**25 February 2021**

**Press Release**

**Broadband Grants Announcement**

The ConnectMaine Authority seeks grant applications to plan and expand the availability of broadband service in the state.

In July, Maine voters approved a state bond of $15 million toward expanding the availability of broadband service in the state. ConnectMaine grants are also funded through assessments or surcharges on certain communications, video and internet service bills. Along with other sources of funds, ConnectMaine anticipates awarding about half of the bond funds at this time, toward projects that generate significant public benefit. Broadband service enables civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning and access to essential services.

Infrastructure grants are awarded to support investments in expanding the availability of broadband service in the state. Communications service providers and community leaders are encouraged to partner on infrastructure grant applications. Currently, preference is given to projects that propose the greatest relative improvement to existing internet service in unserved areas only.

Many communities in Maine have gone through a community-driven planning process. Looking to meet the current and future broadband needs of the community, and ensure equitable access, most plans call for broadband service that is universally available. Community-Driven Broadband Projects are substantial and seek to widely expand infrastructure that brings affordable and reliable connectivity. Many of these communities are actively seeking enough funds to implement projects.

To-date most projects receiving state grants have been proposed by internet service providers to address coverage gaps within or between communities, such as providing line extensions or filling dark pockets. Given that these types of coverage gaps aren’t experienced by whole communities, less community engagement occurs. By leveraging and expanding the existing broadband networks, Provider Expansion Projects help achieve the state’s broadband vision.

The mission of ConnectMaine is to facilitate the universal availability of broadband to all Maine households and businesses, and to promote the valuable role it can play in enriching their lives and helping their communities thrive. The state has set a goal to contribute 25% of the total cost of expanding the availability of broadband, to connect 95% of potential subscriber locations by 2025.

More information and applications can be found on the ConnectMaine website: [www.maine.gov\connectme](http://www.maine.gov\connectme). Please direct any questions to ConnectMaine staff.

Infrastructure Grants Application

Provider Expansion Projects

**Contact Staff**

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This application binder is for provider expansion projects which help achieve the state’s broadband vision by leveraging and expanding existing broadband networks, such as addressing coverage gaps, providing line extensions or filling dark pockets within or between communities. Given that these types of coverage gaps aren’t experienced by the entire community, scoring is weighted in favor of cost-benefit and project scope.[[1]](#footnote-2)

This application window is February 25 through April 12. Please submit your application materials by emailing Connect.ME@maine.gov with the subject heading Grant Application.

The window for identifying unserved areas was January 6 to January 25, with any 30-day public comment period ending February 24.

The current window for provider outreach is February 25 to March 27, with the response window effectively being March 11 to April 10.

**Instructions**

Please don’t include attachments or reference attachments; please insert evidence in the order requested. Any information that may be deemed confidential must be submitted as separate files to remain confidential. Please note that applications submitted are made publicly available; please submit confidential information as separate files. Some details of projects funded with grants are posted on the ConnectMaine website.

The proposed project area must be contiguous for each application; please submit separate applications for non-contiguous project areas. If any elements of the application can’t be completed, then in those locations demonstrate how those elements will be developed as part of the proposed project. The ConnectMaine Authority reserves the right to request additional information necessary to evaluate applications for infrastructure grants.

Please contact ConnectMaine staff for any assistance. Please note that the score of an application is only one factor considered by ConnectMaine in awarding grants, among many other factors required or allowed to be reviewed in accordance with the statute and rule, including that infrastructure be forward-looking to meet future broadband needs.

1. **Applicant Information**

Applicant Signature:

Date Submitted:

1. **Fiscal Agent**

Entity Name:

1. **Grant Request**

Amount:

1. **Affected Communitie**s

List each affected municipality, local government or local government authority, or a local nonprofit providing economic development programs, as applicable to the proposed project:

Points of Contact for Affected Communities and any community broadband committees:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Community | Name | Title or Role | Email or Phone |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

1. **Applicant or Agent**

Name:

Title or Role:

Mailing Address:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

1. **Communications Service Provider**:

Company Name:

Point of Contact Name:

Title:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

1. **Applicant Eligibility**

Briefly describe the history and nature of the public-private partnership, if this application is being submitted by entities working in a public-private partnership, for purposes such as but not limited to separate construction, ownership or operation of the proposed network.

Any communications service provider (ISP) that is an applicant, or partner to this application, must be in good standing with all ConnectMaine reporting obligations. Indicate the date of the most recent “infrastructure grant tracking” report, if applicable, and most recent “required filing of data.”[[2]](#footnote-3)

Date of grant report:

Date of data filing:

If the applicant isn’t an eligible ISP, the applicant may be any unit of local government, including town, city, county or regional council of governments; or any broadband utility district or corporation, wholly or partially owned by a unit of local government. State the legal entity of this applicant or partner, if applicable.

Name and type of entity:

Either the applicant or its partner, if applicable, must demonstrate technical, managerial and financial capacity, and experience to operate the network capability, for ConnectMaine to determine whether or not the responsible entity is capable of installing, using and managing broadband infrastructure.

List the entity(ies) that will build, own and operate the network.

If any, list the most recent grant award(s) by ConnectMaine to any of the entity(ies) of this applicant.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Date of last award | Entity receiving funds |
|  |  |
|  |  |

List prior experience in designing, installing, operating and managing infrastructure, if necessary.

1. **Unserved Areas**

Granted funds may be applied in unserved areas only; however, proposed project areas may include areas designated underserved.[[3]](#footnote-4) Areas designated as unserved may be identified in any or all of the following sources:

* The ConnectMaine Broadband Availability Map: <https://maps.sewall.com/connectme/public/>
* The ConnectMaine Unserved Reports: [www.maine.gov/connectme/communities-resources/Broadbandmapping](https://www.maine.gov/connectme/communities-resources/Broadbandmapping)
* Community Broadband Plans posted on the ConnectMaine website: [www.maine.gov/connectme/grants/planning-grants/awards](http://www.maine.gov/connectme/grants/planning-grants/awards)

Indicate how the project area was identified as unserved or underserved.

If the project area wasn’t identified as unserved in the above sources, indicate the date that a request under the opportunity to review such areas was submitted to ConnectMaine. That request must have included accurate mapping of address-specific, availability data of actual speeds in the proposed project area, including a map of the geographic area at a fine enough scale to identify street-level data, and the GIS data behind the map. The request may have also included the dates and times of speed testing conducted by the method directed by ConnectMaine, customer testimonials or other evidence demonstrating that the areas are unserved. For a 30-day period, ConnectMaine posts the general information of the relevant areas for any public comments on the availability, or lack thereof, of broadband service.[[4]](#footnote-5)

Date of Request:

1. **Provider Outreach**

ConnectMaine directs state funds to expand broadband service availability in places where the private sector hasn’t plans to install broadband infrastructure during the same time period. Indicate the date of when provider outreach occurred. Within 30 days of the application window being opened, the applicant must have sent an email, which must have been copied to Connect.ME@maine.gov, followed with a letter sent certified-mail to existing ISPs to confirm that “no plans exist to provide service meeting or exceeding the minimum build standard for broadband[[5]](#footnote-6) within the following 12 months” in the project area; any responses from ISPs must have been copied to Connect.ME@maine.gov, within 14 days of receiving the applicant’s email.

Date of Outreach:

1. **Executive Summary**

Provide a five-sentence executive summary that identifies the applicant, what type of infrastructure will be provided, where in Maine, what level of service (speeds, latency, jitter, network capacity, etc.) will be available, and when completion is anticipated. This serves the purpose of quickly identifying the proposed project among applications and past projects. This summary will also be used when announcing awards of successful applications.

1. **Cost-Benefit**

In total the cost-benefit scoring category accounts for 50 points.

Describe why the infrastructure wouldn’t be installed without this grant being awarded.

1. **Potential Subscribers**

In awarding grants, ConnectMaine is directed to consider the number of potential subscribers to be served by the project. In the project area, indicate the total number of potential subscribers; of those, the number currently unserved; and of those currently unserved, the number to be served by the proposed project.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Potential Subscribers | Currently unserved | To be served |
|  |  |  |

1. **Grant Funds**

Calculate the grant amount requested per customer eligible to be served by the project. Use the number “to be served” above for the number of customers below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Grant amount ($) | Unserved customers to be served (#) | Funds per customer ($) |
|  |  |  |

The grant amount per eligible customer is a factor considered in the cost-benefit scoring category, with lower funds per customer receiving a higher cost-benefit score, up to 50 points.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Grant/Customer | Points |
| <$2,000 | 50 |
| $2,000-4,000 | 1-49 |
| >$4,000 | 0 |

1. **Community Support**

In total the community support scoring category accounts for 10 points.

Describe evidence of community support for expanding availability of broadband service, such as results of speed testing or surveying.

1. **Project Focus**

The percentage of customers to be served, a community support factor, is calculated from the total number of potential customers, which is separately considered as a project scope factor in section V below. In the project area, indicate the total number of customers and those that are proposed to be served.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| All customers | Customers to be served |
|  |  |

ConnectMaine collects data on the type, number and percentage of premises and unserved areas that become served by awarded funds. The percentage of customers that will be served is a factor considered in the community support scoring category, with higher percentages scoring higher, up to 5 points.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Customers | Points |
| <35% | 0 |
| 35-75% | 1-4 |
| >75% | 5 |

1. **Active Community**

Briefly describe the community engagement in the planning process.

Engaging the community in the planning process helps ensure successful projects and helps demonstrate adequate community support; 5 points, if community is engaged, or 0 points..

1. **Project Scope**

In total the project scope scoring category accounts for 25 points; additionally, 10 bonus points are available.

The proposed project area must be contiguous for each application; please submit separate applications for non-contiguous project areas. ConnectMaine requires filing of data of the extent of broadband service. As a separate file, submit a map of the extent of broadband service in the project area that is at a fine enough scale to identify street-level data. Also submit separate file(s) of the GIS data behind the map.

Applicants who are awarded and receive funds must submit grant reports, including infrastructure grant tracking for five years, which may include accurate mapping, cost and speed-level data; address-specific, availability data of actual speeds; and verification of performance criteria by submitting as-built drawings and/or notification of speed testing. Please contact ConnectMaine staff with any questions about accountability requirements.

1. **Existing Service**

Describe the existing internet service in the unserved areas of the affected community, for ConnectMaine to evaluate the proposed project for the greatest relative improvement.

1. **Proposed Service**

Describe the type of service to be provided, including years of growth with proposed capacity.

Also indicate the available download and upload speeds of current and proposed service to customers in the project area.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Current (mbps/mbps) | Customers (#) | Proposed (mbps/mbps) | Customers (#) |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

Applicants are held accountable for funded projects meeting performance criteria, including that resulting service meets the minimum build standard for broadband. The speeds of service to be offered is a factor consider in the project scope scoring category, with faster speeds, of the offering that will be available to the most customers in the project area, scoring higher, up to 15 points.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Upload speed proposed | Points |
| Less than or equal to 10mbps upload | 0 |
| Up to and including 100mbps upload | 1-14 |
| Greater than 100mbps upload | 15 |

1. **Potential Customers**

Indicate the type and number of customers to be served by the project.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Customers | Households | Businesses |
|  |  |  |

The number of customers that will be served is a factor considered in the project scope scoring category, with higher numbers scoring higher, up to 5 points.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Customers | Points |
| <130 | 0 |
| 130-600 | 1-4 |
| >600 | 5 |

1. **Road Miles**

In the project area, indicate the total number of potential subscribers and total miles of roads.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Subscribers | Miles |
|  |  |

ConnectMaine collects data on the number of premises and miles of road in unserved areas. The number of customers to be served is a factor in the project scope scoring category, and state funds are intended to support expansion of broadband availability in places where the private sector alone can’t justify the investment; less densely populated areas score higher, up to 10 bonus points.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Subscribers/Mi  | Bonus |
| <10 | 10 |
| 10-20 | 1-9 |
| >20 | 0 |

1. **Timeline and Milestones**

Insert a timeline that lists the milestones of the proposed project and indicates an estimate of the time required to complete the proposed project.

1. **Financial Commitment**

List all costs of the proposed project and the secured, financial commitments from the applicant, its partner and other sources. Itemized costs may be estimated at time of application; applicants who are awarded and receive funds are required to itemize all expenses. Include service drops and other capital expenses associated with making retail connections to the proposed network, either listing the costs covered by the proposed project, or listing $0 for costs to be covered by customers or other future sources. Committed dollars includes all secured matching funds and may include federal grant funds awarded for the same project area, such as coronavirus relief funds.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Capital & Operations  | Quantity (#) | Unit ($) | Total ($) | Committed ($) | Grant ($) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Totals** | - | - |  |  |  |

Calculate the percentages of total cost covered by the communications service provider’s (ISP) financial commitment; the community financial commitment, including secured municipally-authorized funds and private funds raised; and the financial commitments from any other sources; including federal grant funds, and the percentage of total cost covered by grant amount requested.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ISP/Cost | Community/Cost | Other/Cost | Grant/Cost |
|  |  |  |  |

The applicant’s financial commitment is a factor considered in the project scope scoring category, with lower proportions of grant funds scoring higher, up to 5 points.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Grant/Cost | Points |
| <25% | 5 |
| 25-49% | 3-4 |
| 50-55% | 1-2 |
| >55% | 0 |

1. **Project Value**

In total the project value scoring category accounts for 15 points.

Describe evidence of project benefits to students, remote workers, telehealth patients and support facilities, and small businesses. Submit separate file(s) of letters identifying these groups.

Expanding broadband to these groups helps realize economic and social benefits of broadband, and contributes to project value; 2 points, if the list is deemed complete, or 0 points.

1. **Service Prices**

Describe the service levels to be offered and the price per customer to receive service, which must be equal to or less than the price per customer offered elsewhere in the state.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Service (mbps/mbps) | Price ($/mo) | Details |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

ConnectMaine collects data on service levels and prices per customer for various offerings provided in the state. The estimated price per customer to receive service is a factor considered in the project value scoring category, with the lowest monthly price of service offerings that have an upload speed of at least 10mbps scoring higher, up to 10 points.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Price per customer per month  | Points |
| <$65 | 10 |
| $65-100 | 1-9 |
| >$100 | 0 |

Describe any affordability offering to be available to potential subscribers in the project area, including the criteria or requirements for eligibility. Submit as a separate file, the affordability plan.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Service (mbps/mbps) | Price ($/mo) | Eligibility |
|  |  |  |

Proposed projects that result in affordability offerings help address affordability barriers to the adoption or use of internet service, and contributes project value; 3 points, if the list is deemed complete, or 0 points.

1. **Subscription Rate**

Ensuring project value includes addressing the adoption or use of internet service available. Of potential customers, state the estimated subscription rate or take rate anticipated in the project area.

1. Evaluation of applications is conducted in accordance with the ConnectMaine rule: <https://www.maine.gov/connectme/about/statutes-rulemaking> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Details of these reporting requirements are contained in ConnectMaine rule: <https://www.maine.gov/connectme/about/statutes-rulemaking> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. At least annually, and subject to 30-day comment period, ConnectMaine designates geographic areas that are unserved. Currently areas are designated as unserved where internet service is less than 25mbps/3mbps, and areas are designated as underserved where less than 20% of the households have access to internet service of at least 25mbps/3mbps. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Details about this process for identifying unserved areas is posted on the ConnectMaine website: <https://www.maine.gov/connectme/communities-resources/Broadbandmapping> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Either annually or through its strategic planning process, ConnectMaine sets a build standard for broadband, an accountability requirement for all state funded projects, which currently is offering a service level of at least 10/10mpbs. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)