

CONNECTMAINE REDESIGN PROCESS



OUR OBJECTIVES:

- **Leverage Investment:** Maximize investment in broadband infrastructure and maximize opportunities to leverage resources and funding from other sources to support deployment of broadband infrastructure; aim to correct market failures due to low premise density.
- **Seek Regional Equity:** Balance awards in consideration of investment incentives and regional equity; create a geographically equitable distribution of projects around the State.
- **Recognize Community Visions:** Align with community visions and goals for economic development, education, civic engagement and healthcare.
- **Favor Future-Proof Networks:** Fund forward-looking, scalable infrastructure that provides ubiquitous, universally available broadband service, with sufficient capacity for future growth for the greatest number of years, giving preference to projects providing symmetrical service.
- **Advance Digital Equity and Inclusion:** Consider projects that propose the lowest price for the highest quality of service of the lowest service level offering; no grant will be awarded for proposed projects that allow data caps on service provided; all projects funded must result in providing standardized tiers of service, including one for income-eligible individuals.



WHAT WE HEARD ABOUT RURALNESS

- **Serving low-density, small, rural communities:** ConnectMaine should remain cognizant of the higher cost of providing services in areas with low density, like rural areas and townships.
- **Focusing on where the need is greatest:** Through the application process, ConnectMaine should be
 - identifying areas where the need is greatest (e.g., rural areas, urban areas with income disparities) and the capacity to compete for a grant may be lower.
 - Unserved areas should take priority; communities with dark pockets will need to be addressed by ConnectMaine, prior to updating those who are already connected. Prioritize areas with worse service.
- **Engaging the private sector:** Comments raised the importance of engaging the private sector effectively to help leverage investments in rural or low-density areas.

WHAT WE HEARD ABOUT GOALS

- **Maintain focus on Future-Proof projects:** ConnectMaine should avoid spending money on “bandaid” solutions and instead focus on long-term strategies.
- **Balance its focus between rural and urban areas:** More weight should be given to rural areas given that the likelihood of expansion by ISPs and ability to leverage funds from multiple sources is lower than in denser areas.
- **Prioritizing projects with higher community value:**
 - Broadband expansion that accompanies other simultaneous infrastructure improvements should be weighted higher.
 - ConnectMaine could also place a stronger focus on community builds that employ the municipal- or community-owned model.

GRANTS APPLICATION EVALUATION PROCESS

- Address density challenges
- Community Contribution – based on “wealth” of the community
- Improvements in service quality
- Consider affordability of service
- Prioritize universal service
- Regionalization as a focus

WHAT CONNECTMAINE HAS DONE

- Community Broadband Planning Grants Program:
 - Simplified the process, creating a barrier-free entry point for startups
 - Recognize the non-linear nature of planning processes
 - Wrap-around support for communities, e.g., speed testing, mapping, Connectivity Boosters
- Set standards for service that meet current and future needs
 - Designated Broadband Service at 100/100mbps
 - While focusing on areas with worse service: Designated Unserved Areas as <50/10mpbs
 - Relate Underserved Areas to Unserved & Served: Moved from a percentage of a project

INFRASTRUCTURE GRANTS PROGRAM

- Learned from two-track application process that aimed to encourage universal service and support smaller projects
- Next application process will use scoring with weights to achieve those goals:
 - Proposing project areas that need to be served; universal service to unserved areas
 - Giving preference to project areas with the worst service, and to projects with greatest improvement in service
 - Favorably weight project areas that the lack density of subscriber locations
 - Weights for subscription prices and affordability offerings
 - Community financial commitment based on municipal valuation (ability to tax)
 - Clearer application process that includes mapping, and ability to evaluate applications
 - Performance criteria and grants verification & validation process for accountability (better data and mapping)

OPERATIONS & SYSTEMS

- Rulemaking to align with evolving broadband grants programs
- Broadband Intelligence Platform leveraged for infrastructure grants application process
- Grants Portal for applicants, where they can see progress of applications and projects
- Verification of eligibility, cost reasonableness, network design, etc.
- Validation that projects are built to design standards and meet performance criteria
- Validation that grants are applied to actual capital costs