CONNECTMAINE

September Meeting Minutes

Authority Members
Nick Battista, Chair
Jasmine Bishop
Fred Brittain
Susan Corbett
Heather Johnson
Jeff Letourneau
Liz Wyman

29 September 2021

10:00 A.M.

Temporary Recording: https://networkmaine.zoom.us/rec/share/BkvI2heWRqyEqdg2ttDdM0iXUQoCHobsn0Cy7rBv_ZdVVyWKKj__3dUeSqxz-xz-.7DHzRm_yCihijUrc

Introductions of Members and Staff
Susan Corbett, Liz Wyman, Nick Battista, Jasmine Bishop, Peggy Schaffer, Stephenie MacLagan, Emily Atkins

Meeting Kickoffs
Broadband Communities Conference—Peggy

- ConnectMaine presentation and attendance by a number of partners

Highlighted what Maine's doing right, with an interactive Q&A.

Retirement shoutout to Don Flewelling, Pioneer Broadband—Nick

- A successful grant recipient and long-term partner on broadband

Attending from camp, after retiring a month ago; although, still doing a little part-time work for Pioneer.

Notes of Last Meeting
Approval of the August minutes: Susan motioned, Nick 2nd, 4:0

Review of Operations
Executive Director's Report—Peggy

- Community Broadband Planning Support Program

There's an agenda item to open the next application window to the Community Broadband Planning Grants.

Reminder that that Startup Grants are a new process, applications accepted on-going basis.

Participated in the Maine Community Foundation broadband planning program, which we helped develop over the last several years. It continues to be helpful to review all applications to planning grants across all the various programs in the state, strategically determining which funds can be awarded to which areas of the state.

We're talking with the Maine Broadband Coalition about executing the contract for the Connectivity Boosters. We both met with Land O' Lakes about their Americorps program.

- Rulemaking continues with public hearing on 10.4 at 1pm.

Registration for the hearing is required.

The 10-day public comment period follows the hearing.

PowerPoint that connects the dots from stakeholder engagement last year through rulemaking now to the next application window for infrastructure grants, will be shown for the last agenda item of today.

- ConnectMaine presentation at Maine Connectivity Authority September meeting

ConnectMaine had most of their meeting time to present and have an interactive Q&A. Presentation included our tangible assets that MCA can use, like the Broadband Intelligence Platform, and the intangible things we bring from our grants and support programs.

The Maine Connectivity Authority website is up and running. The state senate isn't coming in to do confirmation until January. They're currently meeting every two weeks.

- Update on Federal Funds

Treasury came out with their Capital Projects Fund Guidance last week. Treasury hired state directors to run the program, who are avoiding the use of FCC maps. The application deadline is in December, after which Project Plans would be submitted. Treasury is hosting a webinar tomorrow.

Board Discussion

- Nick: Treasury funds are connected to MCA; how the state will apply before a president is confirmed?

Nick: We should think about how we as a board can be supportive in this circumstance. We don't want to leave $128 million on the table.

Peggy: I don't think we going to; we just need to figure out the process.

- Jasmine: What were the next steps that came out of the MCA conversation? It's important that we don't simply present but that we keep connections and the ball going.

Peggy: We'll have to work together on the report to the legislature about what happens with these two organizations, so we presented principals that we think are important to carry forward and what work we shouldn't stop. There needs to be consistent messaging about what happens next, but we haven't had those conversation yet. MCA has a lot of startup activities to take care, set up legal status and financials, but still don't have staff yet.

Review of Timelines—Stephenie

- Targeting February or March for awarding infrastructure grants

Trying to get the rest of the bond funds out as soon as possible. This requires opening the application window by/on November 24.

- Targeting February for triennial plan adoption

ConnectMaine is required to do this plan, but there's a lot of questions given the report to the legislature with MCA. This means the draft plan must be publicly posted by/on November 25. Staff has been communicating with some authority members about reframing this plan in the context of the MCA and ConnectMaine relationship over the next three years.

- Targeting November for confirming un(der)served areas

This means our update of the Broadband Availability Map must be done by/on October 20 based on industry data and grant tracking reports that were submitted by last week. If providers haven't submitted required data filing, they should as soon as possible. This update triggers a 30-day comment period, allowing confirmation at the November meeting.

- Targeting October for rule adoption

In order to keep these timelines, we have to adopt the posted rule in October. Later in the agenda, we'll discuss next steps that include getting state approval under the 30-day deadline, to affect those three other upcoming actions.

Board Discussion

- Jasmine: Should we reschedule the November meeting?

Peggy: Jeff also won't be able to join 4th (or any?) Wednesdays due to jury duty.

Action: Staff will email members to reschedule the meetings for the next three months.

Review of Financials—Stephenie

- Update on audit

The audit is occurring the week of the 27th; so as required by 10.15, staff will submit draft financial statements, GAAP package and signed transmittal letter. Vote to approve the audit would then occur at the October meeting.

- Review monthly financial statements

One ConnectKidsNow! Grants left to wrap up to be done with the coronavirus relief funds. Note that these financials are partially only showing July, not completely August, yet.

Board Discussion

- Nick: Do we need to reup our MOU for the NECEC Broadband Fund?

Stephenie: The funds are just holding. Any activities different than just withdrawal to MCA as approved in the budget would need action.

Decisions on Programs

NBRC Grant Workplan—Peggy

- Debrief progress on Broadband Intelligence Platform and Grants V&V process

Update on setting up these systems; later in the agenda we'll talk about the results of this. VETRO and Tilson have been fabulous to work with, and identifying areas eligible for infrastructure grants is going well, showing that BIP is a really powerful tool.

- Plan for the remaining portion relating to evaluation of business models

The NBRC Grant workplan is a little different than the contracts. The former said we'd spend some funds on evaluating business models, so what we're suggesting is to work with CostQuest to purchase what they have for estimating the cost of middle-mile projects. This piece was to help us deploy tons of federal funds we thought were coming to us last February, but will be going to MCA who could make great use of BIP if we add this piece. The subscription and licenses for BIP will need to be renewed, but at least the Capital Projects Fund allows up to 5% for administrative costs.

Action: Staff directed to continue with workplan, and Nick will sign eventual contracts.

Board Discussion

- Liz: Do you need a motion to approve this approach?

Peggy: I'm unsure that we do.

Stephenie: These funds were budgeted this way and the budget was approved, so we might not need another approval to move forward.

Peggy: This approach is also still aligned with the Governor's intent.

- Nick: Does MCA know how BIP can support their work?

Jasmine: Recognition that there should be proactive communication.

Peggy: We have done demonstrations of BIP with VETRO for MCA, and this was also highlighted in our presentation at their recent meeting.

Community Broadband Planning—Stephenie

- Promote Startup Grants

These are much more simplified, accepted on an ongoing basis and reviewed monthly. These are intended to begin the process of building community-wide support.

- Open application window for Planning Grants

We also refined the program for Planning Grants that help communities take the next step in planning to actually pursue future expansion of broadband. These are intended to help communities commit to firm milestones. These grants do have an application window that's opened by a vote of the board. Recommended window is described in the draft application, with reviews happening in November for potential awards at the November meeting. No changes to the proposed budget.

Approval to open community broadband planning grants application window for October, with $50,000 available: Susan motioned, Liz 2nd, 4:0

Board Discussion

- Liz: How long do they have to submit their applications? Opening on Friday?

Stephenie: The month of October; yes, Friday gives me a safety net to get this posted publicly on our website. The deadline of the 31st gives folks that weekend if they want to take it, but we basically need to have the applications on the 1st to start reviews.

- Jasmine: What's the definition of communities? How are they counted for scoring?

Stephenie: The ConnectMaine rule lists the types of entities that can apply, and for the most part "community" ends up being a "municipality" but the scale can go in either direction. During evaluation of applications, we look for the number that are actually involved in the project, not simply listed by the applicant. This part of the program hasn't changed at all.

Peggy: It's loosely reviewed intentionally; normally it's a town, sometimes a group of towns; could be a regional utility, or variety of entities.

Performance Criteria—Peggy & Grants Committee (Nick, Susan & Jeff)

- Review the redesign process of the ConnectMaine grants programs

The PowerPoint presentation will be added to the ConnectMaine grants stakeholder engagement website.

- Discuss development of performance criteria and infrastructure grants process

The working draft of the application guidance, which references the criteria & process, will be added to the posted meeting binder.

- Decide when and how to solicit stakeholder engagement prior to grants applications

Staff recommends two engagement opportunities, once before the application window opens by early November and another after it opens in early December.

Action: Staff directed to continue with recommended workplan.

Board Discussion

- Liz: How are these refinements strategic in the relation to the MCA?

Nick: Rather than re-run the same process used last grants round, these refinements take advantage of the opportunity to develop a structure that's scalable. Getting these processes and systems in place will help with MCA conversations.

Peggy: It's also about ensuring we have the capacity we need to get the money out, and this new process will help us do that. Echoed by Susan.

Peggy: While we're still weak on the digital inclusion piece, that'll change with new federal dollars that specifically allow or address it. Desire to improve here, echoed by Susan & Liz.

No Other Business

Public Comments

MCA Policy Decisions

- Denise Munger, Rockport: Importance as ruralness and nonprofit-supported community-driven, universal service.

As larger amounts of funds come in, there isn't a bigger bang for the buck working with private providers, and projects should be universal, open access.

The Treasury Guidance really seems to emphasize these values of broadband projects.

Nick: That's a great policy decision for the Maine Connectivity Authority, if they're going to be the ones moving these larger sums of funds, especially if any are spent on last-mile projects. As Peggy presented, the refinements to the grants program not only scales for these larger amounts or number of projects, but they also give preference to projects that result in universal service and reward those that are community-owned networks; there are many ways that the MCA could prioritize those things, too.

- Sarah Strickland, Strategic Wisdom Partners: Public participation has been a hallmark of ConnectMaine, and I hope it's replicated in MCA.

Nick: That is something that Peggy touched on in her presentation to MCA.

Approval of adjournment: Susan motioned, unopposed

CONNECTMAINE

August Meeting Minutes

1 September 2021

10:00 A.M.

Temporary Recording: https://networkmaine.zoom.us/rec/share/
bO4DCRdZa_H7n8od5hzQ-rc-L6WK5GYt6ICzTHDNlWDAggUvH3SPjSc6qBl8n
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Authority Members
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Liz Wyman

Introductions of Members and Staff
Nick Battista, Jeff Letourneau, Susan Corbett, Liz Wyman, Fred Brittain, Peggy Schaffer, Stephenie MacLagan, Emily Atkins, Jasmine Bishop, Heather Johnson

Notes of Last Meeting
Approval of the July minutes: Fred motioned, Susan 2nd, 5:0

Review of Operations
Executive Director's Report—Peggy
- Required data filing and grant tracking reports due 9.21

Data filing occurs with Sewall Company, and any grant tracking reports are submitted to ConnectMaine.
- Other federal-level activities

Infrastructure bill contains about $65 billion for broadband, $14.8 for digital inclusion and 42 million for infrastructure. House votes around 9.27, but intended to be grants to the state. Each state should be getting a minimum of $100 million plus more based on new FCC maps, so Maine might be getting $2-300 million in 1.5 years or so. The American Rescue Plan funds through the Treasury for Capital Projects will likely be about $129 million, and additional guidance should be forthcoming in October.
- NTIA Grant application submitted

ConnectMaine submitted an application for almost $28 million to serve almost 15,000 potential subscriber locations in seven different areas of the state. A total of $2.5 billion was requested of only $288 million available, so this will be very competitive but we should hear something in November. ConnectMaine is also supporting an application to another NTIA grant program by the Passamaquoddy. If that is submitted, the field is less competitive, with more funds available in that program.

Update on Maine Connectivity Authority—Heather & Nick
- Debrief first meeting

Board was seated and held first meeting. For next meeting, the board is seeking an update from ConnectMaine on its activities.

- Search for President

Committee is doing the interviews but the ultimate nomination made by the Governor to be confirmed by the legislature.

- Review timeline

The recording of the last meeting and information might be on the DECD website. No update on meeting frequency, but there will be public notice ahead of the next meeting. There are legislative requirements for ConnectMaine and MCA to work together on reporting recommendations for statutory changes in the next legislative session.

Review of Financials—Stephenie
- Update on audit

Field visit is scheduled for mid-September. If it isn't completed and ready for adoption at the September meeting, then we'll know to submit a waiver to vote on the audit at October or November meetings.

- Review monthly financial statements

Flow of funds is slower at the start of a fiscal year, so these show what was captured in July. The $2.5 million NBRC grant is almost fully obligated and funds are starting to flow. NECEC Broadband Fund collects interest. Bond funds are finally moving, and we'll be seeking a second quarter allotment to continue covering the expenses of the projects awarded infrastructure grants.

Decisions on Programs
Review NBRC Grant Workplan—Peggy
- Debrief progress on Broadband Intelligence Platform and Grants V&V process

As mentioned, these funds are flowing and work is well underway.

- Plan for remaining portion relating to evaluation of business models

There was a bit of the grant funds set aside for business models, strategies, for middle mile—information that would be helpful to ConnectMaine but especially for MCA, to estimate costs of projects and assess the possible returns. Waiting to get the cost proposal on additional data tools that will help identify and evaluate various infrastructure projects, including middle-mile, and evaluate the business models for those designs. These feed into the broadband intelligence platform, and ensuring the state's using one mapping platform.

Review Community Planning Support Program—Peggy

- Debrief development of program concept

This program is based on the lessons learned from partners in the private and nonprofit sectors that have provided planning support over the years. Taking upfront planning activities, like the precertification checklist, from the planning grants program—formally known as Phase I—and moving those activities into this planning support program. The Startup Grants will be a much simpler application process, which will roll out in the next week or so. Completion of these projects will result in precertification for Planning Grants.

- Decide on supporting the Connectivity Boosters

One of the lessons learned is watching how communities get started in broadband planning but then get stuck before implementation. A concept proposal was shared with the board, including 12-16 individuals to serve as connectivity boosters across the state. This will provide consistent planning support and training. The support will wrap around the existing community broadband planning and work that consultants are already doing in preparing plans. This additional support has been provided by various nonprofits across the state, and this proposal scales it statewide. ConnectMaine proposes to sole-source contract with the Maine Broadband Coalition to launch this planning support program, in order to ensure statewide consistent training and deployment. MBC can also attract private investment money; we've been having conversations with other partners in this work, e.g., Maine Community Foundation. ConnectMaine Policies & Procedures allows us to waive requirements to do a sole-source contract.

Board Discussion

- Jeff: We've talked about the need for this type of planning support, and structuring it a little bit better for accountability and constantly improving the program is good.

Fred: We need a creative solution for some time, and this is a great opportunity.

Peggy: We did learn a lot from the Maine West Bootcamp, seeing how Mia was able to help move those communities forward; we aimed to scale programs like that statewide.

- Susan: There'd be a connectivity booster in each county?

Peggy: That would be the goal, yes; these connectivity boosters would augment community broadband planning that's already occurring, e.g., Charlie in Western Maine, and wouldn't replace the work of community volunteers and their consultants. There's value in the connections with planning that is going on and the planning grants available.

Approval of ConnectMaine contracting with the Maine Broadband Coalition to support the Connectivity Boosters: Liz motioned, Jeff 2nd, 5:0, Nick abstained

Review Grants Awarded—Nick

- Debrief awards declined or left unaccepted

Status of projects shared in meeting binder. Further described in the Director's Report. Thanks to Melinda at Charter to work through ensuring those declined awards don't prevent the projects from being implemented.

- Discuss response letter on the grants verification & validation process

This new process generated concerns from some industry participations, which were shared in a letter to ConnectMaine. We wrote a response letter, and these conversations are still continuing.

Rulemaking and Grantmaking

Update on Rulemaking & Performance Criteria—Peggy & Nick

- Debrief drafted rule

Spurred by the legislation that expanded the $0.10 surcharge, rulemaking also aims to refine the grants programs, coming from all the stakeholder engagement since last fall. The way that underserved is designated is changing. Other housekeeping changes as well.

- Decision to post drafted rule to host public hearing in September

If we post the drafted rule this week, we can host a public hearing end of September.

- Discuss recommendations for performance criteria and infrastructure grants process

The rule and the grants program are connected, and the grants committee hasn't yet dived deeply into the rule, performance criteria and the Tilson recommendations shared last meeting. Really the other changes to the rule are straightforward or housekeeping; it's only the changes about grants that need to mesh with the application and review process. Board Discussion

- Nick: Is additional conversation beneficial, about the technical details of the performance criteria affected by the rule; does the grants committee want to have this conversation this week?

Liz: Having more time to absorb all these changes would make me feel more comfortable.
Jeff: Agreed, I'd be more comfortable moving forward after a review is done.
Approval of the grants committee finalizing the draft rule to be posted for a public hearing in September: Jeff motioned, Susan 2nd, 6:0

Other Business

Maine Connectivity Authority presentation—Peggy & Nick

- Revisit our role in the state

To be proactive or ready for conversations with MCA about our respective statutes. Even though they aren't set up yet, our presentation could include how the two organizations could work together, giving them something to soundboard off of once established.
Action: Liz & Susan volunteered to form committee to work with Peggy on this.

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Digital Inclusion—Susan

- The National Digital Equity Center received additional funds from DECD

These funds will purchase devices for low- to moderate-income individuals, for which there's an application process. NDEC is working directly with get IT. give IT. To learn more or access, visit: https://digitalequitycenter.org/request-device/

Next meeting—Stephenie & Nick

- Postpone a week to 9.29

With the extra week in September, this makes sense to do.

Public Comments

Startup Grants

- James Ritter, Denmark: How would the grants program work with multiple towns that could range from three to eight?

Peggy: I forgot to mention that while the Startup Grants are replacing Phase I, the Phase II activities would still occur with Planning Grants. The Denmark area is well beyond Startup activities. Community leaders can call staff to discuss their individual timelines.

Approval of adjournment: Susan motioned, Jeff 2nd, unopposed

CONNECTMAINE

Executive Director's Report

22 September 2021

Peggy Schaffer, Executive Director

Authority Members
Nick Battista, Chair
Jasmine Bishop
Fred Brittain
Susan Corbett
Heather Johnson
Jeff Letourneau
Liz Wyman

Active grant awards
All infrastructure projects have commenced. The Long Island project cost is coming in under budget, which will result in savings to the municipality as well as subscribers. This changes the business model as the Town won't be putting funds into the project. The community seems to be very happy about this lower-cost-to-the-consumer change.

With the Community Broadband Startup Grants just being announced, staff outreached to several communities that are in the midst of comprehensive planning and/or seeking grants from the Maine Community Foundation. Progress reports on active planning grants are expected in the coming two months.

Local and regional planning support
ConnectMaine staff and members continue to be part of the Maine Community Foundation Community Broadband Grants review committee. This is a very useful process to really understand what communities are seeking and to funnel the right resources to their projects.

Staff met with Maine Broadband Coalition about the Connectivity Boosters, and the contract is being drafted. We're meeting this week with Matt Wohlman from Land O' Lakes about their American Connectivity Corps Program, involving the Heartland Foundation, to put in place 50 American Connectivity Corps members across the heartland. As we ramp up, understanding what works in other locations and lessons learned will be very useful.

ConnectMaine, EMDC, Downeast Broadband Utility and Sen. King's Office met with the Town of Garland on expanding broadband. Their connection was terrible. Premium Choice Broadband and their county commissioner were also in attendance. PCB laid out their strategy for expanding service in the region. The County Commissioner seemed interested in using some of the $29 million in ARP funds allotted to Penobscot County for broadband, but was really encouraging communities to come in together with projects.

Staff and program management
VETRO continues to integrate the Broadband Intelligence Platform into our processes. Infrastructure applicants will be able to upload their grant maps and data files directly into the platform, simplifying (and making consistent) our review process. VETRO is also working on adding a 3rd cohort of 10 communities to their Cares Program. This will make 30 communities that are using the VETRO FiberMap as a part of their broadband planning.

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ConnectMaine also using funding from our Northern Border Regional Commission grant to get license for middle mile infrastructure and business case data. This can be used by us but will be a great tool for the Maine Connectivity Authority as they move forward with their process and determining best use for federal funds.

ConnectMaine staff presented at the September meeting of the Maine Connectivity Authority. MCA allotted about ¾ of their meeting for the overview, allowing ample time to talk about ConnectMaine activities ongoing and evolving over the past 12 years.

After the September meeting, a rulemaking committee met to confirm rules for grants programs. On 9.10 the rule was posted, and the public hearing has been scheduled for 10.4 with registration required; additional information, including the registration link and posted rule, is on the ConnectMaine website.

Federal funding update
NTIA is reviewing the applications to their public private partnership broadband grants program, and ConnectMaine filed a letter of commitment. We should hear more in October and anticipate decisions in November.

Staff met with the director of the workforce boards from Dept. of Labor about applying to the National Governor's Association for a grant to develop a digital literacy strategy for workforce development. Due 10.12, DOL will be developing it with ConnectMaine, National Digital Equity Center and other partners.

The long-awaited Capital Infrastructure Fund guidance was published last week. Of major note is the definition of unserved for the purpose of this funding is 100/20mbps, and the strong encouragement to build 100/100mpbs, or if "too expensive" to ensure that what is built would be upgradable to 100/100mpbs. Application deadline is 12.27, with a full grant plan due by 2022. States, once submitting the initial application, can then submit "project plans" during CY22. Middle mile is encouraged to be part of a last-mile strategy and build. There are funds for up to 5% administrative costs of using the grant program. Treasury has brought on board two long-time state directors (from NC and MN) to run the program.

Federal/State partnership activities
The Director continues to talk with other states and programs on setting up a structure for federal funds: The new director of Texas is charged with paying for poll replacement(!) along with developing a grant program. We also met with the Colorado and Alaska Broadband Task Forces. We're also doing a presentation organized by VETRO on the work we are doing from the community-level on up. Tomorrow, the Director will be a guest on ConnectThis! along with Carole Monroe of ValleyNet (EC fiber) on the good things happening in Northern New England.

ConnectMaine Overview

Presentation to the Maine Connectivity Authority Board, September 2021.

Quasi Independent Agency

Established in 2007 (Title 35, Chapter 93) Board appointed by Governor. Staffed by Office of Broadband in DECD

State broadband policy Goals:

- A. Broadband service be universally available in this State, including to all residential and business locations and community anchor institutions;

- B. There be secure, reliable, competitive and sustainable forward-looking infrastructure that can meet future broadband needs; and

- C. All residents, businesses and institutions in the State be able to take full advantage of the economic opportunities available through broadband service

Policies.

- A. Maximize sustainable investment in broadband infrastructure in the State;

- B. Maximize federal and private resources to support the deployment of broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas of the State

- C. Prioritize the use of state resources to assist deployment of infrastructure to provide broadband service in unserved and underserved areas of the State; Promote adoption of broadband service by residents, businesses and institutions; and

- E. Leverage existing infrastructure to extend broadband service.

Statutory Authorities: (guardrails)

- Establish the definition of broadband service, unserved and underserved

- Prioritize investment that supports the greatest relative improvement in service for unserved and underserved locations

- Promote use of broadband

- Support local and regional planning

- Support broadband investment through funding in un/underserved areas

- Develop policies to support expansion of broadband

- Collect data on broadband service and affordability

- Can only fund projects that would not happen in the same time period by the existing provider

- Many of the same powers the MCA has to accomplish these goals

Funding and Staffing

- Ongoing funding – Approximately $2.5-3m a year:
  - .25% surcharge on revenue on essentially landlines (and some cable). Declining revenue stream.
  - 10 cent surcharge on all phone numbers. Similar to E-911 and MTEAF (MSLN funding). (New in 2020. 2022 expands to cell phones)
  - Both surcharges placed on customers bills.
  - Historically, has been about $1.5M a year

- Staffing:
  - DECD's Office Of Broadband - 2 headcount.
    - Direct tie to Commissioner and Governor on policy.
    - Board oversight of programs but not staffing
    - Staffing has been as high as 3, and as low as 1.

National reputation

- ConnectMaine's community planning program and broadband strategy is nationally recognized including in a Pew Charitable Trust Report released in February 2020.

- Connected with national advocacy groups like Broadband Connects America Coalition, Institute for Local Self Reliance, as well State Broadband Leaders Network.

What tangible assets is ConnectMaine building to augment MCA's potential work

- Broadband Intelligence Platform
  - "Mapping on steroids"
  - Middle Mile modeling tool
  - Last mile cost estimates and business case for build outs
  - Census and demographic info

- National Broadband Availability Map
  - NTIA's broadband mapping for states.
  - 250 layers of data

- Contracts for work
  - Verification and Validation and BIP
  - SalesForce integration for applicant and tracking grants/contacts

What activities ConnectMaine is doing that will jumpstart MCA's work

Last Mile Grants - $12M between 2007 and 2019. $23M 2020-2021
- Accountability and technical audits of projects
- New Application process
  - Pre-defined areas for service – one track process
  - Weighted scores based on grant priorities
  - Consistency between application in the type of data
  - Integration of BIP, verification, salesforce

- NTIA Grant
  - $28M grant with 10% match to serve 15000 locations

Community engagement/planning
- Start up grants (flat amount, no scoring)
- Phase 2 and Beyond
- Connectivity Boosters
  - Geo Partners
  - Vetro Cares

What is Maine's secret Sauce?

A diverse broadband team that shares a common vision – connectivity for all.

- Building on the strengths of each partner to bring together resources (money, people, knowledge, strategy) to support the work communities are doing to get connected.

- Understanding the role of ConnectMaine in that ecosystem – what we are, what we are not.

- Continuous experimentation, learning, innovating, revising our thoughts, ideas and strategies.

Principles for ConnectMaine Maine Connectivity Authority Next Steps

- Protect and sustain the funding streams that ConnectMaine has that support ongoing broadband deployment work
- You won't finish the job of deployment
- Digital equity work requires sustained funding
- Sustain community of broadband advocates that support local broadband investment and engagement
- Planning/startup grants, community boosters
- Community ownership requires this network of advocates
- Digital equity must be central to efforts
- Continue to build a common understanding among stakeholders of role of BB in economic development, education, telehealth, civic engagement, equality.
- Don't disrupt the marketplace
- Joint Communication clearly to Industry, State Partners, existing staff and communities about future plans (MCA/CME)
- Consistency in process and messages
- Be ambitious, bold, innovative. Build from our shared work and knowledge.

ConnectMaine Authority Financials

FINANCIALS	DETAIL	PROPOSED	OBLIGATED	ENCUMBERED	Q1	Q2	ACTUAL	REMAIN
REVENUE	Carryforward, includes Assessment Withdrawal	$886,455.65	$1,927,088.14	$1,927,088.14	$1,927,088.14	$0.00	$1,927,088.14	$783,222.92
Fund	Assessment Fees, etc.	$3,050,000.00	$1,250,000.00	$481,215.90	$879,098.85	$0.00	$879,098.85	$2,171,487.66
State	Refunds, excludes Assessment Withdrawal	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
SUBTOTAL		$3,936,455.65	$3,177,088.14	$2,408,304.04	$2,806,186.99	$0.00	$2,806,186.99	$2,954,710.58
EXPENSES								
Financial	DAFS, Solix, audit, bank charges	$81,600.00	$76,600.00	$12,900.00	$7,574.00	$0.00	$7,574.00	$69,026.00
Website	InforME, OIT & Sewall	$79,275.00	$79,275.00	$2,375.00	$356.52	$0.00	$356.52	$78,918.48
Administration	Salaries, etc.	$263,563.00	$263,563.00	$263,153.87	$20,280.59	$0.00	$20,280.59	$242,873.28
Cellphones		$1,080.00	$1,080.00	$90.00	$82.16	$0.00	$82.16	$997.84
Travel	Central Fleet, etc.	$3,000.00	$3,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Operational Services	subscriptions, conferences	$21,300.00	$700.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$20,600.00
Support Services	excluding technical and intelligence	$376,500.00	$145,960.20	$50,718.95	$23,112.70	$0.00	$23,112.70	$276,887.30
Technical Services	grants verification & validation	$177,775.00	$146,318.75	$55,856.25	$21,218.75	$0.00	$21,218.75	$125,100.00
Broadband Intelligence	data collection, analysis & mapping	$900,000.00	$929,201.39	$529,294.19	$462,362.15	$0.00	$462,362.15	$466,839.24
Research Services	business models & ROI evaluations	$250,000.00	$140,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$250,000.00
Planning Grants		$246,125.00	$86,625.00	$30,250.00	$30,250.00	$0.00	$30,250.00	$213,375.00
Planning Services	including community mapping services	$200,000.00	$9,500.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$200,000.00
Digital Inclusion		$100,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Grant Matches		$750,000.00	$50,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Infrastructure Fund	separate from restricted grants	$225,312.50	$75,000.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$225,312.50
Miscellaneous	covers likely deviations	$50,000.00	$42.00	$44.18	$44.18	$0.00	$44.18	$19,955.82
TOTAL		$3,725,530.50	$2,006,865.34	$944,682.44	$565,281.05	$0.00	$565,281.05	$2,189,885.46
BALANCE		$210,925.15			$2,240,905.94	$0.00	$2,240,905.94	$764,825.12

ConnectMaine Authority Financials

Coronavirus Relief Funds

FINANCIALS	DETAIL	FY20	FY21	PROPOSED	OBLIGATED	ENCUMBERED	Q1	Q2	ACTUAL	REMAIN
REVENUE	Carryforward			$289,708.39	$289,708.39		$289,708.39		$289,708.39	$0.00
Coronavirus Relief	CARES	$12,000,000.00	$6,201,842.08	$0.00	$0.00				$0.00	$0.00
SUBTOTAL		$12,000,000.00	$6,201,842.08	$289,708.39	$289,708.39	$0.00	$289,708.39		$289,708.39	$0.00
—										
EXPENSES										
Financial	pro rata share of audit	$0.00	$0.00	$5,000.00	$5,000.00					$5,000.00
Digital Inclusion	affordability program	$2,000,000.00	$0.00	$0.00						$0.00
Infrastructure	Connect Kids Grants	$10,000,000.00	$6,201,842.08	$284,708.39	$284,708.39	$273,858.52				$284,708.39
TOTAL		$12,000,000.00	$6,201,842.08	$289,708.39	$289,708.39	$273,858.52	$0.00		$0.00	$289,708.39
—										
BALANCE		$0.00	$0.00	$0.00			$289,708.39		$289,708.39	-$289,708.39

ConnectMaine Authority Financials
NECEC Broadband Fund

FINANCIALS	DETAIL	PROPOSED	OBLIGATED	ENCUMBERED	Q1	Q2	Q3	ACTUAL	REMAIN
REVENUE	Carryforward	$1,000,533.46			$1,000,533.46			$1,000,533.46	$1,000,533.46
NECEC		$0.00						$0.00	$0.00
Interest					$469.61			$469.61	
SUBTOTAL		$1,000,533.46	$0.00	$0.00	$1,001,003.07	$0.00	$0.00	$1,001,003.07	$1,000,533.46
—									
EXPENSES									
Withdrawals	Maine Connectivity Authority	$1,000,533.46	$1,000,533.46					$0.00	$1,000,533.46
Planning Assistance		$0.00						$0.00	$0.00
Digital Inclusion	affordability program	$0.00						$0.00	$0.00
Infrastructure Grants	matches or direct allocations	$0.00						$0.00	$0.00
Infrastructure Loans		$0.00						$0.00	$0.00
Miscellaneous	covers likely deviations	$0.00						$0.00	$0.00
TOTAL		$1,000,533.46	$1,000,533.46	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$1,000,533.46
—									
BALANCE		$0.00			$1,001,003.07	$0.00	$0.00	$1,001,003.07	$0.00

ConnectMaine Authority Financials
FY22 State Bond Spending

FINANCIALS	DETAIL	PROPOSED	OBLIGATED	ENCUMBERED	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	ACTUAL	REMAIN
REVENUE	Carryforward	$2,000,000.00	$2,000,000.00	$211,000.00	$211,000.00				$211,000.00	$1,789,000.00
Bonds	FY21	$13,000,000.00		$1,789,000.00	$1,653,134.71				$1,653,134.71	$11,346,865.29
SUBTOTAL		$15,000,000.00	$2,000,000.00	$2,000,000.00	$1,864,134.71	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$1,864,134.71	$13,135,865.29
EXPENSES										
Bond Fees		$10,000.00							$0.00	$10,000.00
Infrastructure Bond		$14,990,000.00	$2,027,986.96	$2,027,986.96	$1,597,840.00				$1,597,840.00	$13,392,160.00
TOTAL		$15,000,000.00	$2,027,986.96	$2,027,986.96	$1,597,840.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$1,597,840.00	$13,402,160.00
BALANCE		$0.00			$266,294.71	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$266,294.71	-$266,294.71

CONNECTMAINE

ConnectMaine Authority Members: Nick Battista, Jasmine Bishop, Fred Britain, Susan Corbett, Heather Johnson, Jeff Letourneau, Liz Wyman

1 October 2021

Press Release

BROADBAND GRANTS ANNOUNCEMENT

The ConnectMaine Authority seeks applications to the Community Broadband Planning Grants Program from groups interested in expanding broadband service to their communities.

Broadband service enables civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning and access to essential services. These grants are funded through assessments or surcharges on certain communications, video and internet service bills. Along with other sources of funds, ConnectMaine anticipates awarding about $50,000 at this time.

Planning grants are awarded to develop plans for expanding the availability of broadband service, and to produce strategies for digital equity and inclusion. Municipalities, groups of municipalities, counties, or community organizations that provide local or regional economic development programs, are eligible to apply.

The planning grants program incentivizes collaboration among multiple communities, in part because the community planning process is a significant undertaking. Collaboration can bring additional resources, volunteers and community support to the planning effort, and it also improves the viability of eventual expansion of broadband networks in the area. Regional projects will be more competitive.

The ConnectMaine Community Broadband Planning Grants Program is designed to get communities ready to pursue future opportunities for broadband expansion, by committing to firm milestones to expand broadband in a way that reflects the community's vision and goals. Communities that go through a community-driven broadband planning process are situated well to apply for future infrastructure grants. Community-Driven Broadband Projects seek to widely expand infrastructure for equitable access to affordable and reliable internet service that meet the current and future broadband needs of Mainers.

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

CONNECTMAINE

Planning Grants Application

Authority Members
Nick Battista, Chair
Jasmine Bishop
Fred Brittain
Susan Corbett
Heather Johnson
Jeff Letourneau
Liz Wyman

Contact Staff
Connect.ME@maine.gov
207.624.9894

This application is for community broadband planning projects, which involve developing plans for expanding the availability of broadband service. Preference will be given to regional projects affecting multiple communities. Successful grant applications describe the project work that would likely lead to expanding the availability of broadband in unserved and underserved areas.[1]

This application window is October 1 through October 31. Please submit your application materials by emailing Connect.ME@maine.gov with the subject heading Grant Application.

Instructions

Please don't include addendums or references; 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. Some details of projects funded with grants, including the extent of broadband service availability and any plans produced, are posted on the ConnectMaine website.

Precertification is an eligibility requirement that involves demonstrating an understanding of broadband service availability in the affected communities, that a committed broadband committee covering relevant backgrounds and essential roles has been established, and that other startup activities have been occurring. Proposing the use of funds and investigating regional collaborations are requirements of this application. The ConnectMaine Authority reserves the right to request additional information necessary to evaluate applications for planning 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. Regional collaborations, proposing project areas that cover more than one municipality, are strongly encouraged.

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[1] Evaluation of applications is conducted in accordance with the ConnectMaine rule:
https://www.maine.gov/connectme/about/statutes-rulemaking

CONNECTMAINE

I.   Applicant Information
Applicant Signature:
Date Submitted:

A. Fiscal Agent
Please also submit a W9 form with the application.
Entity Name:

B. Grant Requested
Amount:

C. Affected Communities
List a point of contact for each community involved in the proposed work.

Community	Name	Title or Role	Email or Phone

D. Applicant or Agent
Name:
Title or Role:
Mailing Address:
Phone Number:
Email Address:

E. Partner, if any, excluding any consultants hired
Company Name:
Point of Contact Name:
Title:
Phone Number:
Email Address:

F. Applicant Eligibility
The applicant may be any general-purpose local government, including a municipality or county; groups or regional partnership of general-purpose local governments, including multiple municipalities, local government authorities, counties, and joint or multi-county development authorities; any broadband utility district or corporation, wholly or partially owned by local government(s); or any nonprofit local or regional community organizations that are providing local or regional economic development programs.
Name and type of entity:

If any, list any planning grants awarded by ConnectMaine to any of the entities of this application.

Date of award	Entity receiving funds

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II.   Executive Summary

Provide a five-sentence executive summary that identifies the applicant, the project area, the proposed work, how the proposed work will lead to expanding the availability of broadband service, and when completion is anticipated.

III.   Precertification

To be eligible for planning grants, precertification must be completed and approved. Precertification is a process of engaging stakeholders and gathering information, and which encourages adoption of best practices for community broadband planning.

Briefly describe the regional collaborations or partnerships formed among communities, local or regional nonprofits providing economic development programs, or private-sector stakeholders. If none, then describe the investigation and efforts of undertaken to date.

A. Local Participation

Briefly describe how residents of each affected community are participating in broadband planning.

B. Broadband Committee

The community broadband committee must be committed for the duration of community broadband planning; committees that are committed into and through eventual expansion of broadband further ensure community vision and goals are met. List the community broadband committee members who contribute relevant backgrounds and roles.

Background	Name
an official representing the affected community, including a local elected official with political will to support broadband	
an educator who cares about educational opportunities around broadband	
someone in economic development, including a local business owner, including someone from an industry that's important to the affected community	
someone who depends on broadband, including a teleworker, including a student, including a healthcare provider	
a key individual to any such project, including someone who's integral to the fabric of the affected community	
a deep diver into broadband, including someone with information technology expertise, including someone with policy expertise	
a finance expert, including someone with banking expertise, including someone with public-private partnership experience	
a communicator, both within the committee and from the committee	
an energizer, who diversifies and brings together the group	
a visionary, who drives the process forward and keeps it upbeat	

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IV.   Regional Preference
Preference will be given to regional projects involving multiple communities.

Describe the areas covered by the proposed project or included in the proposed activities, including the number of municipalities or local governments, and the number of economic development nonprofits, that are involved in this broadband planning.

V.   Project Focus
The evaluation process involves first ranking applications by the likelihood of the proposed projects leading to the expansion of the availability of broadband service.

Describe the focus of the proposed project and how it is likely to lead expanding the availability of broadband service in unserved and underserved areas.

Grant recipients are required to submit the plan generated by the project or a report with sufficient detail to demonstrate that the project is leading to the expansion of the availability of broadband service in unserved and underserved areas. Funded activities should either build upon or result in the following:

- a description of local broadband needs and goals;
- an inventory of the existing infrastructure assets;
- a gap analysis defining the additional broadband infrastructure necessary to meet identified needs and goals;
- an assessment of relevant municipal procedures, policies, rules and ordinances that have the effect of delaying or increasing the cost of broadband infrastructure deployment;
- a strategy to promote digital inclusion that addresses affordable internet service and equipment, digital literacy and public computer access;
- one or more network designs and cost estimates based on input from broadband service providers;
- operating and business models based on input from broadband service providers; and
- information or network design solutions from any other parties submitted during planning.

CONNECTMAINE

A. Project Area

Are the areas covered or included in the proposed project predominately unserved or underserved areas?[2] If not, briefly describe the unique benefit of expanding broadband service to the portion of the project area that is unserved or underserved.

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/
- Community Broadband Plans posted on the ConnectMaine website, if geographic areas are delineated based on a service level of at least 50/10mbps being unavailable: www.maine.gov/connectme/grants/planning-grants/awards
- The 2021 Reviewed Areas, if these weren't awarded infrastructure grants since: www.maine.gov/connectme/communities-resources/Broadbandmapping

B. Project Engagement

Describe how local leaders, residents and businesses of affected communities will be educated and engaged in the proposed project.

C. Timeline and Milestones

While planning is an on-going process, for these proposed planning activities, insert a timeline that lists the anticipated milestones and anticipated completion date.

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[2] 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 50mbps/10mbps, and areas are designated as underserved where less than 20% of the households have access to internet service of at least 50mbps/10mbps.

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VI. Financial Commitment

The evaluation process involves dividing the grant amount requested by the number of communities involved in the proposed project, which is then multiplied by the initial ranking for a final ranking.

Briefly describe how any funds awarded would be essential for the proposed project work.

While many factors affect costs, ConnectMaine may use these guidelines and others to award the very limited grant funds available:

- Activities that the applicant, broadband committees or affected communities have the capability of conducting should be covered by in-kind contributions or committed dollars;
- Only activities that the applicant, broadband committees or affected communities aren't capable of conducting on their own should result in consultant expenses;
- Grant dollars should be reserved to cover expenses associated with other activities that aren't typical for the applicant, broadband committees or affected communities to conduct on their own, or that can't be covered by in-kind contributions or committed dollars;
- Consultant expenses are typical for generating the engineering designs and business modeling; however, grant dollars are unlikely to be awarded for fieldwork, mapping and conducting RFP processes where in-kind contributions should be explored.

A. Budget

List all costs of the proposed project and the secured, financial commitments from the applicant and other sources. Committed dollars cannot consist of in-kind contributions.

Anticipated Expenses	Total ($)	Committed ($)	Grant ($)
Totals			

If a community includes a financial commitment toward planning, those funds may not consist of in-kind contributions from the municipality or funds provided by a vendor or private business that proposes to build, operate or provide retail services using broadband infrastructure constructed pursuant to the planning grant. By signing and submitting this application, the applicant certifies the proposed project would be conducted and completed in accordance with the ConnectMaine rule.

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-linier 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

CONNECTMAINE

Infrastructure Grants Application Guidance

Authority Members
Nick Battista, Chair
Jasmine Bishop
Fred Brittain
Susan Corbett
Heather Johnson
Jeff Letourneau
Liz Wyman

Contact Staff
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207.624.9894

This application guidance explains the process of proposing broadband projects for infrastructure grants. The current application window is November 24 through January 20, and complete applications must be submitted by 11:59 P.M. EST.

Table of Contents

CONNECTMAINE

I.   Instructions and Overview

This document identifies required information that must be included for a completed application to be evaluated by ConnectMaine. Please contact ConnectMaine staff at Connect.ME@maine.gov for any assistance needed. ConnectMaine intends to host a workshop for potential applicants, and any announcements or additional guidance will be posted on the ConnectMaine website: www.maine.gov/connectme/grants/infrastructure-grants/process

Refinements to the infrastructure grants program were based on recent rulemaking and include:

- A single track for all applications, including community and provider applicants, including community-driven and provider expansion projects
- New designation of broadband service, and performance criteria for awarded projects
- New designations of unserved and underserved areas, and eligibility criteria for project areas
- New application evaluation process that uses preference criteria and a weighting system
- For preparing and submitting applications, systems and tools include an online Grants Portal, a web-based FiberMap, an Application Data Form, and other separate files

II.   Eligibility Criteria

ConnectMaine must determine that the responsible entity is capable of installing, using and managing broadband infrastructure.

A. Eligible Entities

Applications may involve a single or multiple entity(ies) from the private and/or public sectors; however, a single entity must be identified as the legal applicant. The following types of entities are eligible to apply for infrastructure grants:

- Communications Service Providers (ISPs) that meet eligibility criteria;
- 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.

B. Pre-Application Requirements

Any ISP that is the applicant or involved, and any entity awarded grants previously must be in good standing with ConnectMaine.

1. Required Filing of Data

The ConnectMaine rule lists the data that must be filed by ISPs annually, and the most recent period for filing of data was from June 23 to September 21. An ISP that doesn't submit the required data filing within three months of the request is ineligible for infrastructure grants.

2. Provider Outreach

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, to existing ISPs to confirm whether or not installation of broadband infrastructure and service of at least 100mpbs download and 100mbps upload, equivalent to the proposed project, would occur within the same period as the proposed project. Separately, any responses received from ISPs within 14 days of provider outreach will be copied to Connect.ME@maine.gov by the applicant. The current window for provider outreach is November 24 through December 24, with the response window effectively being December 8 through January 7.

C. Eligible Project Areas

Proposed projects must address potential subscriber locations in unserved or underserved areas. A "subscriber location" means any location at which there could be one or more subscribers of communications service, including but not limited to a house, apartment, apartment complex, condo complex, other dwelling unit, a business, business complex, medical facility, community building, government facility, or other facility. Unserved areas are those areas of the state that do not have service of at least 50mbps download and 10mbps upload, and underserved areas of the state are areas that have broadband service available at greater than 50mbps download and 10mbps upload, but less than 100mbps download and 100mbps upload from two providers.

ConnectMaine publishes a publicly available web-based map that identifies geographic areas as unserved or underserved: www.maine.gov/connectme/communities-resources/Broadbandmapping ConnectMaine announces the opportunity to review areas, allowing data to be submitted from any ISP, potential applicant or other credible data sources, utilized by ConnectMaine to confirm the availability, or lack thereof, of broadband service. The latest opportunity to review areas was October 20 to November 19, with areas confirmed on November 24.

Based on the data behind that map, ConnectMaine identifies and proposes unserved and underserved areas eligible for grants. Applicants must select one or more eligible area to propose serving.

D. Performance Criteria

Performance criteria for projects funded by awarded grants include the level and price of internet service to be offered.

1. Subscriber Locations

Proposed projects must serve all potential subscriber locations in unserved areas, and may serve some or all subscriber locations in underserved or served areas, of the selected project areas. A potential subscriber location is considered to have been served once the grant recipient has constructed facilities to a point sufficiently close to the subscriber location that it is able to provide service upon request to that location within a normal service interval and without additional cost to the subscriber for construction of new facilities.

CONNECTMAINE

2. Broadband Service

Proposed projects must result in offering broadband service of at least 100mpbs/100mpbs. Other service levels may be offered, but at least one service level meeting or exceeding this designation of broadband service must be offered.

3. Service Prices

Of all the service levels to be offered, the retail price per subscriber location to receive service must be equal or less than the price per subscriber location offered elsewhere in the state.

E. Grant Necessity

ConnectMaine will consider whether or not the project would occur without an infrastructure grant; ConnectMaine will consider whether or not broadband infrastructure and broadband service would otherwise occur within the same period as the proposed project, and whether or not infrastructure and service equivalent to the proposed project would otherwise occur within the same period as the proposed project.

F. Eligible Expenses

Eligible uses of grant funds include provision of public infrastructure, services, facilities and improvements needed to implement broadband services and enhance existing internet services.

1. Project Costs

Grant recipients may use grant funds for actual capital costs up to the awarded amount, on a one-time capital improvement basis. Costs must be directly related to the provision of public infrastructure, services, facilities and improvements needed to implement broadband services and enhance existing internet services, as well as any other activities that are integral and necessary for expanding broadband infrastructure and broadband service.

Eligible project costs include:
- Professional Services, including engineering; permitting, easements and encroachment acquisition; project and construction management;
- Outside Plant, including fiber optic and coaxial cable, pole placement and pole make-ready, aerial and underground materials, and aerial and underground construction labor;
- Long-term Leases;
- Drops and CPE, i.e., service drops and other costs of connection up to network interface points, including subscriber connection materials, subscriber connection equipment, subscriber connection labor, subscriber management equipment;
- Land and Buildings, including equipment shelters, land, site preparation and site restoration costs;
- Network and Access Equipment, including headend/central office/remote cabinet equipment and installation; and
- Wireless Equipment and Facilities, including towers, and tower improvements and installations, backhaul and access radios, and powering equipment.

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Ineligible costs include but aren't limited to:

- Expenses incurred prior to the date of awarded grants being announced;
- Administrative and fundraising activities, computers and other office equipment, and vehicles and other operating expenses;
- Equipment owned or leased by the subscriber, including routers, modems and any other costs beyond the network interface points; and
- Operating expenses.

2. Reasonable Project Cost

While ConnectMaine will consider relevant factors that may increase the cost or difficulty in expanding broadband service, applicants must propose costs that are reasonable and proportional to the project scope, including density and geography of the project area.

3. Minimum Financial Commitment

A minimum financial commitment of $700 per subscriber location in the project area must be made for the proposed project. The total financial commitment is equal to the total project cost minus the grant amount requested and then divided by the number of potential subscriber locations to be served. Ineligible costs are excluded from the total project cost. The number of potential subscriber locations must include all of the following counts as they occur within the project area(s) selected by the applicant:

- Subscriber locations within unserved areas,
- Subscriber locations within underserved areas that will be served by the project, and
- Subscriber locations within served areas that will be served by the project.

G. Financial Capacity

Applicants must demonstrate financial capacity. The total financial commitment in addition to the grant amount requested must be adequate to complete the proposed project. Applicants proposing projects that are large relative to existing operations must demonstrate financial sustainability of the proposed project. The proposed project is considered large if it includes more potential subscriber locations than 10% of all existing subscribed locations of the entities involved in the proposed project.

III. Application Process

The applicant will enter information and upload files to the online Grants Portal: URL
The applicant will contact VETRO to obtain access to the interactive, web-based FiberMap:
https://vetrofibermap.com/

Some information is needed in multiple places, or it's generated in one place but needed in another: the FiberMap, separate documents such as the Application Data Form and Application Narrative, and the Grants Portal. Please ensure information entered into the Grants Portal is consistent with information included elsewhere.

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A. Grants Portal

The Grants Portal of the Department of Community and Economic Development captures the application date and summary information from each applicant. Required forms and additional files can be downloaded from and uploaded to the Grants Portal: URL

1. Legal Applicant

Applicants must register in the Grants Portal and enter the entity name of the legal applicant. The Grants Portal will capture the legal applicant contact's mailing address, any fax number or EIN; and the legal applicant entity's name, phone number, email, mailing address and county.

2. Communications Service Provider

Applicants must enter the ISP company name and contact information into the Grants Portal, whether or not the ISP is the legal applicant. The ISP is the entity responsible for providing broadband service that results from the proposed project. The ISP may or may not also be the entity responsible for installing, managing and operating the broadband infrastructure.

3. Affected Communities

Applicants must enter each affected municipality, local government or local government authority, or a local nonprofit providing economic development programs, as applicable to the proposed project, including points of contact for each, into the grants portal.

4. Executive Summary

A space of 800 characters in the Grants Portal is for the proposed project summary that should describe the how the project is unique with regard to ruralness and the unique economic opportunity will result.

B. Interactive FiberMap

Applicants must use the interactive, web-based FiberMap to select project area(s) from unserved and underserved areas that ConnectMaine identified and proposed as eligible for grants, to propose network routes and broadband infrastructure locations, and to identify other subscriber locations as relevant. The FiberMap will contain eligible project areas and a layer of potential subscriber locations, classified by their location in unserved, underserved or served areas.

1. Project Area

Applicants must use the FiberMap to select one or more project area, which will be the basis of the application.

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2. Proposed Design

Applicants must import a high-level network design into the FiberMap. At a minimum, the design must include any fiber routes and the interconnection with existing networks, but applicants are encouraged to include additional information, especially for new networks or significant expansions of existing networks. There are two methods for importing the proposed design into the FiberMap:

- Applicants who are already using VETRO FiberMap to generate designs may share the proposed design, or
- Applicants, including those who use another platform to generate designs, may import SHP files of the proposed design, which must clearly identify the fiber route layer(s) and must include fiber strand count as an attribute.

3. Project Focus

Applicants must identify the potential subscriber locations in the selected project area that will be served by the proposed project. There are two methods for identifying the project focus in FiberMap:

- Applicants may use FiberMap tools to select from the subscriber locations layer the subscriber locations to be served by the project, or
- Applicants may import SHP files containing points of the potential subscriber locations, which must include attributes identifying each point as being in unserved, underserved or served areas and as being served or not by the proposed project.

Applicants may include additional potential subscriber locations from outside selected project areas, if those locations are within areas that are adjacent to the selected project areas. There are two methods for adding such locations in the project area in FiberMap:

- Applicants may select those locations from the subscriber locations layer in FiberMap, or
- Applicants may describe those points as such in the attributes included in the SHP files imported to FiberMap.

Proposed projects must serve all potential subscriber locations in unserved areas, of the selected project areas, as identified in the FiberMap, regardless of whether or not those locations have been identified accurately by the application, and regardless of whether or not the routes to those locations have been included in the application. A limited exception may exist where subscriber locations in an unserved area are disconnected from any utility lines serving other subscriber locations in the project area requiring the route to go outside the project area. There are two methods for excluding such locations from the project area in FiberMap:

- Applicants may deselect those locations from the subscriber locations layer in FiberMap, or
- Applicants may describe those points as such in the attributes included in the SHP files imported to FiberMap.

Potential subscriber locations in underserved or served areas, of the selected project areas, included as locations to be served by the proposed projects must be served.

C. Application Data Form

Applicants must fill out the Application Data Form that can be downloaded from the Grants Portal. Information to be included is supplemental to the information entered directly into the Grants Portal, providing more details and making the application evaluation process possible. The Application Data Form must remain in the Excel file format when uploaded to the Grants Portal.

1. Summary Information

The information included in the Application Data Form must be consistent with the information entered into the Grants Portal:

- Name of the legal applicant and name(s) of the entity(ies) responsible for installing, managing and operating the broadband infrastructure
- Date of required data filing
- Project Cost: The total estimated, eligible costs of the proposed project
- Grant Amount Requested: Grant dollars being requested toward project cost
- Subscriber Locations: Number of potential subscriber locations within the project area(s)
- Subscriber Locations in Unserved or Underserved Areas: Number of potential subscriber locations in unserved or underserved areas of the project area(s) that will be served
- Miles: Number of route miles of the proposed project
- Density: Subscriber Locations divided by Miles
- Cost-Benefit: Grant Amount Requested divided by Subscriber Locations in Unserved or Underserved Areas
- Minimum Financial Commitment: Project Cost minus Grant Amount Requested and then divided by Subscriber Locations that will be served

2. FiberMap Information

In the Application Data Form, applicants must include some information that is calculated in the FiberMap:

- Subscriber Locations: Number of potential subscriber locations within the project area(s)
- Subscriber Locations in Unserved or Underserved Areas: Number of potential subscriber locations in unserved or underserved areas of the project area(s) that will be served
- Subscriber Locations in Unserved Areas: Number of potential subscriber locations in unserved areas of the project area(s)
- Subscriber Locations in Least Served Areas: Number of potential subscriber locations in areas lacking availability of internet service of at least 25mbps/3mbps
- Subscriber Locations in Underserved Areas: Number of potential subscriber locations in underserved areas of the project area(s)
- Miles: Number of route miles of the proposed project

3. Infrastructure Grant Tracking

Applicants must list all the dates of grants awarded in the last five years, whether received or declined, and the most recent dates of the associated grant tracking reports. The ConnectMaine rule requires grant tracking data to be submitted annually.

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4. Proposed Service

Applicants must list all proposed service offerings that will result from the project, and the associated service prices. Details listed must indicate the following, as applicable: non-recurring charges for service activation, charges for common equipment, applicable fees and surcharges, and data overages. Bundled and promotional prices may be listed, but in addition to, not instead of, non-promotional prices for stand-alone internet service.

Applicants must indicate whether or not affordability offerings are proposed for the broadband service levels listed. Affordability offerings are recognized if the ISP involved in the proposed project agrees to participate in the Emergency Broadband Benefit, Lifeline, or successor programs for at least five years following project completion.

5. Financial Information

Applicants must detail all costs of the proposed project in the Application Data Form, which will calculate the total estimated project cost. The Application Data Form includes standardized cost categories. Applicants must list all sources of financial commitments, including whether committed dollars are secured or the sources are contingent on this grant being awarded or some other reason. Sources may include cash or debt from the applicant, ISP or affected community. Sources may include previously awarded grants. Details listed must indicate the following, as applicable: the grant name, date awarded, and any other grant information that would be useful; the name of the borrowing entity, whether or not the loan is backed, and the terms of the loan; and the full nature of any contingencies.

If the proposed project includes more potential subscriber locations than 10% of all existing subscribed locations of the entities involved in the proposed project, then the applicant must include additional information to demonstrate financial capacity and sustainability:

- Anticipated timing of project costs
- Additional costs required over time, that are ineligible for grant funds
- Anticipated timing of other sources of funds
- Estimated operating costs over time
- Timing of broadband service availability to subscriber locations, estimated subscription rates over time and estimated revenue over time
- Debt and capital lease payments
- Ongoing operating subsidies and the associated sources

D. Application Narrative

Applicants must fill out the Application Narrative document that can be downloaded from the Grants Portal. The Application Narrative may be uploaded to the Grants Portal as the Word document file format, or as an Adobe pdf format if the text can be selected, i.e., not a photo pdf. Applicants must insert information in the order requested in the Application Narrative, rather than including addendums or references. The information included in the Application Narrative must be consistent with Grants Portal:

- Name of the legal applicant
- Eligible entities, with regard to technical, managerial and financial capacity, and experience in operating the network
- Date of provider outreach

1. Applicant Eligibility

The applicant must demonstrate technical, managerial and financial capacity, and experience in operating the network. The applicant must indicate which entity(ies) will build, own and operate the network.

2. Proposed Network

The applicant must specify the network technology proposed to support the proposed levels of broadband service listed in the Application Data Form, and must indicate how the technology is upgradeable. The applicant must explain the estimated project cost, any relevant factors that increase the cost or difficulty in expanding broadband service, and how proposed costs are reasonable and proportional to the project scope, including density and geography of the project area.

3. Technical Details

The applicant must specify the standard or standards to be used in the proposed network, e.g., DOCSIS 3.x, GPON, EPON, NG-PON2, XGSPON, Active Ethernet, etc. The applicant must describe how any existing infrastructure is being leveraged, and how the proposed network will be interconnected with existing networks. The applicant must identify any technical equipment vendors to the extent known at the time of application.

If wireless technology is involved in the proposed project, the applicant must describe the wireless network technology and spectrum. The applicant must describe the assumptions used to generate the predicted coverage, which shall include the prediction tool used; terrain and clutter resolution used to generate the plot; the signal strength, RSSI or RSRP for an LTE network, and threshold at which areas are considered covered or uncovered; and the assumed height above ground level of subscriber equipment.

4. Active Community

The applicant must describe how the project is unique with regard to any widespread community engagement, including any participation by the affected communities in broadband planning programs or technical assistance received, and briefly describe how the affected communities have been uniquely supportive of the proposed project.

E. Supplemental Files

Applicants must upload supplemental files to the Grants Portal.

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1. Network Diagram

Applicants must upload a network diagram that shows the proposed network and its interconnection with existing networks. While the diagram can take the form of any software chosen by the applicant or partner, the file type must be accessible by ConnectMaine, such as pdf, jpg or doc.

2. Wireless Design

If wireless technology is involved in the proposed project, applicants must upload SHP files of the projected propagation plot of coverage from the proposed access points, to the Grants Portal. Propagation plots may show multiple service levels, but must clearly identify signal strength at which subscribers could expect to receive service of at least 100mbps/100mbps.

Applicants must identify the sites used in the coverage projection, in a table that is uploaded to the Grants Portal as an Excel xls or csv file format; the table must list the following for all access points:

- The latitude and longitude of the site
- Base station antenna information including manufacturer, model, azimuth, down tilt, and center line
- Base station equipment information with manufacturer, model number, and EIRP
- Whether the support structure at the site is existing or planned, whether the applicant intends to lease or own the structure, and whether or not the applicant has already acquired rights to use the site

Information must be provided by sector for sectorized sites. If the proposed project includes point-to-point wireless links, then applicants must identify the points linked, the frequency to be used, data transmission rate supported and link budget.

Applicants must upload the manufacturer data sheets for key radio equipment and antennas that are consistent with the projected coverage or reach shown for the proposed project, including for point-to-point links, point-to-multipoint access points and end user equipment. These data sheets must be uploaded to the Grants Portal in Adobe pdf file format.

Applicants must upload the same information for adjacent sites of the existing network of entities involved in the proposed project, sites which may provide overlapping coverage with the proposed sites. Applicants must upload site information before and after any proposed upgrade to existing sites.

If the use of licensed spectrum is proposed, then applicants must upload information demonstrating permitted use of the spectrum, in Adobe pdf file format.

3. Timeline and Milestones

Applicants must upload a project timeline that indicates the anticipated milestones of the proposed project, including those related to engineering, pole processes, permitting, construction, connections and any major contingencies. While the project timeline can take the form of any project management software chosen by the applicant or partner, the file type must be accessible by ConnectMaine, such as pdf, jpg, xls, or doc.

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4. Application Window

The current application window is November 24 through January 20, and complete applications must be submitted by 11:59 P.M. EST through the Grants Portal of the Department of Community and Economic Development.

IV.   Application Evaluation

After the application window closes, ConnectMaine reviews completed applications submitted for eligibility and then prioritizes proposed projects for grants. In accordance with the ConnectMaine rule, the evaluation process involves grouping applications based on preference criteria; then within each preference group, the cost-benefit of the proposed project is calculated, and weights from project scope and project value criteria are applied.

A. Additional Information

The ConnectMaine Authority reserves the right to determine whether or not to request additional information necessary to evaluate applications for infrastructure grants. ConnectMaine may request that the applicant modify the proposed project in any, but not necessarily only, the following ways:

- The project areas proposed, especially if multiple applicants select the same project areas
- The proposed project focus or boundaries of the project areas, especially if additional potential subscriber locations are within areas that are adjacent to the selected project areas
- The potential subscriber locations to be served by the proposed project
- The grant amount requested to be proportional to per-mile or per-location modifications
- The financial information based on modifications requested

In order to award grants totaling the available bond funds, ConnectMaine reserves the right to request modifications to the grant amounts requested, financial information and other relevant elements in competitive applications, before the ConnectMaine Authority awards grants. Alternatively or also, if the funds that would remain after awarding grants to the most competitive are insufficient to award the grant amount requested in the next most competitive application, then ConnectMaine may instead award the grant amount requested in one or more of the less competitive applications.

B. Preference Criteria

ConnectMaine will give preference to projects in unserved and underserved areas that provide the greatest relative improvement to existing internet service. The three preference groups will be:

1. Least Served: Project areas where a majority of potential subscriber locations lack availability of service of at least 25mbps/3mbps.
2. Greatest Improvement: Projects proposing to offer at least 90% of subscriber locations broadband service of at least 1gbps/1gbps.
3. Remaining Applications: All other proposed projects.

Applications that meet the first preference criterion will be prioritized into the first preference group over the second, and the second over the third.

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C. Cost-Benefit

Within each preference group, applications are judged based on the cost-benefit of the proposed project. An unweighted cost-benefit is calculated as the grant amount requested divided by the number of potential subscriber locations in unserved and underserved areas to be served by the project; for example:

- Grant Amount Requested: $750,000
- Potential Subscriber Locations in Unserved and Underserved Areas: 500
- Unweighted Cost-Benefit: $1,500

This unweighted cost-benefit is then weighted by Project Scope and Project Value factors. Each weight is expressed as a percentage. Receiving greater weight will improve the competitiveness of the application. Preliminary weights and the weighted cost-benefit of the proposed project will be calculated in Application Data Form based on the information included by the applicant.

The weight of project scope is based on relevant factors that may increase the cost or difficulty in expanding broadband service:

- Density of the project area
- Financial commitment from the community
- Financial commitment from the ISP

The weight of project value is based on relevant factors that may increase the value of the proposed project:

- Subscription price
- Affordability offering

The weight of each factor is expressed as a percentage and is subtracted from 100%, and then the results are multiplied in series by the unweighted cost-benefit, i.e.:
Unweighted Cost-Benefit x (100%-weight1) x (100%-weight2)… = Weighted Cost-Benefit

The preliminary calculation in the Application Data Form are subject to review by ConnectMaine and adjustments if appropriate. ConnectMaine will use the weighted cost-benefit to prioritize proposed projects for grants; while, the amount of the grant awarded will be based on the grant amount requested by the applicant.

D. Project Scope

The weight of project scope is based on relevant factors that may increase the cost or difficulty in expanding broadband service.

1. Density of Project Area

Proposed project areas with low density, measured by the number of potential subscriber locations per mile, will receive greater weight. Up to a 30% maximum weight will be applied for the density of the project area. For every potential subscriber location per route mile less than 18 subscriber locations per mile, will result in 2%; for example:

- Density: 14 potential subscriber locations per mile
- Weight: 8%

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2. Community Financial Commitment

Projects proposed with larger community financial commitments will receive greater weight. Up to a 40% maximum weight will be applied for a financial commitment from the affected community toward the project cost. The affected community may or may not be the applicant; however for this weight, the financial commitment must come from one or more of the following entities: a unit of local government, including town, city or county; a broadband utility district or corporation, wholly or partially owned by a unit of local government. The source(s) of the financial commitment may include the Local Fiscal Recovery Fund, pursuant to the American Rescue Plan Act. For the purposes of calculating this weight, other grant funds and any planned expenditures on ineligible costs are excluded.

The weight received will depend on the size of the municipal valuation, as reported by the Maine Revenue Service for the most recent published year at the time the application window opens. Should the community financial commitment be made by a county, the sum of the municipal valuation in the county will be used. If the community financial commitment is made by more than one entity, then the most favorable valuation of the local government from which, or in which, at least $50,000 in financial commitment comes will be used.

All reported valuations will be grouped by quartiles, and weighting will depend the quartile of the most favorable local government, i.e.:

- For local governments in the top half of valuations, a weight of 1% will result for every 2% of the project cost covered by the community financial commitment
- For local governments in the bottom quartile of valuations, a weight of 2% will result for every 1% of the project cost covered by the community financial commitment
- For all other local governments, a weight of 1% will result for every 1% of the project cost covered by the community financial commitment

3. ISP Financial Commitment

Projects proposed with larger ISP financial commitments will receive greater weight. Up to a 20% maximum weight will be applied for the ISP financial commitment. The ISP may or may not be the applicant. For the purposes of calculating this weight, while debts for the proposed project may be included, financial commitments from contingent sources and any planned expenditures on ineligible costs are excluded.

The weight received will depend on the size of ISP financial commitment relative to the project scope: the amount of financial commitment from the ISP toward the project cost per potential subscriber location in the project area. A weight of 1% will result for every secured $75 per subscriber location; for example:

- ISP financial commitment: $150 per subscriber location
- Weight: 2%

If the applicant is a unit of local government, or any broadband utility district or corporation wholly or partially owned by a unit of local government, that will retain ownership of a majority of the proposed project assets, then community financial contributions will be considered as community or ISP financial commitments as is most favorable, up to the maximum weight of each, automatically in the Application Data Form.

E. Project Value

The weight of project value is based on relevant factors that may increase the value of the proposed project.

1. Subscription Price

Proposed service offerings with lower subscription prices will receive greater weight. Up to a 20% maximum weight will be applied for the subscription price. For the purposes of calculating this weight, the lowest retail, non-promotional price of a residential offering with at least 100mbps upload will be used. A weight of 1% will result for every dollar per month to receive service less than $60 per month; for example:

- Subscription price: $50 per month
- Weight: 10%

2. Affordability Offering

Proposed service levels with affordability offerings will receive greater weight. Whether or not the ISP is the applicant, if the ISP that will offer service as a result of the proposed project agrees to participate in the Emergency Broadband Benefit, Lifeline, or successor programs, then a 20% weight will result.

V. Compliance Measures

In accordance with the ConnectMaine rule, grant recipients must ensure compliance with requirements for projects funded with infrastructure grants.

A. Award Acceptance

Applicants may accept or decline awarded grants. Applicants accepting awards must execute a contract agreement with ConnectMaine within 30 days of the awarded grants. ConnectMaine may extend this deadline at its sole discretion. These applicants will be notified of awarded grants and informed on how to sign and upload the required contract agreement and IRS W-9 Form to the Grants Portal, which will constitute acceptance of the awarded grants. The contract agreement contains additional terms and conditions that are standard in state of Maine contracts, and the contract agreement requires compliance with all provisions of the ConnectMaine rule.

ConnectMaine will consider awarded grants declined if applicants fail to execute the contract agreement within the deadline. Following this, the ConnectMaine Authority may reverse the decision to make the award. In order to award grants totaling the available bond funds, ConnectMaine may award grants to other applicants or to other grant recipients who expand their project scopes.

B. Project Dates

Grant recipients may start projects as soon as grants are awarded by the ConnectMaine Authority. A notice of commencement must be filled out and uploaded to the Grants Portal within 30 days of the award or start of the project, whichever occurs sooner. ConnectMaine may extend this deadline at its sole discretion. ConnectMaine will consider awarded grants declined if applicants fail to submit the notice of commencement within the deadline.

Projects of less than $1.5 million must be completed within one year of initial funds being disbursed, or within 180 days of necessary licenses, permits and governmental approvals, whichever later occurs, unless an extension is approved by the ConnectMaine Authority due to unforeseen circumstances; projects that are over $1.5 million will have a contractually agreed to completion date. A completion report must be filled out and uploaded to the Grants Portal. Part or all of awarded grants are subject to recapture if grant recipients fail to complete projects.

C. Reports and Disbursements

Following award acceptance and for five years following project completion, the grant recipient must ensure compliance with reporting requirements. Reports are submitted in order to request disbursements of the awarded grants. Forms for required reports can be downloaded from the Grants Portal once grants are awarded and are made publicly available on the ConnectMaine website: https://www.maine.gov/connectme/grants/award-recipients

1. Notice of Commencement

Before ConnectMaine disburses initial funds, the grant recipient must submit a notice of commencement, which confirms project dates and anticipated disbursement requests. The notice of commencement must be filled out and uploaded to the Grants Portal within 30 days of the award or start of the project, whichever occurs sooner.

2. Progress Reports

The grant recipient must fill out and upload to the Grants Portal a progress report at least every quarter following the quarter in which the project started. Progress reports confirm project dates, actual financial information to-date and anticipated disbursement requests. If the project is being conducted differently than described in the contract agreement, the progress report may be used to explain those differences and how the project remains in compliance.

A progress report may also be used to request an extension to the required project completion date, in which case the grant recipient will explain unforeseen circumstances and proposed project dates. In order for the ConnectMaine Authority to decide on the request for an extension in time, the report must be received by ConnectMaine at least eight days before a regularly scheduled meeting that occurs before the original project completion date.

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3. Completion Report

Before ConnectMaine disburses final funds, the grant recipient must submit a completion report, which confirms project dates, actual financial information and final disbursement request. The completion report includes required documentation for validation of the completed project to the proposed project. The completion report must be filled out and uploaded to the Grants Portal before the required project completion date. If the project was conducted or completed differently than described in the contract agreement, the completion report may be used to explain those differences and how the project remains in compliance.

4. Audit Form

In order to conduct the grants validation process, the grant recipient must fill out and upload to the Grants Portal an audit form and required documentation, by the required project completion date. The audit form includes lists of required documentation for project completeness and compliance. In addition to submitting the information requested for the purposes of the grants validation process, the grant recipient must allow access for inspection of the plant and equipment. The audit form and required documentation should demonstrate:

- consistency of the completed project with the location and number of subscriber locations identified in the grants process,
- consistency of the completed project with financial information reported,
- suitability of the completed project to result in the type of services and performance identified in the grants process, and
- conformance with generally-accepted industry standards.

D. Validation and Tracking

The ConnectMaine Authority contracts with third parties to support the grants validation process that helps ensure projects comply with the requirements of the ConnectMaine rule and contract agreements. Grants tracking allows ConnectMaine to report on the progress toward its statutory goals to the legislature and others in the state of Maine.

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1. Grants Validation

Desktop audits are performed for all projects; while field verifications are performed across randomly selected projects. The audit form describes the five audit segments:

- Area Audit, for validation of broadband service availability to subscriber locations proposed to be served by the project, including all subscriber locations in unserved areas of the project areas; required documentation includes SHP files of the network design, prepared under the review of a professional engineer or an engineer with substantial demonstrated experience designing cable or fiber networks whose credentials are also submitted
- Technical Audit, for validation of performance criteria, including confirmation of materials and network quality and conformance with generally-accepted industry standards, and confirmation of speeds and consistency of broadband service; required documentation includes OTDR traces with event logs, manufacturer's specification information, and engineering documentation and calculations
- Spending Analysis, for validation of each expenditure for appropriateness to the completed project, to industry-consistent pricing and to the results of the Technical Audit, and for validation of actual financial information reported for comparison to industry norms and the proposed financial information in the application; required documentation includes the spending report which is an Excel file of actual project costs and details, and supporting invoices or documentation for those project costs
- Field Verification, for validation of broadband infrastructure, including consistency with the proposed project, through an on-site visit to visually inspect and examine the outside plant, central office, hub and subscriber connections; documentation is only required if any deficiencies identified to verify required remediation
- Connection Validation, for validation of active internet connections to subscribed locations in previously unserved areas; required documentation includes images of OLT and ONT, or CMTS and Modems, or billing statements, as applicable to the type of technology deployed

Any irregularities or deficiencies that are identified will be communicated to the grant recipient for remediation. A final report will be posted for the grant recipient, detailing the findings and any remediation efforts.

2. Grants Tracking

The grant recipient must submit an annual report for 5 years after the project is completed. The tracking reports will include the number of subscriber locations in the project area that are subscribed to broadband service on June 30 of each year.