| no# | RFP/SOW Page Number  | RFP/SOW Section Reference | Question | Answer |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | N/A | N/A | Will the customer please provide Vermont’s submitted request to NTIA for Initial Planning funds including any submission requirements including but not limited to the standard forms, budget narrative template and additional required documents? | VCBB will provide the BEAD initial planning fund submission to the winning bidder. |
| 2 | N/A | N/A | Will the customer please provide Vermont’s submitted request to NTIA for Initial Digital Equity Planning Grant submission requirements including but not limited to Project Summary, budget narrative form and additional required documents? | VCBB will provide the digital equity initial planning fund submission to the winning bidder. |
| 3 |  | Subcontractors | To best deliver for the State responding Bidders may choose to partner with subcontractors, some of whom may possess distinct capabilities but only perform on a Firm-Fixed-Price basis. Can the State confirm that FFP Subcontractors will not be required to (a) provide hourly labor rates, or (b) be held to hourly rates, and/or (c) comply with Attachment B “Payment Provisions” paragraph 3, to the extent it requires disclosure of ‘rates of pay’ and ‘hours of work performed’? | Subcontractors must follow the same contractual requirements as the primary contractor.  |
| 4 | N/A | Outreach | Has VT conducted any outreach activities in the last 12 months?  | VCBB has begun preliminary outreach activities for both Digital Equity and BEAD. For Digital Equity, VCBB recruited and established a 16-member Core Planning Team, representing a combination of state, federal, and nonprofit partners across Vermont working with the eight “covered populations” outlined in the Digital Equity Act. Specific membership can be found on slide 20 of the [BEAD DE Presentation to the VCBB board](https://publicservice.vermont.gov/sites/dps/files/documents/BEAD%20DE%20presentation%20to%20board%203-13-23_0.pdf). The Core Planning Team has met four times as of this document and is also assisting in beginning to map a wider universe for digital equity outreach and engagement. BEAD outreach so far has consisted of informal conversations with the Communications Union Districts (CUDs) and private ISPs.VCBB has strong relationships and is in frequent conversation with the ten CUDs in Vermont, as well as many of the private ISPs. The CUDs, by extension, have boards composed of members appointed by the governing bodies of each town and city that compose a CUD, and have strong local networks in their communities. In addition, VCBB is working with our Federal Program Officer from the NTIA to convene a group of broadband stakeholders from across state government, which will meet for the first time in April.Several other Vermont Agencies have developed equity plans in recent years that should be consulted as the outreach and engagement process begins, and VCBB has existing relationships with some of these Agencies. |
| 5 |  |  | Does VCBB already have a curated list of stakeholders? | In addition to the Digital Equity Core Planning Team, a broader list of collaborators, community groups, and other partners is currently being complied. Many of the members of the Core Planning Team may also have their own curated lists that could be useful in mapping outreach and engagement activities.The definition and requirements of stakeholders is outlined in the [BEAD NOFO](https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/DE%20PLANNING%20GRANT%20NOFO.pdf) and [Digital Equity NOFO.](https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/DE%20PLANNING%20GRANT%20NOFO.pdf) Respondents are expected to familiarize themselves with both documents. The links are included in the footnotes on page 3 of the RFP.VCBB anticipates that winning bidders will use the BEAD and Digital Equity NOFO requirements and recommendations for stakeholders, as well as Vermont-specific knowledge, to work with VCBB and the Digital Equity Core Planning Team to develop a stakeholder universe for the Stakeholder Engagement Plan. |
| 6 |  |  | Has VCBB or other State of Vermont agency begun any community and stakeholder engagement following BEAD/DEA Guidelines? | VCBB has begun preliminary outreach activities for both Digital Equity and BEAD. For Digital Equity, VCBB recruited and established a 16 member Core Planning Team, representing a combination of state, federal, and nonprofit partners across Vermont working with the eight “covered populations” outlined in the Digital Equity Act. Specific membership can be found on slide 20 of the [BEAD DE Presentation to the VCBB board](https://publicservice.vermont.gov/sites/dps/files/documents/BEAD%20DE%20presentation%20to%20board%203-13-23_0.pdf). The Core Planning Team has met four times as of this document and is also assisting in beginning to map a wider universe for digital equity outreach and engagement. BEAD outreach so far has consisted of informal conversations with the Communications Union Districts (CUDs) and private ISPs. |
| 7 |  |  | Is there a preferred type of outreach for stakeholder engagement? Focus groups? Public meetings? Surveys? | It is the responsibility of the winning bidder to develop a Stakeholder Engagement Plan that will direct and inform the state’s work on each of the relevant requirements of the Digital Equity Plan, the BEAD 5-year Action Plan, and the Initial Proposal. It is expected that the winning bidder will use a variety of different outreach types in order to ensure the greatest possible participation, with specific consideration given to making participation accessible to individuals with lived experience of the digital divide. |
| 8 |  |  | What “venues” does VCBB envision for stakeholder engagement (e.g. town halls, conference calls / videos, webcasts, etc.)?  | It is expected that the winning bidder will use a variety of different outreach types in order to ensure the greatest possible participation, with specific consideration given to making participation accessible to individuals with lived experience of the digital divide. |
| 9 |  |  | Do you have an existing software engagement platform to track and manage community engagement? | VCBB does not currently use an existing software engagement platform to track community engagement. The State of Vermont uses Microsoft 365 products and applications, and VCBB will have a Grant Management System coming online in May. If the contractor has a preference on a type of software, that should be included in their proposal. |
| 10 | N/A | Plan | Describe the state’s intentions for making work in draft form available for public comments? For example, does the state intend to solicit public comment on all of the deliverables in draft form? Will the Initial Proposal be made available for public comment at the same time as it is reviewed by the NTIA? | The state will follow the requirements set forth by the NTIA to solicit public comment on drafts and proposals, as outlined in the NOFOs and supporting materials. |
| 11 |  |  | Will the State be responsible for incorporating and finalizing the plan requirements for each of the plan documents? | The State anticipates the final plan documents to be completed by the contractor. There are plan requirements that the State will be responsible for providing to the contractor to incorporate into the final plans. |
| 12 |  | Timeline | Can VCBB confirm their envisioned timeline for deliverables associated with each workstream?Initial Proposal are due from the vendor by June 30, 2023?Bead 5 year Action plan are due from the vendor by July 30, 2023?Digital Equity Plan deliverables are due from the vendor by October 30, 2023? | NTIA requires submission of the initial proposal within 180 days of the Notice of Available Amounts for each state. The Notice of Available Amounts will be released on June 30, 2023, and Vermont is targeting submission of its Initial Proposal in July, 2023, shortly after the release of the Notice of Available Amounts. Vermont’s BEAD 5-year action plan is due to the NTIA on August 28, 2023. Vermont’s Digital Equity 5-year plan is due on September 30, 2023, with a possible extension of up to six months.Additional timeline information can be found on slides 16 and 23 of the [BEAD DE Presentation to the VCBB board](https://publicservice.vermont.gov/sites/dps/files/documents/BEAD%20DE%20presentation%20to%20board%203-13-23_0.pdf). |
| 13 |  |  | What rationale (and any updates) is behind the VCBB’s stated timeline in the RFP:Initial Proposal - submission promptly upon the announcement of BEAD allocations on June 30, 2023 Vermont’s 5-Year Action Plan - target submission is summer 2023 Vermont’s State Digital Equity Plan – target submission is fall 2023 | Initial Proposals are due to the NTIA between June 30 and December 27, 2023. Vermont is targeting submission in July 2023, due to information from the NTIA that submissions will be reviewed in the order that they are received. Vermont would like to be one of the first states to submit an Initial Proposal in order to streamline the release of the initial 20% of funds as quickly as possible. Vermont has invested substantial ARPA funding into broadband internet buildout in the state, and many entities that are currently undertaking construction projects are likely to seek BEAD funding. Vermont would like to make BEAD funds available as quickly as possible to allow for the labor and materials efficiencies of continuous construction.Vermont’s BEAD 5-year action plan is due to the NTIA on August 28, 2023. Vermont intends to meet this deadline without asking for an extension, as many of the sections of the BEAD 5-year action plan must already be completed by the time of submission of the Initial Proposal in July 2023.  Vermont’s Digital Equity 5-year plan is due on September 30, 2023, with a possible extension of up to six months. Upon choosing a contractor and finalizing a SOW, the VCBB and contractor can decide on a target submission date for the Digital Equity Plan, with recognition that certain sections of the plan will need to be used to inform the BEAD 5-year action plan at the time of that plan’s submission. |
| 14 |  |  | Please confirm the deadline for the State to submit their Initial Proposal. According to [BEAD program guidelines](https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/taxonomy/term/158/broadband-equity-access-and-deployment-bead-program), the deadline to submit the Initial Proposal is 180 days after issuance of their Notice of Available Amounts. The [NTIA announced](https://ntia.gov/press-release/2022/biden-harris-administration-awards-more-55-million-vermont-internet-all-planning) release of BEAD and DE grants to Vermont on December 20, 2022. By our calculations, the Initial Proposal should be submitted on or around June 18, 2023. | NTIA requires submission of the initial proposal within 180 days of the Notice of Available Amounts for each state. The Notice of Available Amounts will be released on June 30, 2023, and Vermont is targeting submission of its Initial Proposal in July, 2023, shortly after the release of the Notice of Available Amounts.Vermont received BEAD planning funds on December 1, 2022. The Notice of Available Amounts refers to BEAD Implementation Funds. |
| 15 |  |  | If available, please provide the current estimated target date to submit Vermont’s 5-Year BEAD Action Plan. | Vermont’s BEAD 5-year action plan is due to the NTIA on August 28, 2023. Vermont intends to meet this deadline without asking for an extension, as many of the sections of the BEAD 5-year action plan must already be completed by the time of submission of the Initial Proposal in July 2023. |
| 16 |  |  | If available, please provide the current estimated target date to submit Vermont’s State Digital Equity Plan. | Vermont’s Digital Equity 5-year plan is due on September 30, 2023, with a possible extension of up to six months. Upon choosing a contractor and finalizing a SOW, the VCBB and contractor can decide on a target submission date for the Digital Equity Plan, with recognition that certain sections of the plan will need to be used to inform the BEAD 5-year action plan at the time of that plan’s submission. |
| 17 |  |  | What timeline does VCBB envision for stakeholder engagements? | Outreach and engagement will be an iterative process with the bulk of the initial information gathering happening before June 30th 2023. |
| 18 |  | Evaluation | During evaluation will there be any weighting associated with the response sections? “The State will evaluate all responses received based upon its assessment of the reasonableness of cost, completeness, and quality of the responses, qualifications and capacity of the individuals proposed to perform the work, relevance of previous experience, and any other criteria it deems relevant.” Does this mean cost is the most important factor in evaluation? | VCBB will establish a team who will evaluate the submitted proposals. The order of the assessment factors listed in the RFP should not be taken to indicate the relative weighting of each factor. The State has the authority to evaluate Responses and select the Bidder(s) as may be determined to be in the best interest of the State and consistent with the goals and performance requirements outlined in this RFP. |
| 19 |  |  | In order to be considered by the State, at what time on March 28, 2023 does the proposal need to be submitted? | Proposals must be submitted by 11:59PM EST on March 28, 2023. |
| 20 |  |  | Will the entities responsible for the 10-year Telecommunications Plan and Broadband Construction Grant Program be able to participate in this RFP? | Yes. |
| 21 |  |  | Please discuss VCBB’s process and methodology for evaluating proposals?  | VCBB will establish a team who will evaluate the submitted proposals. The State has the authority to evaluate Responses and select the Bidder(s) as may be determined to be in the best interest of the State and consistent with the goals and performance requirements outlined in this RFP. |
| 22 |  |  | Beyond delivering an implementable BEAD Action Plan, how does the VCBB define success for this project?  | According to the VCBB’s mission statement, “It is the purpose of the VCBB and Vermont Community Broadband Fund to support policies and programs designed to accelerate community efforts that advance the State’s goal of achieving universal access to reliable, high-quality, affordable, and fixed broadband. The VCBB was created to coordinate, facilitate, support, and accelerate the development and implementation of universal community broadband solutions.” Success will include building upon Vermont’s history of addressing broadband challenges in innovative ways and developing plans and programs that meet all the requirements of the NTIA while also meeting VCBB’s specific mission to develop and implement universal, community-driven broadband solutions.In addition, success means ensuring that every individual in Vermont, regardless of background, identity, or community, has high-quality, accessible, affordable technology resources. That includes the connection, equipment, information, and training that is necessary to support education, health, well-being, economic, and social opportunities. |
| 23 |  | Mapping/Data | How and to what degree will the selected firm have access to VT’s broadband mapping and the FCC challenge process? What is VCBB’s envisioned role for the selected firm to improving broadband mapping information based on project work and supporting the challenge process?  | All current broadband mapping data will be available to the contractor(s). The new contractor will be expected to coordinate and collaborate with VCBB’s current GIS consultant in order to determine additional data and analysis needs. The VCBB expects to take the lead on developing the State run challenge process in coordination with the contractor and GIS consultant.  |
| 24 |  | 2.2.1 | Category of Service 2.2.1 references VCBB’s existing GIS and Mapping resources. Does VCBB require the Consultant to work with a specific GIS mapping software platform? If so, can you describe? If not, is this a requirement of this RFP?  | The VCBB’s current GIS consultant is Stone Environmental using ESRI software. The ESRI Hub Site has been developed with data, maps, dashboards, and other resources. |
| 25 |  |  | Has VCBB secured its Broadband Service Level Fabric Data and incorporated into a GIS or other platform?  | Both State-collected availability data and the FCC’s Broadband Service Level Fabric Data have been incorporated into the VCBB’s ESRI Hub Site. |
| 26 |  |  | Is there any requirement for the Consultant to purchase data sets that could be required to satisfy BEAD/DEA requirements?  | The Consultant should anticipate purchasing datasets only if necessary to implement the strategic program(s) the consultant is proposing.  |
| 27 |  |  | Does VCBB or the State of Vermont have any authority to compel ISPs to provide service coverage and network route information? | In Vermont, pursuant to 30 V.S.A. § 202e (e). The Department prepares a map, narrative description, and cost estimate to provide broadband service at the following speeds: 4/1 - 4 Mbps and an upload speed of at least 1 Mbps; 25/3 - at least 25 Mbps and an upload speed of at least 3 Mbps; and 100/100 - download speed of at least 100 Mbps and is symmetrical. If monetarily feasible, the Department also maps areas served and the areas not served by wireless communications service. |
| 28 |  |  | Does VCBB require any support on speed tests? If no, do you have a speed process in place and what technology is being used? | The state does not currently see a need for support on speed tests. If the contractor is proposing processes that require a speed test, that will need to be provided by the contractor. |
| 29 |  | General | Can VCBB make available contact info for potential bidders submitting questions? | VCBB will not publicize contact info for the potential bidders who submitted questions.  |
| 30 |  |  | How can my agency support VCBB as a contractor to review work by successful bidder(s) and other work related to BEAD and otherwise outside the scope of this RFP on an ad hoc project or hourly/not to exceed the cost basis below the dollar amount limit under VT procurement policy requires a competitive bid solicitation? | VCBB welcomes bids on any subset of the tasks outlined in the RFP.  |
| 31 |  |  | Please confirm we can submit one combined proposal to address each of the categories (i.e., outreach & engagement and strategic program development) outlined in the RFP. | Yes, respondents may submit one proposal for the entire scope of the RFP. |
| 32 |  |  | In the BEAD NOFO, there are specific expectations for the Initial Proposal, Five-Year Action Plan, and Digital Equity Plan related to broadband service availability, adoption, and estimated costs for universal service. Can you confirm which required information the selected Bidder can expect to receive from State and/or the VCBB, and which the Bidder would be expected to provide?1. Broadband Service Availability (including served, underserved and unserved)
2. Broadband Adoption (including a breakdown by population types)
3. Cost estimations for providing service to unserved locations
4. Cost estimations for upgrading service to underserved locations
5. Local and regional broadband service needs and gaps
6. High-level deployment plan (or scenarios) for incorporation into the Five-Year Action Plan
 | 1. VCBB has this data -[Link to data](https://publicservice.vermont.gov/telecommunications-and-connectivity/broadband-high-speed-internet-availability-vermont).
2. Contractor support is needed.
3. VCBB has estimates provided by CUDs and ISPs, but contractor may include a neutral analysis in their SOW.
4. VCBB has estimates provided by CUDs and ISPs, but contractor may include a neutral analysis in their SOW.
5. VCBB has an initial analysis, which will be improved based on information collected during contractor’s Outreach and Engagement work.
6. VCBB has high-level deployment plans and scenarios, and anticipates coordinating with the contractor to update this strategy.
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| 33 |  |  | Assuming that the selected Bidder can expect all or a subset of the information from VCBB above, is it expected that VCBB will provide the raw data or sample outputs that are easily and readily incorporated into the Five-Year Action Plan & Initial Proposal (e.g., maps depicting different adoption) or some combination of raw data and sample outputs to the selected contractor? | VCBB has raw data and sample outputs as seen on VT’s Hub Site at <https://explore-vcbb.hub.arcgis.com/> We expect that there may be additional mapping and analysis outputs needed developed in coordination with VCBB Staff and GIS consultants.  |
| 34 |  |  | The Request for Proposal indicates that “existing GIS and mapping resources will be available to Contractor for mapping CAIs throughout the state” – does VCBB seek a Bidder with dedicated geospatial analytics personnel (e.g., own an independent instance of ArcGIS and/or compatible software)? | Access to ESRI software is not required, but personnel with familiarity using ArcGIS or other spatial analysis software could be helpful to better inform the strategies that will be used to develop final plans and successful broadband infrastructure deployment and digital equity programs in Vermont.  |
| 35 | Page 7 | 3.2.4 Cost Proposal | Does the State have a preferred Cost Proposal format, or form, to facilitate the uniform evaluation of all Bidder Cost Proposals? | The State does not have a preferred format, but all responses will be evaluated based on inclusion of all required elements outlined within the RFP. |
| 36 | Page 7 | 3.4 | “Reporting Requirements: Provide a sample of any reporting documentation that may be applicable to the Detailed Requirements of this RFP.”Is this referring to reporting requirements to the NTIA? | This is standard language for State of Vermont RFPs, not specific to Vermont’s reporting requirements to the NTIA. If applicable, please provide a sample of any reporting documentation the respondent may have provided as part of a past contract that is relevant to the Detailed Requirements of this RFP.   |
| 37 | Page 8 | 4.1.3 Retainage | What is the Retainage percentage anticipated for the contract. | VCBB does not anticipate that a retainage will be held. Payments will likely be based on established SOW and completed deliverables. See payment terms for more information.  |
| 38 | Page 14 | Price Schedule | Are Bidders allowed to add additional rows as necessary to include any labor categories required to perform the services requested? | Yes. The RFP includes a sample schedule that can be modified to meet the needs of the bidder. |
| 39 | Page 14  | Price Schedule | Is the State requesting two Lump Sum Total amounts for Task 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 only, or should bidders provide detailed Fixed Prices for all deliverables within both Tasks 2.2.1 & 2.2.2? | A detailed budget broken down by the individual deliverables within 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 is preferable.  |
| 40 |  |  | Please provide as much definition of stakeholders as possible. Are stakeholders: a. Communities? b. CUDs? c. Service providers? d. Business community? e. Healthcare? f. Education? | The definition and requirements of stakeholders is outlined in the [BEAD NOFO](https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/DE%20PLANNING%20GRANT%20NOFO.pdf) and [Digital Equity NOFO.](https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/DE%20PLANNING%20GRANT%20NOFO.pdf) Respondents are expected to familiarize themselves with both documents. The links are included in the footnotes on page 3 of the RFP.VCBB anticipates that winning bidders will use the BEAD and Digital Equity NOFO requirements and recommendations for stakeholders, as well as Vermont-specific knowledge, to work with VCBB and the Digital Equity Core Planning Team to develop a stakeholder universe for the Stakeholder Engagement Plan. |
| 41 |  |  | There is no mention of CUD in the scope. Does community outreach include CUD or does CUD representing XXX communities be considered the outreach? | CUDs are both municipalities and ISPs and will be included in outreach plans as such.  |
| 42 |  |  | Do communities assume residents or broadband committees, town government?  | All of the above. It is expected that the winning bidder will use a variety of different outreach types to reach communities and community members at a variety of different levels.  |
| 43 |  |  | Is the scope of this project based on available data from existing service providers? (i.e. timeframe and plans for federal programs such as, ACAM, RDOF etc.) | The scope of services outlined in the RFP includes as a deliverable Initial Proposal Requirement #3, “Identify existing efforts funded by the federal government or an Eligible Entity within the jurisdiction of the Eligible Entity to deploy broadband and close the digital divide, including in Tribal Lands,” and BEAD requirements prohibit using BEAD funds on an area that already has received existing federal funding, unless an exemption is requested. |
| 44 |  |  | Are firms currently engaged with CUDs and communities in Vermont prohibited from bidding on this project? | Those firms are not prohibited from bidding but should note in their proposal any possible conflicts of interest with their current contract agreements and proposed mitigation strategies if the firm were to be selected.  |