



# **Request for Proposals Broadband Assessment & Planning**

**For Newport and Bristol Counties in Rhode Island and  
The Additional Areas of the State of Rhode Island**

**Issued: April 13, 2021**

**Proposals Due: May 4, 2021**

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## 1. Purpose and Background

Connect Greater Newport is a regional economic development initiative launched in 2018 by the Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce to serve the region's business community. Connect Greater Newport's mission is to support the growth of Greater Newport's existing businesses and serve as a resource to attract new companies to the region.

Past consumer and business surveys have illuminated challenges with affordable, reliable access to the internet, particularly on Aquidneck Island (Newport County), but have not been definitive. The pandemic has exacerbated the statewide need for reliable, affordable high-speed broadband for remote learning, telework, telehealth, e-government, and e-commerce. Connect Greater Newport has convened a coalition of stakeholders (Connect Greater Newport Broadband Coalition) to oversee planning to improve and expand access to quality broadband in the Greater Newport region and possibly statewide. This program is funded by philanthropic support from the van Beuren Charitable Foundation.

We are seeking proposals from qualified communications and technology firms interested in providing a detailed, actionable analysis of broadband service availability and gaps. The purpose of this RFP is to provide regional and state leaders with information and analysis about the options to improve broadband connectivity across the state so that our network(s) are an asset for community and economic development.

We are seeking services for two geographic areas:

- The Connect Greater Newport Region which includes Newport County and Bristol County
- The remainder of the State of Rhode Island.

The expectation is that the Connect Greater Newport region is organized and can readily act on the results and recommendations associated with the development of this feasibility study. Partners in the remainder of the state will be engaged to respond to the results from that component of work.

## 2. Scope of Work

The following is a description of the services to be performed and completed by the successful firm. Respondents are encouraged to add additional activities and or suggest modifications as appropriate:

A. Current assessment and market demand

- Review of the existing infrastructure and competitive environment:

- o Complete an inventory of existing fiber networks within the state, including ownership and availability for use by other network providers.
- o Map the location of existing fiber and broadband-related electronics and available broadband speeds available by provider.
- o Provide an overview and assessment of current broadband providers' services (for residents and businesses), pricing strategies, and coverage area. To the extent possible, determine and analyze the investment and deployment plans of incumbent providers.
- o Map the location of existing fiber and broadband-related electronics and available broadband speeds available by provider.

Deliverable:

- o Dynamic map that is filterable and layered to include:
  - Fiber infrastructure (by owner, as applicable)
  - Fiber infrastructure by technology/capacity (fiber, nodes, junctures, etc.)
  - Population density (and density by age? income?)
  - Topography (not just elevation but tree coverage/buildings where possible?)
  - Current speed access (done through drive bys or crowdsourcing)
- Provide a market study to establish a likely market penetration rate and clarify which benefits from a new region-wide network and/or issue mitigation strategies, might be most important to the residents and businesses. A specific focus on last-mile related issues and barriers is critical to diagnosis of the various possible solutions.
  - o Include information from available market and census data,
  - o Provide local random sample survey of residents and businesses, and focus groups of key constituencies. This can be performed in collaboration with staff and members of Connect Greater Newport.

B. Technology options

- Determine the best technology path for the Connect Greater Newport region.
  - o What are the broadband capacities and considerations that are necessary now and in the future that will enable our region to be economically competitive? What technologies can provide broadband services at those speeds?
  - o What are the technologies best suited to the various areas of the region based on geography, underlying infrastructure, use cases, and demographics?
- Options for services provision to include:
  - o Mix of technologies and phased build out plans with multiple platforms scalable to 1 gigabit and include wireless, fiber, ARMER towers, cable, etc.
  - o Scenarios using what already exists, with a minimum service level of (50/25, 100/50, Mbps).

- o Business models and pro forma to be analyzed to include but not be limited to:
  - a) Build on existing networks: Options to combine or collaborate with existing providers to provide middle and last mile coverage to the underserved and unserved, with special emphasis on leveraging federal or other government-related dollars.
  - b) Create new networks:
    1. Open Access: The State or Municipality would finance and contract to build the network or and invite other service providers to contract to deliver services over the network.
    2. Proprietary Network:
      - i. The State or Municipality would build and operate the network, with or without private sector operating partners
      - ii. The State or Municipality would incentivize a private sector partner, including existing cooperatives, the creation of a new cooperative, or other entity to invest, build, and operate a network by using development powers as necessary.
    3. Other options that might involve multiple local entities or other scenarios as the contractor sees appropriate.
- Conduct pre-engineering study(s) at sufficient depth to estimate costs and approximate implementation timeframes for full network implementation.
  - o This evaluation should include an assessment of all available mainstream (ownership documented) high-speed technologies either alone or in combination and include an assessment and consideration of both Fiber to the Premise (FTTP) and wireless technologies. All parts, materials, and services proposed must be currently available on the market and in continuing production (no discontinued manufacturers or parts).
  - o Assessment of primary and redundant backhaul connection options between local network and the Internet.
  - o Define the proposed service area and create a conceptual fiber route and high level design to provide the greatest coverage, showing businesses and publicly owned facilities passed within one half mile on both sides of the fiber route.
  - o Use algorithmic tools to combine the map data with historical cost data to provide an estimated cost to offer scalable broadband service for all options identified (including fixed line and wireless). Costs will be calculated by service area and anticipated route miles to determine capital costs for fiber optic mainline, access equipment, cell tower backhaul, routers, and switches. Costs should be all inclusive of any design, initial configuration and installation costs.

### C. Partnership options

- Provide examples of prospective partners with a brief summary of how each relationship would function.

- What sectors, groups and individuals may help our region achieve the broadband goals? Please identify synergies and sharing opportunities that exist with providers and customers to include but not limited to ISP Providers, Telecoms, Cooperatives, Statewide telecom networks, government entities, NGOs, public housing authorities, K-12 and higher education, including library systems, Healthcare providers, and the industry and business community.

#### D. Financing and Legal Considerations

The proposer should have significant in-house experience or secure partners to:

- Provide financing options to include, but not be limited to federal recovery and stimulus funds, general obligation bonds, revenue bond, tax advantaged structures for publicly owned networks, public/private partnerships, NTIA, EDA, USDA RUS, other state and federal funding, and others where appropriate.
- Provide an assessment of legal requirements, risks, and regulations relevant to the building or operation of a network and partnership arrangements.
- Prepare financial projections for at least two project scenarios as selected by the project steering team.

To support the selected vendor, Connect Greater Newport will, at a minimum, provide:

- Monthly meetings with broadband coalition
- Access to previous studies and reports
- Assistance with connecting to and gathering input from key stakeholders (survey, focus group, etc)

### 3. Qualifications

Qualified vendors will have expertise in developing broadband feasibility studies, fiber technology or other broadband infrastructure, last mile broadband network design and engineering, and analyzing fiber network models.

Vendors are encouraged to assemble teams using other firms to assist with the project in order to offer the full range of expertise. Background on these sub-contractors/partners should also be provided in the proposal.

### 4. Proposal Evaluation Criteria

The steering committee will evaluate all proposals according to the following criteria:

- 20%: Experience and qualifications of the vendor and personnel assigned to this project
- 40%: Strong project work plan and timeline relevant to this project
- 15%: Work experience in similar communities
- 25%: Pricing

After reviewing all submissions, the steering committee may choose to interview one or more candidates. The Newport County Development Council will be the contracting entity.

## 5. Submission Requirements

**Please provide two scopes of work and fees: one for the counties of Bristol and Newport counties and one for the balance of the state of Rhode Island.** We would like to cover the entire state if possible.

Please submit the following information in the order listed below:

1. Summarize the goals, objectives, and project tasks to demonstrate your team's understanding of and approach to the project.
2. Provide details on the project team. Identify key personnel who will conduct the project and provide details of their training and work experience, including background in the following areas:
  - a. Network: Outline the direct knowledge and experience your team has regarding broadband solutions.
  - b. Financial: Describe direct experience and knowledge your team has creating and analyzing financial plans and models including capital requirements, operational pro formas, and financing options.
  - c. Regulatory/Legal: Describe any direct experience and knowledge your team has in analyzing and interpreting the regulatory and legal landscape and providing analysis and guidance on these issues as they pertain to the various options contained in the proposal.
  - d. Services: Describe any direct experience and knowledge your team has in providing community and business community analysis and guidance surrounding broadband services. This should include a description of how the team has worked with incumbent broadband providers to ensure information is shared appropriately.
  - e. Project Management: Outline your team's direct knowledge and experience with structured project management.

- f. Partnerships: Share your team’s experience working with state and local governments and public-private sector collaborations.
3. Conflicts of Interest: Provide any information on prospective conflicts of interests, including existing or financial relations with equipment vendors, ISPs, or other firms.
  4. References: Include at least three references from previous similar projects with an emphasis on those that resulted in implementation of the recommendations.
  5. Detailed work plan to include:
    - a. Tasks to be accomplished and the budget hours to be expended for each task and subtask. (This will be used as a work plan and managing tool for basis of invoicing.)
    - b. Project timeline with deliverables and key milestones.
    - c. Detail regarding local involvement and services expected to complete the project. A minimum of three status meetings are to be contained in the work plan in addition to any data collection or input/review meetings.
    - d. Project management approach that your company will employ to execute this project and identify the individual(s) responsible for the various areas in the outline.
    - e. Areas of risk for the project based on the contractors detailed work plan and schedule for all aspects of the project including but not limited to financial, construction, legal, product availability, environmental, and archaeological.
    - f. Detailed cost estimate, including known project expenses, professional hourly rates and multipliers, and estimated service/task hours with a “Not to Exceed” cap. Other ancillary expenses related to the completion of the study will be discussed on a case-by-case basis.
    - g. Explanation of sustainability of the mapping, once the maps have been created, are there dynamic data transfers to maintain them? Note any confidentiality concerns if information developed will be open source.

Submissions should be no longer than 12 pages. All submission materials (excluding past project examples) should be compiled into one PDF and sent via email to Jessica David at [jd@jdinri.com](mailto:jd@jdinri.com). Proposals are due by 5:00 p.m. on May 4, 2021. Only electronic submissions will be accepted.

## 6. Timeline

We expect to follow this timeline:

RFP released	April 13, 2021
Vendor questions (if any) due	April 24, 2021 noon. Responses provided by

	EOD.
Proposals due	May 4, 2021, 5 p.m. EST
Individual vendor scoring	May 12, 2021
Select final candidates for interviews	May 13
Interviews with finalists	Tentative: May 18 or 19, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
Vendor selection	May 20, 2021
Contract negotiation complete	June 4, 2021
Final deliverables expected	Suggested: August 2021

**7. Questions**

Please direct all requests for information related to this RFP in writing to:

Jessica David  
 Project Manager, Broadband Initiative  
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