

Involvement in more than one proposal

Is it permissible for an organization to prime a proposal and also participate as a subcontractor in another proposal, so long as the relationships and roles are specifically disclosed in both submissions?

ANSWER: Yes, it is permissible for an organization to participate in multiple proposals.

Does the anti-collusion provision prevent respondents from submitting either joint bids (i.e., one bid by two companies) or coordinated bids, i.e., bids by two different companies that complement each other?

ANSWER: No, respondents are not prohibited from submitting joint or coordinated bids.

Rural Development Opportunity Fund and the Get Vermont Connected Now Program

Does the Department intend that addresses contained within Census Blocks published in the FCC's RDOF Phase I Updated Eligible Areas map are eligible for funding under the Connectivity Initiative and the GVCNI? If so, does the Department expect that addresses funded under the Connectivity Initiative and the GVCNI would become ineligible for RDOF Phase I funding due to either state or FCC program rules?

ANSWER: All locations marked Underserved, Served 4/1, or Served 10/1 are eligible for the Connectivity Initiative and the GVCNI. However, if the same entity is awarded funds by the FCC RDOF to deploy service to a location that has been funded through this program, the Department may require that the recipient refund any funds provided for that location as is deemed necessary and appropriate by CARES Act Funding.

Is the Department looking for projects that cover any unserved census blocks as defined by the Department, or projects that target unserved census blocks that are not RDOF-eligible?

ANSWER: All locations marked Underserved, Served 4/1, or Served 10/1 are eligible for the Connectivity Initiative and the GVCNI. However, if the same entity is awarded funds by the FCC RDOF to deploy service to a location that has been funded through this program, the Department may require that the recipient refund any funds provided for that location as is deemed necessary and appropriate by CARES Act Funding.

On page 10, under the section labeled "Secondary Public Funding Resources, is it correct to interpret that if an address is awarded under the Connectivity Initiative that the Respondent awarded that location would be precluded to bid the FCC's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) census block that includes the awarded location?

ANSWER: All locations marked Underserved, Served 4/1, or Served 10/1 are eligible for the Connectivity Initiative and the GVCNI. However, if the same entity is awarded funds by the

FCC RDOF to deploy service to a location that has been funded through this program, the Department may require that the recipient refund any funds provided for that location as is deemed necessary and appropriate by CARES Act Funding.

Deadlines

Would the Department reconsider its schedule of proposal deadlines to three weeks apart rather than one week apart? We all, of course, understand the motivation to get proposals and agreements out the door ASAP, however, some proposals (particularly those requiring RF propagation studies) simply require more preparation time to do a proper job.

ANSWER: No, the Department will not change the schedule for this round of funding. The Department notes that there are three rounds of funding, and recipients that need additional time should plan to participate in subsequent rounds.

Verifying Wireless Speeds

Would the Department accept verifiable RF propagation studies in lieu of individual RF tests at every funded location? This requirement is impractical, time-consuming, invasive, and extremely expensive. It involves sending two-person teams to climb roofs of buildings even where the owners have not requested service. This is either trespass or invasion of privacy. The cumulative labor cost of, perhaps, \$200 per location is prohibitive. Spot verification, of performed installations, rather than universal verification of all potential installations would be a more appropriate solution.

ANSWER: No, the PSD will not accept propagation studies in lieu of speed tests.

Would the Department revise the funding claw-back rule regarding failure to achieve 25/3 at more than 15% of funded locations from ALL of the funding to a pro-rated claw-back? This is more customary in programs such as CAF II. US Treasury guidance does not require claw-back for failure to achieve 25/3. The Legislature did request 25/3, but it did not say claw-back the entire award should 15% not reach the threshold. And, though it may not be in the Act's final language, much discussion on this point was heard from elected representatives and senators wanting whatever is best for the internet recipients compared to what they have now.

ANSWER: No, the Department will not revise the funding claw-back rule for failure to demonstrate the availability of 25/3 Mbps service at more than 15% of funded locations.

Please understand that we are confident that 25/3 is achievable at a great majority of locations, but low band spectrum may be required to penetrate more forested locations. TVWS and 700 MHz spectrum is more challenged achieving 25/3.

ANSWER: H.966 requires recipients of Connectivity Initiative funding to offer services that provide 25/3 Mbps internet access at all funded locations. Because this is state law, there is no flexibility in this requirement.

Speed Test. The RFP states that wireless and DSL providers must provide proof of deployment in the form of a speed test performed at each funded location “regardless of whether a customer has elected to subscribe at that location.” Would it be acceptable to provide internal diagnostic data for subscriber locations and a continuous wave, drive-by test for locations passed but not subscribed?

ANSWER: Yes, it may be possible to employ drive-by tests for locations passed but not subscribed. The Department requires speed tests to demonstrate the availability of 25/3 Mbps service at all funded locations served by DSL and wireless. The Department expects to provide latitude to providers in implementing the speed tests. At a minimum, the Department expects that the tests will be conducted within a reasonable distance of each funded location (not more than 500’) and of a reasonable duration (at least 5 seconds for each of upload and download speed tests). This could be accomplished by a drive test so long as these minimum distance and time thresholds are met.

Because of the time constraints imposed by the legislation and the Coronavirus Relief Fund requirements, the Department can work with recipients on a case by case basis to ensure that payment and turn-up of services are not delayed beyond December 20, 2020.

Do all recipients need to provide a speed test at each location served in order to receive funding, or only projects using wireless or DSL technology?

ANSWER: No, not all recipients need to provide speed tests at each funded location. Speed tests are required to demonstrate 25/3 Mbps speed performance at all funded locations where the recipient chooses to employ DSL or wireless technology.

Are speed tests required at locations at which the ISP passes/is prepared to serve, but where the resident or business has not subscribed to service?

ANSWER: Yes, Speed tests are required to demonstrate speed performance at all funded locations where the recipient chooses to employ DSL or wireless technology, even if the resident or business has not subscribed to service.

Regarding the "Wireless provider proof of deployment with Speed Tests of at least 25/3 at each funded location." What methods are you proposing to satisfy the requirements without it becoming so onerous and costly that it is impossible to apply even with new fixed wireless radios with speeds greater than 25/3?

ANSWER: This program requires recipients to offer 25/3 Mbps service at funded locations. Where the ISP chooses to employ wireless or DSL technology a speed test demonstrating the

availability of service is required for funding. The Department expects to provide latitude to providers in implementing the speed test requirement. At a minimum, the Department expects that the tests will be conducted within a reasonable distance of each funded location (not more than 500') and of a reasonable duration (at least 5 seconds for each of upload and download speed tests).

Under the section labeled "PERFORMANCE" on page 7 of the RFP, item # 1 states in part that: "... Speed guarantees are subject to verification by the Department once service is offered." How does the Department envision verifying the speed of the underlying service and how frequently will this be tested? Is this the same as the speed test referenced on page 2 of the RFP?

ANSWER: This program requires recipients to offer 25/3 Mbps service at funded locations. Where the ISP chooses to employ wireless or DSL technology a speed test demonstrating the availability of service is required for funding. The requirement that the service meets the performance threshold applies to all recipients, and if, after deployment, a consumer complains that the service does not meet the performance requirement, the Department may require the recipient to conduct tests to demonstrate performance, even if a speed test was previously submitted.

On page 2, for wireless and DSL service, the RFP states: "...the grantee must provide proof of deployment in the form of a speed test performed at each funded location, demonstrating service at 25/3 Mbps, regardless of whether a customer has elected to subscribe at that location." What is an acceptable "speed test" and is it measured at the provider's network (i.e., not including any subscriber equipment)?

ANSWER: The Department expects to provide latitude to providers in implementing the speed test requirement. At a minimum, the Department expects that the tests will be conducted within a reasonable distance of each funded location (not more than 500') and of a reasonable duration (at least 5 seconds for each of upload and download speed tests). The required speed tests may, but need not, include subscriber equipment.

On page 5 the RFP states that Respondents may be asked to make: "...facilities available for a site inspection by the Department..." What facilities would the Department want to inspect?

ANSWER: Any facility funded by the grant are subject to inspection by the Department.

Permitting

Is Vermont providing favorable permitting and approval processes through the States Emergency declaration?

ANSWER: No, Vermont is not providing favorable permitting and approval process through the State's Emergency declaration.

Use of State Property

Does the State have any properties, such as state parks, that it can contribute for Wireless's aerostat deployment? Aerostats need about 2 acres of land and access to power and fiber at a reasonable cost.

ANSWER: No, the State of Vermont has not identified any properties that it can contribute to aerostat deployment. However, the Department is prepared to assist grantees to identify suitable state-owned properties in target areas as the request of grantees and to assist grantees in negotiating with the agency responsible for that asset.

Confidential Information

How do Respondents protect Confidential Information contained in their RFP responses?

ANSWER: Section 24 of Attachment C states: "Confidentiality: Party acknowledges and agrees that this Agreement and any and all information obtained by the State from the Party in connection with this Agreement are subject to the State of Vermont Access to Public Records Act, 1 V.S.A. § 315 et seq" Respondents that wish to claim that certain materials in their proposal are confidential should clearly mark these documents as confidential. Such materials will be treated pursuant to the cited statute and 30 V.S.A § 202f(K).

Confidentiality. How may bidders submit certain bid information on a confidential basis, such as financial information? Please clarify procedurally how bidders would submit such information so that it will be treated on a confidential basis pre-award and thereafter.

ANSWER: Section 24 of Attachment C states: "Confidentiality: Party acknowledges and agrees that this Agreement and any and all information obtained by the State from the Party in connection with this Agreement are subject to the State of Vermont Access to Public Records Act, 1 V.S.A. § 315 et seq" Respondents that wish to claim that certain materials in their proposal are confidential should clearly mark these documents as confidential. Such materials will be treated pursuant to the cited statute and 30 V.S.A § 202f(K).

General Information, Section 6 Financial History, says that "The Department requests permission to view the responding entity's financial information, as well as financial information for any subcontractor that is expected to receive more than ten (10) percent of the value of each award." Should the respondent submit financial information with its proposal? If so, what type and duration of financial information is requested (e.g. two years of audited financial statements)?

ANSWER: Section 24 of Attachment C states: “Confidentiality: Party acknowledges and agrees that this Agreement and any and all information obtained by the State from the Party in connection with this Agreement are subject to the State of Vermont Access to Public Records Act, 1 V.S.A. § 315 et seq” Respondents that wish to claim that certain materials in their proposal are confidential should clearly mark these documents as confidential. Such materials will be treated pursuant to the cited statute and 30 V.S.A § 202f(K).

Underground Conduit vs Wireless Prioritization?

Section (2) states that a Project involving underground conduit shall be prioritized if it results in broadband access to low-income households with remote learning, telehealth, and telework needs. Does an “aboveground” wireless solution (e.g., new tower, aerostat) become eligible to be prioritized if the electrical connection for the installation is buried underground?

ANSWER: Review Criteria section 2 of the RFP is intended to refer to the Get Vermonters Connected Now Initiative. See RFP Addendum item 3. The Department will not provide an additional priority for proposals meeting these criteria but will treat qualifying locations as eligible.

Will the Department prioritize funding fiber-to-the-premise projects that require underground conduit over projects that do not require underground conduit? If so, how would this priority be reflected in the selection criteria?

ANSWER: Review Criteria section 2 of the RFP is intended to refer to the Get Vermonters Connected Now Initiative. See RFP Addendum item 3. The Department will not provide an additional priority for proposals meeting these criteria but will treat qualifying locations as eligible.

Why is underground conduit prioritized? If the desire is for speed of deployment, aerial should be prioritized. We have found that existing underground conduit is often compromised, adding time and cost to customer connections. New underground conduit substantially adds to cost.

ANSWER: H966 directs the Department to prioritize projects involving underground conduit under the Get Vermonters Connected Now Initiative. Review Criteria section 2 of the RFP is intended to refer to the Get Vermonters Connected Now Initiative. See RFP Addendum item 3. The Department will not provide an additional priority for proposals meeting these criteria but will treat qualifying locations as eligible.

Under the GVCNI program, are conduit and conduit installation costs an “eligible expense” and, therefore, subject to reimbursement?

ANSWER: Yes, conduit and conduit installation costs are subject to reimbursement under this program.

Application Scoring

If a proposed project’s coverage overlaps between unserved and served, is the project considered “unpreferred” as compared with a project that solely focuses on unserved needs? Does the State have a priority ranking in terms of unserved areas?

ANSWER: Applicants must submit a list of all individual addresses they intend to serve. Addresses falling within priority categories will improve the overall score. A sample score sheet is posted on the Connectivity Initiative webpage.

Section (7) looks at Whether the proposal would use the best available technology that is economically feasible.

-Is feasibility measured or considered in terms of speed of deployment and impact on natural and other resources, or is it measured purely in terms of 100 Mbps symmetrical service?

ANSWER: The department is required to prioritize services that are capable of 100 Mbps symmetrical service.

Are the scoring and/or selection criteria different for projects funded through the Connectivity Initiative and the GVCNI? If so, how?

ANSWER: They are both scored based on the score sheet sample provided on the Connectivity Initiative webpage. Applicants should clearly indicate which parts of the proposed project they would like funded through the GVCNI.

How will preferences for projects designed to serve economically challenged households or communities be reflected in the selection criteria?

ANSWER: The Department does not have granular data on low-income households, so inclusion of low-income areas in a proposal will be un-scored review criteria. Applicants may provide evidence of their inclusion of low-income areas in the narrative of their proposal.

How will prices to consumers be reflected in the selection criteria?

ANSWER: End-user pricing is not listed in the score sheet, but charges associated with data caps will be considered when comparing proposals.

How will the proposed cost to consumers of any new construction, equipment installation, or facility be reflected in the selection criteria?

ANSWER: Applicants may apply for funds to offset consumer costs through the GVCNI program, but the costs must be clearly divided. The end-user cost is not a scored metric but will be considered when comparing proposals.

How will the objectives of the state Telecom Plan be reflected in the selection criteria?

ANSWER: The Telecom Plan goals are represented by the selection criteria articulated in the RFP.

Is the “Number of Addresses Proposed” in the scoring sheet intended to be only Eligible Locations?

ANSWER: Yes. If an address is listed as served, but a drop has not been extended to the house- that address is eligible for GVCNI funding. Such addresses should be aggregated and indicated in the proposal as seeking funding to offset customer costs associated with fiber-to-the-premises installations.

The RFP states, “The primary consideration under the statute is the cost per address. Therefore, in an effort to maximize the effectiveness of this RFP, the Department will favorably consider proposals that utilize alternative funds as a match. Such matching funds can include private, local, state, or federal funding sources.” Will the Department consider proposals with a match more favorably per se, or simply as a means to achieving lower state cost? For example, given two projects identical except that one proposes higher grant funding but has a match, and the other has less or no match but nevertheless requests less grant funding, which project would the program’s selection criteria favor?

ANSWER: Please see the score sheet provided on the webpage. Proposals will be scored on both a “price per point” and “points per location” basis.

Given a hypothetical project proposing to provide 100/100 service to 100 addresses, all of which are Priority Addresses, all of which lack 4/1 service, and all of which are also Priority Addresses, would that project’s points per location be 7.5? If that same project only offered 25/3 service, would its points per location be 6?

ANSWER: 100 addresses lacking 4/1 would receive +250 points. 100 priority addresses would receive +250 points. 100 addresses at 100/100 would receive +250 points. 100 addresses at 25/3 would receive +100 points. So the 100/100 project would receive 750 points vs 600 points for a 25/3 project.

Once the Department determines that proposed projects meet the program’s eligibility requirement and a “price per point” for each is established using the scoresheet, are there any selection criteria other than the price per point that the Department will use to choose among competing applications? If so, which ones?

ANSWER: The “Review Criteria” section in the RFP contains the additional review criteria.

Attachments

Could we have copies of Attachment B (Payment Provisions), Attachment C (Customary State Grant Provisions), and Attachment D (Other Provisions)?

ANSWER: Attachments were issued 7/21/20 in an update/addendum. Please see the [Connectivity Initiative webpage](#).

Attachments A, B, C, D, and the sample scoring matrix were not attached to the RFP. Will the Department make those documents available to Companies.

ANSWER: Attachments were issued 7/21/20 in an update/addendum. Please see the [Connectivity Initiative webpage](#).

Timing and Deadlines

For wireless applications in particular, does the Department take into account factors beyond the reasonable control of the applicant that can affect the completion date estimate, including:

- a. Timing of NEPA review completion**
- b. Permitting contingencies (i.e., opposition to a project from individuals, host communities, other agencies)**
- c. Availability of coordinating with distribution utilities and fiber providers to activate service once site is constructed**
- d. Weather-related contingencies and seasonal restrictions on construction**
- e. Complications resulting from the COVID-19 violation**
- f. Build Out Deadline. For successful applicants only seeking Connectivity Initiative grants (but not GVCNI funding), will the applicants have one year after entering into an agreement with the Department to complete the build-out to all locations? The RFP indicates that this is the case on numbered p. 2, but there is language on number p.1 that seems to conflict. Please clarify.**

ANSWER: Both the Connectivity Initiative and GVCNI projects must be completed and providing service to end-users by December 30, 2020. The Department is required to make payments to providers no later than December 20, 2020. See footnote 1 of the RFP. Delays that are “beyond the reasonable control of the applicant” are unexpected delays, beyond the normal, standard operating procedure and expected time for the project under typical conditions.

The “RFP Overview” (Pg. 1) indicates that Connectivity Initiative projects must be completed and providing service to end-users by December 30, 2020. In “Work to be Performed” (Pg. 3), the RFP appears to indicate that projects must be completed within one (1) year of entering into an agreement with the Department. Please clarify the deadline for completion of Connectivity Initiative projects.

ANSWER: Both the Connectivity Initiative and GVCNI projects must be completed and providing service to end-users by December 30, 2020. The Department is required to make payments to providers no later than December 20, 2020. See footnote 1 of the RFP. Delays that are “beyond the reasonable control of the applicant” are unexpected delays, beyond the normal, standard operating procedure and expected time for the project under typical conditions.

Footnote #4 (Pg. 4) indicates the Department has some discretion to allow extensions of time “if the delay is due to circumstances beyond the recipient’s control”. As make-ready work is typically outside of the applicant’s control and delays due to make-ready could be exacerbated, will an inability to complete a Coronavirus Relief funded project by the deadline due to make-ready delays invalidate the award?

ANSWER: Both the Connectivity Initiative and GVCNI projects must be completed and providing service to end-users by December 30, 2020. The Department is required to make payments to providers no later than December 20, 2020. See footnote 1 of the RFP. Delays that are “beyond the reasonable control of the applicant” are unexpected delays, beyond the normal, standard operating procedure and expected time for the project under typical conditions.

The RFP states, “Respondent shall not commence work on its proposed project until an agreement is in place.” Does this restriction apply to pre-construction planning, engineering, permitting, and/or licensing, or only to construction activities?

ANSWER: The department will not reimburse any costs incurred prior to an agreement’s start date.

How quickly does the Department expect to announce awardees and enter into agreements?

ANSWER: As soon as possible.

Your project description requires "time frames for setting up service once it is ordered." We find that this can be a real problem within the 9-day timeframe we have right now. It requires a respondent to assess every single drop to every proposed premises to determine which are likely to be underground, which are overly long aerial, etc. Will estimates be acceptable?

ANSWER: Providing a “Typically X days, but not longer than Y days” will suffice.

On page 2, “Both the Connectivity Initiative and the GVCNI projects must be completed and providing service to end-users by December 30, 2020.” There is the possibility that a provider builds out to a min of 25/3 Mbps to an address or multiple addresses in an area on the list of 69,899 locations but no one actually orders service. Is it correct to interpret the above-quoted language that the Department will accept projects as “completed and providing service” as long as residences or business at the specified addresses can order service as of December 30?

ANSWER: Yes, service must be made available to consumers at all funded locations by December 30, 2020.

The “Payment” terms on page 10 of the RFP appear to conflict with the “RFP Overview” terms on page 1. How can the Department pay a provider by December 20, 2020, given the certification requirements under “Payment” on page 10 when the work might not complete until the December 30 date set forth in the overview?

ANSWER: Under the terms of the CARES act, funds must be disbursed by December 20, 2020. Therefore, grant recipient must request reimbursement from the Department with sufficient lead time ahead of this date. Service must be deployed and available to consumers prior to December 30, 2020.

Interaction with other projects built under this RFP

Will a Respondent have an opportunity to partner with other Respondents to leverage existing or broadband infrastructure being built under these RFP Initiatives?

ANSWER: The respondent is free to partner with other respondents. If there is not sufficient time to coordinate for this phase, respondents should consider doing so prior to the next phases.

Funding

Will Connectivity Initiative projects be funded by Vermont Universal Service Funds, Coronavirus Relief Funds, or a combination of the two?

ANSWER: All \$12M in funding made available through H.966 will be drawn from the CARES relief fund.

Of the \$12m in funding, how much is available from the Connectivity Initiative, and how much from the GVCNI?

ANSWER: All \$12M made available through H.966 will be awarded to projects under both programs, depending on the score sheet on a per-location price basis, with no separate budgets or targets for either program.

Technologies

The “Get Vermonters Connected Now Initiative” (GVCNI) (Pg. 1) specifies “fiber-to-the-premises”. Please clarify that the GVCNI does not exclude other technologies that are capable of delivering not only the broadband speeds required by this RFP but also speeds that greatly exceed those speeds, such as 1 gigabit service. Please confirm that the GVCNI includes projects using hybrid fiber-coax (HFC) construction which deploys fiber to the node and coaxial cable to the home and thus coaxial cable drops from the street/main trunk line to the home will be eligible.

ANSWER: H.966 language states “The purpose of this program is to provide financial assistance to Internet service providers to offset the customer costs of fiber-to-the-premises installations, which include underground conduit installations, where required, and service drops.” This program is limited to fiber-to-the-premises.

Provider Responsibilities

In “Work to be Performed” (Pg. 3), the RFP requires that eligible locations be served with retail broadband service for at least five (5) years whereas in “Performance” (Pg. 7), the obligation is to offer retail broadband service to eligible locations. Please confirm that once a project is completed, providers are obligated to provide retail broadband service only if a resident at an eligible address affirmatively subscribes to the provider’s retail broadband service.

ANSWER: The service must be made available for subscribers at the locations for five years. The customers may choose not to subscribe. “Serving” = “offering retail broadband”.

Priority Locations

Is it true that all Priority Locations are Eligible Locations, but not all Eligible Locations are Priority Locations?

ANSWER: Yes. All locations lacking 25/3 are eligible. Locations lacking 4/1, locations with telehealth/distance learning/telework needs, are priority addresses.

Please provide a link to the 2020 list of eligible addresses for the Connectivity Initiative (i.e., non-GVCN eligible locations). I could only find a map on your website - not a spreadsheet list as was made available last year.

ANSWER: The list of locations is posted in Excel, KML, and GIS format on the Geodata portal, linked on the RFP page. The subset of eligible locations will be posted on the RFP page.

Can you assure that there is no overlap between GVCNI priority locations and "eligible locations."

ANSWER: There is a considerable overlap. Priority locations are not restricted to the GVCNI, and the GVCNI is not restricted to priority locations. All priority locations are also eligible locations.

Is there a database or map of E-911 addresses that have kids in K-12 grades. This would be helpful to respondents in making their proposals.

ANSWER: Distance learning needs and other priority categories are aggregated into a single list, which is available on the Connectivity Initiative webpage.

Will any of the programs cover service for a municipality's service/increase speed to a wifi hotspot?

ANSWER: If the building is an eligible location lacking 25/3, yes.

Other Funding

The RFP states, "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 any round of grant funding," but also, "[T]he Department will favorably consider proposals that utilize alternative funds as a match. Such matching funds can include private, local, state, or federal funding sources." Please explain under what circumstances other sources of state or federal funding can and cannot be combined with funding under the Connectivity Initiative and the GVCNI.

ANSWER: Matching funds can include contributions from private and public sources other than the Department. Funds from alternative sources should be complimentary. Total grant and match funding cannot exceed the project cost. The Department will only reimburse for expenses actually incurred and not covered by an alternative source.

Selection, Payment and Other Considerations

Under the Section labeled "RFP Overview" on page 1, there is a sentence that states: "Proposals not selected for awards will roll over and be considered for funding in subsequent funding rounds." But on page 4 of the RFP, under the Section labeled "RFP Timetable" there are references to proposals being accepted no later than August 6 and August 13. Are

Responders able to submit additional proposals after the initial Round One deadline of July 30, 2020?

ANSWER: Applicants may submit as many proposals as they desire. Multiple separate projects can be submitted for individual consideration within a single proposal. Nothing received after July 30 will be considered for funding in the first \$4M allotment, nothing received after August 6 will be considered for funding in the second \$4M allotment, and nothing received after August 13 will be considered for the third \$4M allotment.

The RFP states, "The Department (through COVID-Response Accelerated Broadband Connectivity Program) will pay for actual work performed and expenses incurred under a project up to the specified grant amount. Payment will be made after a project is completed and the Department has received certification from the Respondent(s) that service is available and being offered to every location identified in the award, and the speed of service is at least 25/3 as independently verified through a speed test," and also, "The Department may disburse an award for advance payment of capital costs provided that the Department determines such funding is necessary for project commencement." Please explain under what circumstances the Department may determine that funding in advance is necessary, and when it may withhold funding until project completion.

ANSWER: the bidder should request advance payment for specific components of its project and explain why it is necessary to receive an advance payment. Advance payments will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis during contract negotiations.

Over the life of the awarded project, may a winning bidder modify rates, terms, and conditions provided at the time of application and offered to retail customers, provided that rates, terms, and conditions within the awarded project are consistent with rates, terms, and conditions offered to the awardee's other customers in Vermont?

ANSWER: Yes.

General Information, Section 6 Financial History, says that "The Department requests permission to view the responding entity's financial information, as well as financial information for any subcontractor that is expected to receive more than ten (10) percent of the value of each award." Should the respondent submit financial information with its proposal? If so, what type and duration of financial information is requested (e.g. two years of audited financial statements)?

ANSWER: The Department would appreciate two years of audited financials. If the provider has not been in business for two years or otherwise does not have audited financials, the provider should supply the Department with unaudited for the years that it has conducted business.

On page 4, under the section labeled “TERMS OF AGREEMENT” indicates that projects will be paid upon “substantial completion” by 12/30/20. Can you provide a definition of “substantial completion”, including how it will be measured?

ANSWER: construction is complete. Items such as testing, and provisioning of service may be left to do. CRF Guidance, however, requires delivery of services on or before December 30. Guidance concerning delays can be found here:
<https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/Coronavirus-Relief-Fund-Guidance-for-State-Territorial-Local-and-Tribal-Governments.pdf>

On page 10, under the section labeled “WARRANTY”, Subsection iii indicates that grant requestors, as a condition of delivery of funds, must warranty that they do not already provide service of at least 4/1 Mbps today. Would this indicate that any location that currently has service today below the 25Mbps / 3Mbps minimum standard but at or above 4/1 Mbps would NOT be eligible for funding or should this read “Respondent does not already provide service of at least 25/3 Mbps to locations listed in Respondent’s proposal”?

ANSWER: This was a typo on the Department’s behalf. Any address lacking 25/3 is eligible. The Department will correct this and reupload the RFP.

Communication Union District Review

Communication Union Districts are allowed to object to any applications for Grant funding into their service territories. Does the department. Has a map or location data showing current service territories of Communication Union Districts?

ANSWER: Please see - <https://publicservice.vermont.gov/content/vermont-communications-union-districts>. This map will be updated as new towns join Communications Union Districts.

In reviewing the RFP, I did not see any reference about proposed projects being reviewed by the appropriate CUD as required in H.966. Please clarify.

ANSWER: Language was originally written for the attachments which were mistakenly not included with the posted RFP. A decision was made to remove the language from attachment D because it refers to contract provisions whereas the CUD notification requirement happens prior to agreements. The language regarding CUD notifications is now posted as an [addendum to the RFP on the Connectivity Initiative webpage](#).