

2016 Connectivity Initiative RFP Questions and Answers

Q1. If an internet service provider submits a bid to provide service to areas A, B & C, can the Department issue a partial award and/or can the bidder accept a partial award (for example, an award for only A&B)?

A1. Yes

Q2. Is it permissible to partially serve a census block?

A2. Yes

Q3. If an ISP has applied for federal grant support to serve locations but the decision will not be received until after RFP proposals are due on July 15, 2016, can an ISP contest the locations as being served, pending receipt of the federal award?

A3. Internet service providers were given until June 17, 2016, to challenge the unserved status of any eligible or conditionally eligible location included in the RFP. Under this process, the Department will remove any contested location from the list of eligible locations **in exchange for a written promise from the internet service provider that it serves, or will serve by a date certain, the contested location(s) at a speed of at least 4/1 Mbps.** This promise will take the form of a written agreement executed by the internet service provider and the Department of Public Service. As a result, if an internet service provider contests that locations will be served, it is entering into a binding commitment to provide service to those locations regardless whether or not future funding from any source is received.

Q4. What is the “community support” factor to be considered when reviewing RFP proposals?

A4. For purposes of the RFP, “community support” is a factor that reduces the cost of providing service to a location. Examples of possible “community support” could be direct financial support or in-kind support for the project from a city or town to be served.

Q5. Will there be a bidders’ conference?

A5. No

Q6. In regard to Secondary Public Funding Resources, the RFP states:

“The Respondent shall attest that it has not received support from any additional federal or state program for any of the locations awarded to Respondent under this round of grant funding. Furthermore, Respondent shall attest that it won’t seek additional federal or state support for any of the locations awarded to Respondent under this round of support for the duration of this grant award. Respondents may only apply secondary public funding sources to awarded locations with prior written approval from the Department. The Department reserves the right to withdraw or reclaim funding for any location found to be counted toward federal Universal Service obligations by the Respondent.”

Does this language allow for an ISP – with permission from the Department – to combine a grant award from the Connectivity Initiative with existing federal funding, such as CAFII, to provide service to unserved locations, and subsequently count those locations toward its CAFII or other federal funding obligation?

A6. The Connectivity Initiative is the only state funded program aimed at improving broadband service in Vermont. It has very limited funding. The conceptual use of this fund was to fill in the gaps in existing federally-funded programs. It is the intent of the Department to use Connectivity Initiative funding to support locations that will not be otherwise supported by existing public funding sources, such as the CAF program. Thus, the Department is unlikely to give prior approval to a bidder that has already committed to serving a certain number of locations in exchange for federal funds. It is the Department’s expectation that locations served by Connectivity Initiative awards are **in addition** to the number of locations required to be served by existing federally-funded programs and would therefore **not count** toward meeting an existing CAFII or other federal funding obligation.