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Vermont CARES Act Relief Fund Broadband Spending Considerations

Executive Summary

On May 19th, 2020, the Vermont Legislative Joint Fiscal Office contracted with CCG Consulting to develop a list of viable ideas for CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund spending that address some of the state's short and long-term broadband needs.¹

After consulting US Treasury guidance on supported uses of the funds and conducting numerous interviews with state agency, legislative, CUD, broadband provider, utility, and public representatives, along with ten US states about their plans, the following list was developed.

The full body of this report contains individual 1-page summaries for each item on the list below along with comments about other proposals that are circulating that CCG deemed to not meet the CARES Act criteria.

CARES Act Round 1 Coronavirus Relief Fund Broadband Investment Ideas

Ideas that CCG believes are clearly allowed under current CRF guidance:

Infrastructure

Fund new broadband connections for K12 and telehealth households. Establish a one-time grant program using CRF funds to pay for service extensions to K12 and telehealth households that can be constructed before December 30, 2020.

Education

Wi-Fi on School Buses. Install wi-fi connectivity on K-12 buses to provide support for the schools working to adapt their curriculum to one that can move between classroom and distance learning methods more seamlessly.

Device Lending and Digital Literacy Clinics. Fund equipment purchases and broadband connections for lending programs through school districts, local and regional libraries; potentially expand the distribution network to include touchpoints like the Women, Infants, and Children program (WIC), early childhood and family education programs, or public health nurses that are

¹ CCG Consulting will address two additional requests by the JFO to provide comments on the Emergency Broadband Action Plan Draft and to comment on approaches for the 10-year telecom plan review separately, to be delivered no later than June 19, 2020.

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closest to the unconnected populations. Consider funding digital literacy clinics as part of this program. Collect data on the demand vs. supply of devices and training.

Wi-fi Hotspots for Libraries. Fund public institutions to implement next-generation gigabit wi-fi distribution points focused on serving the areas outside their buildings. Collect data on how often these sites are used.

Telehealth

Fund telehealth patient connectivity. Similar to K12 but for healthcare. Fund short-term patient connectivity needs. Focus on collecting data needed for a long-term solution.

Fund telehealth practitioner pilots. Provide rapid turn-around small project funding to practitioners. Collect data to inform future rounds of investment if necessary.

Institutions and PEG

Fund upgrades needed for institutional networks. Create a fund to pay for network adaptations needed because of changes to demand driven by the response to COVID-19. Examples include routers, VPNs, network security devices.

Fund Content Creation, Planning, and Response needs of PEG AMOs. Fund COVID-19 specific planning and content creation.

Funding ideas that may not have enough of an immediate return to satisfy CRF requirements but for which CCG still believes a case could be made:

Fund CUD response plans and feasibility studies. Provide short-term funding to CUDs for COVID-19 planning and feasibility work.

Fund supplemental review of the state telecom 10-year plan. Provide funding for a COVID-19 specific review of the telecom 10-year plan.