

Responses to questions have been separated into categories. Answers from Cumberland County are in bold.

Categories:

1. PROHIBITIONS associated with winning the bid
2. FUNDS AVAILABLE for the project
3. FUNDING for construction and operation post-project
4. DESIGN
5. SURVEY
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PROHIBITIONS

Q: If a firm should wins the Planning and management agreement, does it preclude them from responding to Network Design and City build RFP(s)?

A: No. The materials developed by this project will be disseminated to leadership in municipalities across the County to use however they choose. They may choose to take on construction projects on their own or as a larger entity, and Cumberland County may participate as a collaborating partner. We will not be the sole-source end client. As such, we are not capable of creating any such restrictions. In the unlikely chance that Cumberland County becomes a sole client on a construction project that results from this survey, we would not prohibit the successful contractor of this RFP from responding to future work.

FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR PROJECT

The following questions were similar enough that Cumberland County has produced one answer, below.

Q: The article about this project which posted at www.centralmaine.com on October 3rd indicated this study will cost up to \$25,000. Is this the maximum limit of the budget which project plans should be designed for? Will you consider project plans that may exceed that amount, but in doing so represent a plan with more likelihood to achieve the goals you have stated?

Q: In the RFP there is mention of a \$ 25,000.00 grant to fund the Study, is that the maximum the county will spend for the study.

Q: Is there a fixed budget for the project, and if so, will the County consider recommended modifications to the scope in order for a contractor to meet the County's maximum budget?

A: Cumberland County was awarded \$25,000 in CDBG funds to perform this study, and our aim is to keep the cost of the project within that number, or as close to it as possible. We applied for that amount based on informal conversations with several contractors about the estimated cost of a project like this. However, the County has set aside a limited amount of funds to supplement that grant for this project if no contractor can demonstrate the ability to perform the functions of the RFP within that set number.

While cost is not the only deciding factor in who Cumberland County chooses for this work, the contractor who is able to demonstrate an ability to thoroughly perform the components of this RFP at the lowest cost will, of course, earn a high favorability in our review.

FUNDING FOR CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION POST-PROJECT

Q: If a study showed a network is feasible for all areas, is there any understanding of which entity, government or non-government, would wish to fund the proposed network?

A: No. The purpose of this research project is to provide municipalities with a thorough understanding of the need and demand for broadband services in their community, and the methods by which they could pay for such a service, either on their own or as part of a regional utility. This project would very likely spawn another - or several more - project-design RFPs once communities use the data to decide whether and how they might move forward.

Q: If Government entities within CUMBERLAND COUNTY have shown desire to fund a proposed network based on a positive results of the study, does CUMBERLAND COUNTY intend to guide those decisions post-study?

A: Cumberland County will continue to participate in regional broadband planning in whatever capacity that best serves our communities, but only to the degree that they are interested in having us. We do not have ruling power over their decisions. We will remain a partner, but ultimately municipal funding, strategy and scope will be determined at municipal levels.

Q: Financial return expectations sometimes are varied depending on the organization, are there any significant differences in those expectations?

A: Without access to the data on what those financial returns may be, this is a difficult question to answer; but certainly, the staff and members of municipal-elected boards are going to have different opinions amongst each other and across town lines of what kind of ROI is acceptable. Our aim is to provide them with thorough data to help them arrive at their own best decisions.

Q: Have the initial four towns, Town of Gray, Raymond, Standish and Windham approved financing for building Fiber in their community?

A: No. The four towns have explored the cost of building out fiber to their communities, but they have not formed a regional utility, chosen a funding method or agreed to fund any such construction. This is not a comprehensive design project. The purpose of this research is to provide towns - in particular, the four towns in the Lakes Region

Broadband Partnership - with a playbook of HOW they could move forward should they decide to do so.

DESIGN

Q: What is the network for which the County is requesting a "County-wide network design"?

a. Is it a design for key fiber and microwave routes that could be used to support further last-mile build-out in Cumberland County?

b. Is the County requesting a full county-wide FTTP (and microwave) design? If so, are there any areas of the County that the County considers adequately served that would be excluded?

A: This is not an RFP for a comprehensive network design; our response would be that we are looking for something closer to your option (a), a countywide map of key fiber and potential microwave routes that would enable communities to easily build out last-mile. If a firm is able to give a ROUND, BALLPARK ESTIMATE of those last mile costs, it would be very useful data. Our goal is to present each community with a sense of need and demand in their town, an estimate of what it would cost to build out, and then a summary of methods to pay for that goal, either together or as part of a scalable utility. It is the hope of Cumberland County that the survey will guide which communities currently believe they have adequate service. Some towns in Cumberland County may have regular access to 100MBPS download speed already, but are interested in symmetrical fiber anyway; either as a marketing and business attraction tool, or a desire to move to a municipally owned model. Other communities may not have access to significant speeds, but the survey may reveal that there is no appetite to build. This process is not designed to move the region forward on a specific plan. It is designed to offer the information that may help create a specific plan (or plans) in the months to come.

Q: Is the County expecting the contractor to provide representative or typical costs to build major arteries vs. the cost to build directly to end users, or is it requesting an estimate of actual costs to build to end users throughout the County?

A: The County is interested in providing our towns with a thorough, but not an exhaustive summary of costs. An ideal presentation to a community would go something like this (*numbers are purely examples and not based on any actual data*):

"Gorham, the cost to build out major arteries throughout town that would make service possible to your constituents is \$1,256,800. It would cost, roughly, another \$2.5 million to build out to every end user." And then a thorough presentation of what the rest of the region looks like, how they could come up with the funds, and how they could form or join a regional utility to spread risk and share some costs.

Q: Please clarify the task related to purchasing or contracting with privately owned fiber networks in place on the islands. Is the reference to fiber connecting islands to the mainland or to fiber already serving homes and businesses? If the latter, please clarify the County objective in possibly purchasing or contracting for this fiber.

A: This question was the result of an interview with staff and residents of Long Island, who are aware of privately-owned fiber that is not being used to capacity on the island. They have expressed interest in either purchasing the resource outright or entering into a partnership with the fiber line's owner in order to spread access across the island. The RFP hopes for guidance data on entering into these partnerships in general; can the successful bidder identify potential resources that already exist, and could be negotiated into shared use to prevent duplication of efforts?

Q: If the study shows a network to be viable for some but not all involved, and given each entity within CUMBERLAND COUNTY may have different circumstances and goals, is there an existing understanding within CUMBERLAND COUNTY of how to move forward? If so, what is that understanding?

A: Cumberland County is not responsible for making the final decision on what will and will not be built. It may be that several projects are spawned from the results of this research project. Cumberland County government will participate in projects where we determine that they contribute to broader access or help rural communities clear financial roadblocks, but as a partner, not a sole decision-maker.

Q: Given any network must always start somewhere, and the goal is to provide to all homes, businesses, and institutions, would significant effort be placed on getting existing providers to be involved?

A: Cumberland County is agnostic on the method by which access is delivered; in areas where a community determines that a partnership with a current provider is able to meet the needs and best interest of their constituency, then, of course, that information should be made available to the town. But we are not putting any weight on one solution over another.

SURVEY

Q: What is the desired geographic scope of the requested survey?

A: The broadband consumers of the 28 municipalities in Cumberland County.

Q: Would the County be open to proposals that recommend alternatives to a survey that the contractor considers to be more cost-effective?

A: Yes. Proposing an alternate method to a survey would not disqualify an applicant. But this information is going to be absolutely critical to communities that are exploring whether broadband is an expense that they need to make, so we are going to choose a contractor who can show that they're able to collect and report this information thoroughly.

PROCESS

Q: Organizing many entities across a large area has challenges, are there any projects CUMBERLAND COUNTY has undertaken that could show us your collaboration strategy to ensure we respond in a way that is most impactful?

A: Cumberland County has been researching and engaging our communities on this issue for more than a year. A recent informal survey of regional needs showed that broadband expansion earned significant interest, across the County. Cumberland County will engage the communities directly to introduce the winning contractor; assuage concerns about sales calls by specifying that the contractor that they will not engage the town to sell them other services outside of the RFP guidelines while they are working with the town to collect data respective to this project; explain clearly that there is no cost or commitment for them to participate; and stress that they will get the best data by working with the winning contractor to collect thorough data.

GENERAL

Q: Of all the outcomes desired and laid out in the RFP, which is the most important to accomplish through this study?

A: Cumberland County's goal for this project is to provide each community: with a summary of their need and demand for broadband expansion; a summary of costs associated with building out to that need; a host of options on how to pay for that work; and the methods by which they could collaborate to spread risk, share costs and reduce duplication of resources and efforts.

Q: Do funds come with any special requirements or terms due to it being from a federal fund?

A: The funds for this project are provided under the Community Development Block Grant program under the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. Work in response to this RFP must be performed meeting standards set by that Agency. However, since this is a planning grant the requirements are minimal; they largely amount to sign-offs that the firm is meeting certain workplace and human resources standards.

Q: Regardless of the result of the study for all entities within CUMBERLAND COUNTY, would pilot projects be a required next step?

A: No. There is no required next step in this process, but Cumberland County would certainly be interested in collaborating with interested pilot projects that may arise as a result of this work.