

team does not recommend that the State of Vermont fund the deployment of this type of wireless network at this time.

Nearly all locations within a 0.5 mile radius of a building served by FirstLight or a VELCO substation could be more rapidly served by mobile data (including those households that could benefit from signal boosters) or line extensions. Identifying and deploying small-scale wireless solutions would require time from PSD employees or employees from other agencies that could best be used implementing other programs.

Individuals across the State have been working on these types of hyper local solutions — from Addison County to the Northeast Kingdom. Individuals with experience could be supported by the CUDs may be able to set up and manage these micro-networks. These deployments are not to be discouraged; however, it is not in the State's best interest to fund them to address an immediate Covid-19 emergency.

8.3 Using Broadband Corps to Mobilize Solutions

Consistent through interviews and survey feedback, stakeholders have illustrated a need for more hands-on resources to assist with the technical issues that inevitably arise as the State moves online. Schools tech directors that were busy serving an in-person school enterprise now need to also assist educators, students and parents for both online and in person instruction. Healthcare providers report that appointments take longer due to technology barriers and state that they often are using appointment time to walk patients through use of their online systems. And the rapid distribution of wireless devices and boosters to connect many unserved locations will require relatively low skill but intensive work on the ground.

8.3.1 Overview of Broadband Corps Tasks

A quickly organized Broadband Corps could address these gaps through organizing volunteers through the CUDs and providing direct service to Vermonters to make sure as many as possible are connected quickly and able to use this new connectivity.

We recommend the creation of a Broadband Corps to perform the following tasks:

- 1) **Assist with infrastructure and service deployment.** Corps members will assist Vermonters to measure what type of hot spot would work best, and whether a signal booster is needed. Corps members would also be responsible for installations, updating coverage maps, and other duties related to infrastructure deployment. Installation of signal boosters are very simple efforts that require few specialized skills and could be ideal for volunteer efforts.
- 2) **Perform outreach, and direct technical support to Vermonters becoming familiar with their broadband connections and devices.** Corps members will work with schools,

libraries, town administrators, CUDs, to increase effective utilization of devices and online tools. Structured as a digital literacy help desk that used telephone service to engage participants, Corps members would deliver support to those unfamiliar with core video conferencing tools, as well as specific applications related to remote education and telehealth.

- 3) **Provide “high touch” support to ensure low-income Vermonters take advantage of broadband support programs.** Enrollment in programs for low-income Vermonters – from State subsidies to ISP specific programs – is very low. In collaboration with regional organizations who work with low income populations, Broadband Corps members can undertake proactive outreach to eligible Vermonters and provide phone based support to ensure applications get processed and submitted.

If the Corps is successful in connecting Vermonters rapidly, we recommend in the Spring that Corps members spend available time on pole surveys of towns on behalf of CUDs and thereby advance their work toward deploying fiber.

8.3.2 Possible Broadband Corps Structure and Scale

We have created a sample Broadband Corps structure that combines regionally assigned Corps members with a statewide installation team. Corps members could be assigned to Regional Planning Commission regions, and could work closely with RPCs and/or CUDs if desired, with statewide management based in a central location. We recommend at least 22 regional corps members (two for each RPC region), and at least 20 statewide corps members.

Regional corps members would be focused on evaluating the viability of hotspot or booster for unserved households. Statewide corps members would comprise the trained installation teams. Though this may seem like extra driving for the central corps members, central storage of equipment provides great efficiencies, and this is how installation teams in the renewable energy space and other similar ventures operate.

A recommended management structure for the Broadband Corps would include a statewide director, two to three regional managers, one data manager, and one operations manager. The initiative could be assigned to a nonprofit with experience in this arena or potentially managed under the SerVermont office with the understanding that traditionally the Vermont National Service Commission has been largely focused on distributing AmeriCorps resources, not managing direct service activities. Though this structure would also work well as an AmeriCorps program with the benefits that kind of structure provides (e.g., insurance, recruiting support, education awards), incorporating it into this national structure would likely delay the project by many months or longer. There would remain opportunities to leverage other national service programs like the National Community Conservation Corps (NCCC), which has the ability to

quickly deploy teams of trained AmeriCorps members to a state for six-week labor-intensive projects like this one, although preparations would need to be made to maximize the value of this deployment. Once this program is underway, SerVermont could evaluate whether the initiative could be transitioned to a statewide AmeriCorps program.

While a Corps could be put together quickly to get started as early as December, it is likely such a team would be focused on executing for a six-month period. Below is a draft budget for a six month effort:

Table 2: Sample Broadband Corps Budget

Personnel	Cost	Number	Total
Regional Corps Member	\$18,000.00	22	\$396,000
Statewide Corps Member	\$18,000.00	20	\$360,000
Full Team Director	\$50,000.00	1	\$50,000
Regional Director	\$40,000.00	3	\$120,000
Data Manager	\$40,000.00	1	\$40,000
Operations Manager	\$40,000.00	1	\$40,000
Fringe	15%		\$150,900
Total Personnel Cost	\$1,156,900		
Work Equipment	Cost	Number	Total
Monthly Truck Lease	\$500	10	\$50,000
Gas, oil, tires, maintenance	\$500	10	\$50,000
Construction equipment	~\$350	10	\$3,500
Pole Collection software	\$50	10	\$5,000
Total Equipment Cost			\$108,500

Note: This is a sample budget to provide scale to this proposal. Room for contingencies should be built into this budget, as well as administration costs and overhead for the managing entity, and estimates should be further vetted for equipment and personnel costs.