



Solano County Department of Information Technology

Request for Information (RFI)

for

**Deployment of Fiber Broadband in Unincorporated
Solano County**

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Late responses will not be accepted

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Background and current state of broadband in Solano County	4
a. Solano Connected roadmap	4
b. Federal Funding Account	4
3. Project goals and scope of service	8
a. Matching Funds award process and amount of funding.....	8
b. CPUC priority areas	8
c. ARPA requirements	9
4. Network design.....	9
5. RFI response requirements	10
6. Response process	11
7. Evaluation.....	11
8. Protests and appeals.....	12
9. Terms and conditions	12
a. Purchasing & Contracting Policy Manual	12
b. RFI amendment, cancellation and right of rejection	12
c. Evaluation.....	12
d. Confidentiality	13

1. Introduction

The purpose of this Request for Information (RFI) is to solicit responses from internet service providers (ISPs) for potential fiber buildouts to unserved and underserved areas in unincorporated Solano County for which the County would provide financial support. The Solano County Department of Information Technology (DoIT) seeks private partners for the purpose of building, expanding, and sustaining new broadband service capabilities to unserved and underserved areas of the County. Solano County is willing to provide letters of support for grant opportunities and contribute financially toward CPUC Federal Funding Account (FFA) grant recipients. The intent is to enable CPUC FFA grant applicants to provide stronger proposals to ensure as many eligible locations in the unincorporated areas of the County are covered as possible.

Each Responding Firm must submit a Proposal, supporting documentation (e.g., portfolio of subject matter expertise, etc.) and meet minimum qualifications detailed herein to be deemed “Qualified” for funding.

For purposes of this grant program, DoIT has defined Broadband as internet access with transmission speeds that, at a minimum, provide 100 megabits per second (100 Mbps) download and 100 megabits per second (100 Mbps) upload, as defined by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) Federal Funding Account grant program. Though other technologies may be considered, fiber optic infrastructure is strongly preferred.

For purposes of this program, DoIT considers an area or address to be “unserved” by broadband if it cannot reliably receive broadband speeds of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload.¹ An area or address is considered “underserved” if speed of service meets or exceeds 25 Mbps/3 Mbps but does not meet speeds of 100 Mbps/20 Mbps.

The term “Responding Firm(s)” refers to the firm(s) or individual that submit(s) a Proposal in response to this solicitation. The terms “response(s), submittal(s) or Proposal(s)” refers to the documents responding firms submit for this solicitation for consideration by the County. These terms are used interchangeably throughout this solicitation.

A maximum of \$2.2 million will be awarded to Responding Firm(s) who meet the requirements laid out in this RFI and receive FFA funding for projects in unincorporated areas of the County. The County will have discretion over the allocations to the Responding Firm(s) selected based on the criteria in Section 7 below.

¹ https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/bbusa_broadband_glossary.pdf.

2. Background and current state of broadband in Solano County

Solano County is located in California, adjacent to the San Francisco Bay Area. As of the 2020 census, the population was 453,491. The county seat is Fairfield. Other urban centers in the County include the City of Vallejo and the City of Vacaville.

Solano County has received approximately \$86 million in American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) Program funds. \$2.2 million of this amount has been allocated to broadband infrastructure funding in unincorporated areas of the County. An additional \$1.8 million was allocated to digital equity planning. For the purposes of this RFI, infrastructure proposals only will be considered.

a. Solano Connected roadmap

In 2022, Solano County Department of Information Technology (DoIT) hired Boston Consulting Group (BCG) to create a Broadband and Digital Equity Strategy and Roadmap.² In this study, BCG estimated that approximately 1,800 addresses are unserved in the unincorporated parts of the County, with broadband speeds under 25 Mbps download/3 Mbps upload (25/3). In addition, they estimated that approximately 3,900 addresses are underserved, with speeds between 25/3 and 100/20 Mbps. Please note that these estimates were made with FCC Form 477 data, which has more recently been replaced by the FCC National Broadband Map.³ Responding Firms are urged to consult with FCC's most recent map and the CPUC's Federal Funding Account Priority Areas Map⁴ when preparing their Proposals.

b. Federal Funding Account

The California State Legislature has allocated \$2 billion to a new last-mile federal funding program ("Federal Funding Account Program"), to be split evenly between rural and urban areas and to be administered by the CPUC.⁵ As part of its statutory mandate, the CPUC designated urban vs. rural counties based on a formula that uses 2019 data.⁶ Using this formula, the CPUC

² <https://www.solanocounty.com/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?BlobID=38196>.

³ <https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov/home>.

⁴ <https://federalfundingaccountmap.vetro.io/map#5.65/37.393/-116.87> (showing unserved locations).

⁵ SB 4, Chapter 671 (October 8, 2021), Section 2 (revised Public Utilities Code Section 281(n)), https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220SB4. The funding is mostly federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act, including both Capital Projects Fund and State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, as well as smaller contributions of state funds.

⁶ Public Utilities Commission of the State of California, "Decision Adopting Federal Funding Account Rules," (D.22-04-055), Order Instituting Rulemaking Regarding Broadband Infrastructure Deployment and to Support Service Providers in the State of California, Rulemaking 20-09-001, April 22, 2022, pp. 32-35 ("FFA Decision"), <https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M470/K543/470543650.PDF>.

has categorized Solano County as an urban county and allocated \$17 million under FFA⁷ to fund broadband infrastructure projects located in the County. The application window was opened on June 30, 2023 and applications are due by September 29, 2023 by 4:00 pm PDT. Last-mile projects must be completed within two years of receiving authorization to construct and must provide speeds of at least 100 Mbps/100 Mbps.

The County is seeking proposals that include applying for this upcoming grant opportunity, with a County financial contribution that would supplement funds provided to the selected partner(s) by the FFA grant.

Applicants should be aware of the following elements of the FFA grant program (please note that this list is not exhaustive):

- **Eligible organizations:** Broadband service providers, local governments, electric utilities, nonprofits, cooperatives, and Tribal governments may apply. The CPUC intends to prioritize requests from local governments, nonprofits, and cooperatives, with the assumption that these networks have less pressure to generate profits and a stronger commitment to serve communities.
- **Eligible areas:** The FFA program determines eligibility based on the current performance of broadband service options in an area, and allows further prioritization based on other key digital equity factors. Non-contiguous projects may be submitted as a single project. Unserved areas according to the Federal Funding Account Map can be found at this link: <https://federalfundingaccountmap.vetro.io/map#5.65/37.393/-116.87>
 - **General eligibility:** Applicants can apply for projects in areas that are “underserved” at reported speeds of less than 100/20 Mbps, with priority funding going to areas that are “unserved” at less than 25/3 Mbps. An applicant can include locations that show as “served” on the availability map if the applicant can demonstrate that service in those locations is “unreliable.”⁸

⁷ SB 4, Chapter 671 (October 8, 2021), Section 2 (revised Public Utilities Code Section 281(n)), https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220SB4 (accessed April 13, 2022). The funding is mostly federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act, including both Capital Projects Fund and State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, as well as smaller contributions of state funds.

⁷ Public Utilities Commission of the State of California, “Decision Adopting Federal Funding Account Rules,” (D.22-04-055), Order Instituting Rulemaking Regarding Broadband Infrastructure Deployment and to Support Service Providers in the State of California, Rulemaking 20-09-001, April 22, 2022, pp. 32-35 (“FFA Decision”), <https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M470/K543/470543650.PDF>.

⁸ See, FFA Decision, pp. 20-21 (this could include challenging a fixed wireless provider’s performance claims of its infrastructure).

- **Legacy technologies = unserved:** The CPUC has adopted a “rebuttable presumption” that specifies that areas with only copper facilities or cable system technology of DOCSIS 2.0 or lower are designated as “unserved” and eligible for funding. Incumbent ISPs and network owners will be allowed to rebut this assumption by showing that the network in question offers reliable service to all locations of at least 25/3 Mbps;⁹ these data from ISPs, however, would not bar an application for funding in this area. The area would still be considered “underserved” if the incumbent cannot demonstrate service offerings of 100/20 Mbps.¹⁰
- **Prioritization:** The CPUC will award up to 20 points to applicants proposing to serve areas that meet certain socioeconomic indicators.¹¹ These indicators include:¹²
 - The Disadvantaged Households Index from the CalEnviroScreen developed by the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment¹³
 - The Socioeconomic Vulnerability Index developed by the CPUC¹⁴
 - Census Bureau Median Household Income data
- **Network buildout requirements:** Funded projects must reliably provide service speeds of 100 Mbps symmetrical, have a latency under 100 milliseconds, and must offer services with at least 1,000 GB of data a month (with strong preference for unlimited data). Applicants can include a proposal to build middle-mile infrastructure if demonstrated as necessary to achieve last-mile connectivity. Funded middle-mile projects must be open access with multiple interconnection points. Projects must be complete within 24 months after authorization to build.
- **Service offering requirements:** Projects must cap prices for five years after project completion at the rates proposed in the application and must waive installation charges. Only adjustments of rates in accordance with the Consumer Price Index are allowed.

⁹ See, FFA Decision, p. 20.

¹⁰ See, FFA Decision, Appendix A, p. A-21-22.

¹¹ See, FFA Decision, at page 20; Appendix A, page A-7.

¹² CPUC, “Frequently Asked Questions: CPUC Federal Funding Account, Last Mile,” April 2023, pp. 4-5, https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/-/media/CPUC%20Website/Files/uploadedFiles/CPUC_Public_Website/Content/Utilities_and_Industries/Communications_-_Telecommunications_and_Broadband/FFA%20Webpage%202023-04/FFA%20FAQs%20V2.pdf.

¹³ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, “CalEnviroScreen 4.0,” <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/report/calenviroscreen-40>.

¹⁴ CPUC, “Socioeconomic Vulnerability Index,” <https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/industries-and-topics/electrical-energy/affordability/socioeconomic-vulnerability-index>.

Applicants must participate in the Affordable Connectivity Program or other analogous low-income subsidies for service.

- **Grant administration:** There are significant quarterly and annual reporting requirements regarding project progress, financial status, and subscriptions; post-closeout reporting will also be required. Payment will be issued upon percentage completion of milestones (10 percent, 35 percent, 60 percent, 85 percent, 100 percent).
- **Scoring Criteria for FFA:** Applicants can receive additional scoring priority by meeting these optional elements:

<p>1. Match (up to 10 points) FAA does not require a match, but a larger match or matches from diverse sources will provide additional points</p>	<p>2. Low-cost broadband service offering (up to 20 points) “Low-cost” is defined as no more than \$40 per month for 50/20 Mbps</p>
<p>3. Fiber (up to 10 points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong preference for all fiber projects • Applicants can justify the use of a different technology with additional evidence and documentation that fiber is infeasible 	<p>4. Projects serving disadvantaged communities (up to 20 points) Will identify “disadvantaged communities” with different socioeconomic indicators that appear on the Federal Funding Account Map</p>
<p>5. Partnership with public, nonprofit, or Tribal entities (up to 20 points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networks “owned, operated by or affiliated with” a Tribe, local government, or nonprofit will receive additional points • Letters of support from public agencies will provide some additional points 	<p>6. Applicant demonstrates financial, technical, operational capacity (up to 10 points) Applicants must provide three years of financial statements and five years of pro forma forecasts</p>
<p>7. Participation in the federal and/or state Lifeline programs (up to 10 points)</p>	<p>8. Application with well-planned project/reasonable budget (up to 10 points)</p>

	Applicants must provide a five-year business plan to demonstrate project viability
9. Price freeze for up to 10 years (up to 10 points) Price freeze of rates for a minimum of five years is required; longer freeze will provide additional points	10. Leveraging statewide middle-mile (up to 10 points)

3. Project goals and scope of service

The following is a summary of the project purpose and broadband policies guiding the Solano County DoIT.

a. [Matching Funds award process and amount of funding](#)

Matching Funds will be awarded through this RFI application process by Solano County DoIT, which has developed and will administer this program.

For this opportunity, up to \$2.2 million in total funding is available and Responding Firms may apply for any amount up to that total for projects located in unincorporated areas of the County. DoIT anticipates making multiple awards. Final matching amounts will be determined after FFA funds are distributed.

Responding Firms that respond to this RFI and are awarded Federal Funding Account (FFA) grant funds will be eligible for matching funds from the County. The County may choose to provide a letter of support to multiple providers proposing to build in a given area.

b. [CPUC priority areas](#)

Responding Firms that submit projects in CPUC priority areas¹⁵ and receive FFA funds will be eligible for match funding.

Service and pricing requirements: Responding Firms must meet all the CPUC FFA guidelines for service offerings and pricing (see section 2 above) to be eligible for matching funds from the County.

¹⁵ <https://federalfundingaccountmap.vetro.io/map#5.65/37.393/-116.87>.

c. ARPA requirements

Responding Firms' proposals must conform to the SLFRF Compliance and Reporting Guidance.¹⁶ Costs related to ARPA funds must be incurred no later than December 31, 2024 and all Award Funds must be expended by December 31, 2026.

To meet both FFA and ARPA requirements, fiber is strongly preferred and must meet at least 100/100 speeds. If it can only deliver 100/20, there needs to be a strong justification and the technology must be scalable to 100/100. Fixed wireless may be considered for funding, but the applicant would need to demonstrate that other technologies are infeasible for the proposed locations.

4. Network design

The County is willing to consider all proposals for partnerships and welcomes Responding Firms' unique approaches to network design and construction. The County prefers the following baseline technical attributes:

- Fully fiber-based connectivity (i.e., FTTP) to residential and business customers,
- XPON network with sufficient extra capacity to accommodate reasonably expected population and subscriber growth,
- Fiber strand capacity and physical architecture (e.g., handhole placement, backbone routes) anticipating full deployment to all homes and businesses,
- Low latency, and
- Backbone topology capable of supporting connections over diverse paths from one or more central hub locations to fiber distribution cabinets located throughout the County to facilitate high-availability service offerings.

Please provide shapefiles, KMZ or other standard electronic GIS format with proposed service areas and locations to be covered in the proposed buildout and number of passings.

NOTE: Responses to this RFI do not need to include specific network designs or other information directly related to a respondent's planned application for the CPUC's FFA funding program. However, the County expects to review and discuss the planned network designs and capabilities of each qualified respondent's FFA proposed project, including the elements listed above, prior to a commitment by the County to provide matching funds.

¹⁶ <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SLFRF-Compliance-and-Reporting-Guidance.pdf>.

5. RFI response requirements

Please prepare your Proposal in accordance with the following requirements.

The Proposal must use 8.5" x 11" numbered pages as a single PDF attachment and must use the following headings and observe the page limits outlined below. The Proposal should consist of a narrative which covers sections a-f below and completed and signed Attachments 1-3.

- a. *Cover Letter* (not to exceed the equivalent of one single-sided page). The proposal must be submitted with a cover letter describing the Proposer's interest in applying for FFA funding and the overall scope of the Proposer's project(s) in unincorporated Solano County. The letter must include the name, title, address and telephone number of the individual to whom correspondence and other contacts should be directed during the selection process.

Address the cover letter as follows:

Solano County Department of Information Technology
675 Texas Street Suite 3700
Fairfield, CA 94533

- b. *Approach and Management Plan* (not to exceed the equivalent of five single-sided pages). This section shall provide the proposer's approach and management plan for construction of new networks (preferably fiber).
- c. *Qualifications, Experience and References* (not to exceed the equivalent of 3 single-sided pages). This section shall provide the qualifications and experience of potential internet service provider(s). Emphasize the specific qualifications and experience from projects aligned with requested services. Describe existing broadband services already being provided in Solano County.
- d. *Additional Relevant Information* (not to exceed the equivalent of two (2) single-sided pages). This section invites additional relevant information that may be helpful in the selection process such as reporting frequency and type of reports.

No other documents or attachments will be accepted as part of the proposal.

Submission of Proposal: An electronic submission of Proposals via email to Alheen Mahmud at amahmud@ctcnet.us are due **no later than the time and date set forth in the Schedule of Events**. Any hard copy submission will be retained in the file unopened and will be considered disqualified.

6. Response process

7/20/23	RFI issued
7/31/23	Information session, 10:00 am; please contact Alheen Mahmud at amahmud@ctcnet.us to attend.
8/2/23	County's response to questions posted on website at: https://www.solanocounty.com/depts/doit/broadband_and_digital_equity.asp .
8/11/23	Electronic submission of proposals shall be emailed to amahmud@ctcnet.us . Proposals are due no later than 5:00 pm PDT on 8/11/23. Late proposals will not be accepted.
8/18/23	Notice of intent to coordinate with approved vendors

The County reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to adjust this schedule as it deems necessary. Notification of any adjustment to the schedule will be posted on the County's website. Responding Firms are responsible to periodically view the County's website (www.solanocounty.com) for any revisions.

7. Evaluation

Evaluation Committee. A County Evaluation Committee (CEC) will evaluate all Proposals and recommend Responding Firms for County funding. Allocations for the County funds will not be determined until FFA funds have been awarded. The CPUC has committed to review all FFA applications within 6 months of the closing of the window, on September 29, 2023. The CEC will be composed of County staff and other parties that may have relevant expertise or experience. The CEC will score and recommend Proposals in accordance with the evaluation criteria set forth in this RFP. Evaluation of the Proposals shall be within the sole judgment and discretion of the CEC. Higher scores among proposals selected for support may result in larger per-location County funding contribution relative to the proposed locations.

Categories. The evaluation criteria and their respective weights are as follows:

CATEGORIES	MAXIMUM POINTS POSSIBLE
A. General Qualifications and Experience	50
B. Approach and Management Plan	50

Total Possible Points	100
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8. Protests and appeals

Any Responding Firm that wishes to protest the notice of intent to award funds may submit a protest. The protest must be submitted in writing to the Chief Information Officer of the Department of Information Technology within 7 working days after such proposer knows or should have known of the facts giving rise to the protest, but in no event later than 7 working days after the date of the notice of intent to award the contract. All letters of protest shall clearly identify the reasons and basis for the protest. The protest must also state the law, rule, regulation, or policy upon which the protest is based. The Chief Information Officer of the Department of Information Technology will issue a written decision within 10 working days after receipt of the protest which shall include the reason for the action taken and the process for appealing the decision.

9. Terms and conditions

a. Purchasing & Contracting Policy Manual

The County's Purchasing & Contracting Policy Manual, found at <http://www.solanocounty.com/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?blobid=21595> is fully incorporated into and made a part of this RFI by this reference and governs this RFI.

b. RFI amendment, cancellation and right of rejection

The County reserves the right to accept or reject all or portions of any response(s) to the RFI, to waive any formalities of the RFI process, to re-advertise the RFI, to amend the terms of the RFI, to extend the dates provided herein, to suspend the process if the desired outcomes are not achieved, to award the contract to the most responsive and responsible respondent(s) as deemed in the best interest of the County, and/or to proceed to provide the services otherwise, as the County may determine in its sole discretion is in the best interest of the County.

No reimbursement will be made by the County for any costs incurred in responding to this RFI, developing, or submitting responses to the RFI, or attendance at a site inspection, pre-bid conference, or interviews.

c. Evaluation

The County reserves the absolute right to conduct such investigations as it deems necessary to assist in the evaluation of any response to the RFI and to establish the

experience, responsibility, reliability, references, reputation, business ethics, history, qualifications, and financial ability of the respondent(s), proposed subconsultants, independent consultants and suppliers. The purpose of such investigation is to satisfy the County that the respondent has the experience, resources, and commercial reputation necessary to perform the work and support any warranties in the prescribed manner and time.

In the event the RFI responses are considered for an award, the County reserves the right to award funds to the Responding Firm(s) that demonstrate(s) the best ability to fulfill the requirements for performing the subject services. The successful firm(s) will be chosen based on the qualifications, evaluation of submittals and a possible interview. The County reserves the right to conduct such discussions or negotiations with Responding Firms or other entities as it deems necessary to assist in the evaluation of any proposal, to secure maximum clarification and completeness of any proposal, and select the proposal that best meets the requirements of the County and the public interest.

d. Confidentiality

The County will retain a master copy of each response to this RFI, which responses will become public record after the Award Funds are allocated unless the qualifications or specific parts of the qualifications can be shown to be exempt by law under Government Code section 7921.000 et seq. Proposers may clearly label part of a submittal as "CONFIDENTIAL" if the proposer agrees to indemnify and defend the County for honoring such a designation. The failure to have so labeled any information shall constitute a complete waiver of all claims for damages caused by any release of the information. If a public records request for labeled information is received by the County, the County will notify the proposer of the request and delay access to the material until 7 working days after notification to the proposer. Within that time delay, it will be the proposer's duty to act in protection of its labeled information. Failure to so act shall constitute a complete waiver.