



NEK Broadband
Danville, VT
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Request for Proposal: BEAD Grant Proposal Support

Introduction and Background

1.1. Purpose of the RFP

NEK Broadband seeks support services in order to apply for BEAD Funding. The following areas may be bid on independently or together. The funding for the following services will be from a grant from the VCBB and from in-hand NEK Broadband Pre-Construction Funds. The time frame for the work is to commence at the beginning of February with completion most likely some time between July and September - with most work being completed in the earlier months. These contracts are not expected to continue into the following year. **This RFP has a shortened time frame** so that NEK Broadband may make a submission to the VCBB RFP for grant funds to cover this grant proposal support work by the first VCBB deadline of January 29th. Though the purpose of this RFP is for BEAD Grant Proposal Support, NEK Broadband may also use these responses for other purposes.

1.2. Company Overview

NEK Broadband is a Communications Union District formed under 30 V.S.A. Chapter 82 with 56 member towns in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont and Wolcott. The State of Vermont has promoted the development of CUDs and committed \$150 million in ARPA funding toward the buildout of fiber-optic cable to those with less than 25/3 Mbps service. NEK Broadband has teamed with NRTC Broadband Solutions for construction management, Mission Broadband Inc. as adjunct staff, and Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecommunications (WCVT) as our network operator and retail internet services provider for a 2,300-2,800 mile fiber project.

Scope of Work

2.1. Grant Writing: The successful applicant must have experience with writing grant proposals for federal grant programs that are specifically related to broadband. Applicants demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the BEAD program, Vermont's approach to BEAD, and the



nature and background of Communications Union Districts will receive additional points. Please submit an hourly rate and an estimate of the total cost to prepare a BEAD application that incorporates the work from other people as outlined below.

2.2. Business Modeling: NEK Broadband's district is a patchwork quilt of RDOF census blocks and existing grant funding. NEK Broadband has secured \$65M in ARPA VCBB Construction Grants; \$8M in ARPA VCBB PreConstruction Grants; \$17.5M in USDA ReConnect Grant; \$5.8M in financing. Just over 200 miles are currently served by NEK Broadband within the district and an additional 170 miles of dark fiber is available. NEK Broadband has five wholesale contracts for dark fiber and an MOU to wholesale lit fiber. The business model must take into account the requirements for all grants, anticipated BEAD funding needs, match requirements, work toward performance bonds and letters of credit.

2.3. Grant Compliance and Match Analysis: NEK Broadband seeks accounting analysis of how the district can leverage the CARES and ARPA grants to provide match and what additional cash match must be obtained to meet BEAD requirements and maintain a competitive grant application. Experience should include the ability to provide acceptable demonstration of match to federal entities and the associated accounting requirements.

2.4. High Level Design: NEK Broadband's current high level design and detailed design is reserved for on-grid addresses. We will need to do some high level design to off-grid addresses looking at both fiber and alternative solutions.

2.5. Digital Equity: Digital equity is fundamental to our mission. It is also an integral part of the BEAD program. NEK Broadband is seeking proposals from potential partners to provide assistance in the development of a digital equity plan and proposal. Applicant should be familiar with the VT Proposed Digital Equity Plan and the Affordable Connectivity Program.

2.6. Off-Grid Unserved: Under BEAD - ALL unserved addresses must have a solution before allocating funds to underserved addresses. NEK Broadband has roughly 1,400 off grid addresses that will need a solution. Some of these addresses are actually homes and truly need a solution. Other addresses are camps. NEK Broadband is seeking to challenge the FCC map that many of these off-grid hunting camps are not actually serviceable addresses. Our Town Clerks and board members have been providing as much on the ground information as they can. NEK Broadband is seeking an expert in wireless propagation that can look at potential solutions for the off-grid addresses.

2.7. Strategic and Management Consulting. NEK Broadband seeks someone to lead the grant application process and manage the various vendors selected for the tasks above. The applicant must have intimate knowledge of BEAD, broadband, and CUDs.



Proposal Submission Requirements

3.1. Hourly Rate

3.2. Estimate of Total Cost

3.3. Description of work included in the estimate. Estimate to be revised upon negotiation and finalized scope of work.

3.4. Description of experience and qualifications.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

a) Experience in providing the service needed including combinations of experience with federal grants, communication union districts, the BEAD program, and BEAD digital equity.

b) Description of the types of services and work that can be performed to assist NEK Broadband successfully complete a large BEAD application.

c) Pricing structure.

d) NEK Broadband reserves the right to select multiple applicants per section or no applicant, to make changes as necessary, and to negotiate scope and pricing with respondents.

NO APPLICANT IS EXPECTED TO REPLY TO ALL CATEGORIES - OR EVEN MULTIPLE CATEGORIES. ALL APPLICANTS MAY REPLY TO ANY NUMBER OF CATEGORIES.

RFP Timeline

5.1. RFP Issuance: 1/18/2024

5.2. Intent to Respond: 1/20/2024 - optional - but helpful

5.3. Deadline for Questions: 1/21/2024 - send to rfps@nekbroadband.org

5.4. Proposal Submission Deadline: 01/24/2024

Submission Instructions

Please submit your proposal in PDF format to rfps@NEKBroadband.org by 4:00 on 01/24/2024. Proposals received after the submission deadline will not be considered.

For any questions or clarifications regarding this RFP, please contact Shannon@nekbroadband.org.