



## Project Overview

NEK Broadband has teamed with NRTC Broadband Solutions and Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecommunications (WCVT) to construct a Fiber to the Home (FTTH) network to reach premises in the Northeast Kingdom area of Vermont without access to high-speed broadband internet. The long-term goals of the project are to construct over 1,800 miles of fiber optic network across northern Vermont to offer service to approximately 26,000 passings.

## Project Scope

NEK Broadband was awarded a Reconnect Round 4 Grant from the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) division of USDA to build **325 miles** of Fiber to the Home (FTTH) network in the counties of Caledonia, Essex and Orleans. As part of the USDA environmental review process, NEKB was required to contact any land managers of conserved or protected land our project crossed to determine if there were any special requirements or permits needed for us to do so.

Out of this outreach, two respondents, Vermont Land trust and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources asked for additional considerations before issuing a permit. These additional considerations are the primary scope of this RFP. In addition, we have added on three additional potential scopes of work.

Respondents may quote any of all the three scopes needed. The three separate scopes of work that need to be separately quoted are as follows:

### **Scope #1**

NEK Broadband is looking for an environmental consultant who will ensure compliance with the Endangered Species Act as well as Historic and Archeological review under section 106. The work will be in the Reconnect 4 area mentioned above and consist of approximately 15 miles of fiber routes. It is anticipated that a full and comprehensive environmental compliance assessment will be conducted by the successful bidder, and much of this work may need to be completed within the growing season. Therefore time is of the essence, and a demonstrated ability to achieve this timeline will be critical in assessing bids.

## Scopes #2 and #3

In addition, NEK Broadband has applied for two other USDA telecom programs, Community Connect Grant and a Reconnect Round 5 loan. In anticipation of the awards, NEK Broadband will need a consultant to assist with the federal NEPA and section 106 review process as well as any other additional stipulations local protected land managers require us to perform before building across their conserved lands.

Scope #2 Community Connect Grant consists of 68 miles, 8 of which are on protected lands and will need review.

Scope #3 Reconnect R5 PFSA 1 consists of 146 miles, 7 of which are on protected lands and will need review.

Scope #4 BEAD - NEK Broadband will be merging with CVFiber on August 15th. The new CUD will do business as NEKCV. NEKCV plans to apply for BEAD funding. Information regarding BEAD can be found on the VCBB website. The [Volume II Proposal](#) has been approved by NTIA with a revised schedule pasted at the end of this document. An initial environmental review of the locations has been done. The results of that are pasted below, the details of which will be available to the winning respondent.

A map of the location of the four scopes of work is attached in the addendum.

## Criteria for Selection

1. Demonstrated experience with the review process for utility licenses issued by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources
2. Familiarity with USDA RUS environmental review process
3. Familiarity with SHPO and section 106 review
4. Availability to start on the R4 project area no later than September 2, 2024 and complete necessary work within the 2024 growing season

## Timeline

Work on the Reconnect Round 4 Grant area can start as soon as a consultant is selected. Design and permitting and licensing are underway for the area and construction on parts that do not need special environmental review by ANR or VLT can start as soon as we have utility pole licenses in place. We would strongly prefer to build the areas in need of special environmental review during the same time.

Work on the Community Connect Grant and the Reconnect Round 5 Loan can likely start as soon as the grant and or loan is awarded. The USDA uses the PADUS dataset to identify formally classified lands. These areas can be identified and researched ahead of formal identification by USDA.

Event	Date
RFP Issued	August 12, 2024
Questions Due	August 15, 2024
Answers Due	August 16, 2024
RFP Responses Due	August 22, 2024
Award Issued	ASAP

### What to Submit & How

1. Please submit any clarifying questions via email to [rfps@nekbroadband.org](mailto:rfps@nekbroadband.org) no later than 7:00 pm eastern time on August 15, 2024.
2. Answers will be provided to all those who have submitted any questions no later than August 16, 2024.
3. Please submit the following responsive Proposal documents via email to [rfps@nekbroadband.org](mailto:rfps@nekbroadband.org) no later than 7:00 pm eastern time on August 22, 2024:
  - a. Company cover letter with legal name and address
  - b. Company resume with demonstrating:
    - i. Experience with the review process for utility licenses issued by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources
    - ii. Familiarity with USDA RUS environmental review process
    - iii. Familiarity with SHPO and 106 review
  - c. Individual's names and titles who propose to work on the project, including their biographies
  - d. Assurances of availability to start on the R4 project area no later than September 2, 2024 and complete necessary work within the 2024 growing season
  - e. Primary POC contact information
  - f. Identification and distinct quotes for each of the three scopes of work outlined herein, including:
    - i. Detailed scope(s) of work based on the proposal herein including how many hours can be committed to this project and proposed completion date, even if a range
    - ii. Total price including how services are calculated, including a high and low bid if a range is offered

## Contingencies

1. This RFP may not be considered as a Contract to purchase goods or services but is a Request for Proposal in accordance with the terms herein and will not necessarily give rise to a contract.
2. RFP responses should be as detailed and complete as possible to facilitate the formation of a contract based on the RFP response(s) that are pursued, should NEK Broadband decide to do so.
3. Respondents must submit a complete proposal package. Failure to do so may disqualify your RFP response submittal. Respondents must submit RFP responses by the due date and time as specified herein. Late proposals may not be accepted.
4. NEK Broadband reserves the right to:
  - a. Accept or reject any or all responses, and award any bid or any part thereof.
  - b. Waive any informalities or technicalities contained in any response received.
  - c. Conduct discussions with respondents and accept revisions of proposals after the closing date.
  - d. Award based upon selection criteria defined in this RFP.
  - e. Request clarification from any respondents on any or all aspects of its proposals.
  - f. Cancel or re-issue this RFP at any time.
  - g. Request a nondisclosure agreement in furtherance of discussions.
  - h. Retain all proposals submitted in response to this RFP; and/or
  - i. Invite some, all, or none of the respondents for interviews, demonstrations, presentations, and further discussion.

NEK Broadband reserves the right to expand this RFP to include the environmental needs of other Communications Union Districts in Vermont.

### **Estimated BEAD Timeline as of August 2, 2024**

(ARPA timeline highlighted in dark grey)

Start Date	End Date	Activity	Notes
	25 July 24	NTIA Approves Volume 2	
	Aug 24	VT \$30M Federal Match Program Awards	
14 Aug 24	11 Sep 24	Post draft RFA for public comment	Seeking public input on clarity
	14 Aug 24	Post final BEAD-eligible BSL data	
31 July 24		ARPA Quarterly Reporting Due	
Aug 24	Oct 24	Host Subgrantee Preparedness Workshops	
25 Sep 24	9 Oct 24	Pre-proposal window open	
10 Oct 24	31 Oct 24	Pre-proposal review and final project area determination	Ensure all unserved locations will be included within a full proposal
	31 Oct 24	Post final project areas	
31 Oct 24		ARPA Quarterly Reporting Due	
13 Nov 24	6 Jan 25	Full proposal window open	
7 Jan 24	7 Mar 25	Subgrantee initial selection and negotiation process	
31 Jan 25		ARPA Quarterly Reporting Due	
10 Mar 25		Notify all applicants of the evaluation process results	Those eligible for initial 20 percent of funding may begin deployment activities.
Ongoing	31 Mar 25	Complete and Submit Final Proposal to NTIA	
TBD by NTIA		Final Proposal approved by NTIA	Remaining subgrantees may begin deployment activities



