

**Notice and Request for Comments**  
**Vermont Office of the Chief Technology Officer**  
**2010-01-26**

**The State of Vermont Office of the Chief Technology Officer Seeks Responses from Potential Vermont Applicants for Funding under the Second Round of the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) and the Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP)**

**Background**

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provides funding to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, for grants through the Broadband Telecommunications Opportunity Program (BTOP) and to the Rural Utilities Service (RUS), part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, for grants, loans, and loan guarantees for broadband infrastructure through the Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP). On January 15, 2010, both federal agencies released the second Notices of Funds Availability (NoFAs) under these programs, with funding proposals due March 15, 2010 (“Second Round Broadband Stimulus”).<sup>1</sup> The state will not make funding decisions under either of these programs. However, the authorizing language for the BTOP provides that NTIA may consult with states regarding areas that are “unserved” and “underserved” for broadband within the state, and regarding the allocation of grant funds within the state. The Vermont Office of the Chief Technology Officer (VCTO) also has an interest in supporting applications which expand broadband service availability in unserved and underserved parts of the state and accomplish related objectives.<sup>2</sup>

**State of Vermont Support for Applicants and Approach**

VCTO intends to work to provide coordination and direct and indirect support for Second Round Broadband Stimulus proposals in cooperation with the Vermont Telecommunications Authority (VTA) and the Vermont Broadband Mapping initiative. The approach to this coordination and support is detailed below.

Comprehensive Community Infrastructure Projects

Under the second round BTOP NoFA, the major focus of the program will be so-called Comprehensive Community Infrastructure projects, which includes support for middle mile broadband infrastructure, connections to community anchor institutions, and some last mile broadband infrastructure. (Please see the following “Last Mile Broadband Infrastructure Projects” subsection for more information.) NTIA has announced that its focus includes projects that incorporate a public-private partnership among government, non-profit and for-profit entities, and other key community stakeholders. The VTA is working with Anchor User Consortia in education, state government, libraries, and health care, and has solicited proposals from regional transport providers in order to develop a partnership and a strong project proposal that addresses itself to this focus. More information on this project is available from the VTA at [www.telecomvt.org/RFP2009-108.php](http://www.telecomvt.org/RFP2009-108.php). In this category of project, VCTO supports the development of a single unified Vermont

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<sup>1</sup> Second Round Broadband Stimulus NoFAs and related information are available at [www.broadbandusa.gov](http://www.broadbandusa.gov).

<sup>2</sup> VCTO has been delegated responsibility for the coordination of Second Round Broadband Stimulus by the Vermont Office of Economic Stimulus and Recovery (VoESR). VCTO and VoESR are both units of the Agency of Administration, and this Notice and Request has been prepared in consultation with VoESR.

application with a coordinated set of public and private partners, having the VTA as the lead applicant.

### Last Mile Broadband Infrastructure Projects

In this category of project, VCTO seeks to ensure that currently unserved and underserved areas of Vermont which qualify for the Second Round Broadband Stimulus are the subject of proposals for funding. VCTO encourages independent (although coordinated) proposals by broadband service providers to BIP and, in some parts of the state where necessary or advantageous, integration of last-mile proposals into a VTA-led Comprehensive Community Infrastructure proposal to BTOP.

As of the release of this Notice and Request, no last mile broadband projects have been announced for funding in Vermont in the first round of the BIP and BTOP programs. Until award announcements are made, VCTO encourages potential applicants to prepare for Second Round Broadband Stimulus as if no first round projects will be funded. VTA has already issued an RFP seeking private sector last mile partners for the preparation of applications covering those areas of Vermont which are not currently served or the subject of a broadband service commitment, and which were not included in a first round BIP or BTOP application.<sup>3</sup>

Under the second round BIP NoFA, the major focus of the program will be last mile broadband infrastructure projects. There are important differences between the first and second round BIP NoFAs, including changes in eligibility criteria, review, and grant funding levels. While BIP will still not provide funding to overlapping last mile broadband projects, the second round BIP NoFA has clarified how BIP will review overlapping proposals. This includes clarification of how much overlap RUS may consider minimal and processes for resolution of overlaps. For this reason, VCTO will not seek geographic coordination of proposals using the “Standard Service Areas” encouraged by the Vermont Office of Economic Stimulus and Recovery (VoESR) in Round 1. However, VCTO will encourage a more informal geographic coordination of proposals through responses to this Notice and Request with the objective of avoiding “orphaned” territory.

Under the second round BTOP NoFA, last mile broadband projects are not a focus of the program, except as part of a Comprehensive Community Infrastructure proposal. Furthermore, the NTIA has announced that the Last Mile component of a Comprehensive Community Infrastructure proposal (to residential consumers and non-community anchor institutions) may not exceed 20 percent of total eligible project costs. For this reason, VCTO intends, through this Notice and Request, to assist VTA in the identification of a limited number of last mile broadband service providers and projects which may be good candidates for inclusion in a VTA-led BTOP application instead of an independent BIP application.<sup>4</sup>

### Sustainable Broadband Adoption and Public Computer Center Projects

The second round BTOP NoFA once again seeks proposals for these categories of projects. As of the release of this Notice and Request, no sustainable broadband adoption or public computer center projects have been announced for funding in Vermont in the first round of the BIP and BTOP programs. Until award announcements are made, VCTO encourages potential applicants to prepare for Second Round Broadband Stimulus as if no first round projects will be funded. In the Sustainable Broadband Adoption category, VCTO strongly encourages the development of proposals

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<sup>3</sup> See [www.telecomvt.org/RFP6-documents/RFP-2009-106.pdf](http://www.telecomvt.org/RFP6-documents/RFP-2009-106.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> In the Second Round Broadband Stimulus, a project may not apply to both BIP and BTOP.

to accelerate the rate of broadband adoption in currently unserved Vermont communities once service is expanded to them. In the Public Computer Center category VCTO strongly encourages proposals for public computer centers at libraries and other community anchor institutions targeted for connectivity under the VTA-led Comprehensive Community Infrastructure proposal.

### State Broadband Availability Data

RUS and NTIA have announced that their evaluation Second Round Broadband Stimulus proposals will include the extent to which proposals served unserved and underserved areas. Additionally, eligibility for BIP funding will be determined in part by the number of premises in a project area that have no access to broadband service at the rate of 5 Mbps (upstream and downstream combined).<sup>5</sup> VCTO intends, through VoESR's web site, to provide a data package of broadband availability information for use by any potential applicant, similar in form to the data package provided on July 31, 2009, at [recovery.vermont.gov/broadband](http://recovery.vermont.gov/broadband). A link to the new data package will be provided at this same address and is anticipated on or about February 12, 2010. The package will be based on information collected through the Vermont Broadband Mapping Initiative, which is headed by the Vermont Center for Geographic Information and which is the NTIA-funded State Broadband Data and Development Grant Program awardee for Vermont.<sup>6</sup> The data package will be assembled based on the best reliable information available to the Vermont Broadband Mapping initiative.<sup>7</sup> All broadband service providers are encouraged to cooperate with this Initiative.

### **Information Requested**

Potential applicants who intend to seek State of Vermont support for a Second Round Broadband Stimulus application are strongly encouraged to provide a brief (2 page or shorter) description of their proposed project. Please include the names of the entity responsible for the project and any partnering entities, a contact name, phone number, and e-mail address. Please state whether the application to be prepared is for BIP or BTOP. For potential last mile broadband infrastructure proposals please also include the following additional information:

- The proposed geographic area to be served, described in reference to towns or telephone exchanges. Please describe whether all or part of a town or telephone exchange is proposed to be served.
- The type(s) of last mile infrastructure intended in the project.
- Whether the intended proposal may seek loan or grant funding, or both.
- Whether the potential applicant wishes to be referred to the VTA for consideration to be included as part of a VTA-led Comprehensive Community Infrastructure project.

Respondents may be contacted requesting additional information regarding the proposed projects.

Please submit responses by email to [chris.campbell@state.vt.us](mailto:chris.campbell@state.vt.us) or mail to:

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<sup>5</sup> Potential applicants should review the Second Round Broadband Stimulus NoFAs for complete eligibility and scoring information.

<sup>6</sup> The data package will contain aggregated information and will not reveal information provided as Confidential to the Vermont Broadband Mapping Initiative.

<sup>7</sup> The Vermont Broadband Mapping Initiative will also make a submission of data to the NTIA by March 31, 2010, consistent with the requirements of the State Broadband Data and Development Grant Program.

Vermont Office of the Chief Technology Officer  
109 State St, 5th Floor  
Montpelier, VT 05609-0201

Due to the anticipated short timeframe for implementation of federal stimulus efforts, responses are requested by February 2, 2010 . VCTO may have very limited ability to review new responses submitted after this date.