



Pandemic Recovery Office

One Capitol Hill | Providence, RI 02908 | 401-222-2280

Paul L. Dion, Ph.D.

Director

RHODE ISLAND PERFORMANCE REPORT

CAPITAL PROJECTS FUND 2023 REPORT

Rhode Island
2023 Performance Report

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OVERVIEW

In accordance with guidance from the U.S. Department of the Treasury, Governor McKee and the Rhode Island General Assembly will deploy the State's \$112.3 million American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund (CPF) allocation to invest \$25 million in high-quality broadband infrastructure and \$81.7 million for the construction or renovation of multipurpose community facilities that enable work, education, and health monitoring. The remaining \$5.6 million, allocated by U.S. Treasury as administrative funds, will be used to support the management of CPF and its approved programs. The CPF grant funds will enable the State to make investments in those areas that were impacted or made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic.

U.S. Treasury approved the ConnectRI Broadband Deployment Program on March 28, 2023. This is a grant program that provides the State match for the \$108 million of federal funds allocated in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) under the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program, for last mile connection between the state's middle-mile fiber optic network and businesses and households. These last mile connections will provide high-speed, reliable internet to all Rhode Islanders but with particular emphasis on underserved areas in the state.

This is Rhode Island's first Performance Report, and it covers the only program approved prior to June 30, 2023.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Approved Program Plan number (*as provided by Treasury*) - **111**

Program start date – **10/02/2023**

Program end date – **12/31/2026**

Actual CPF funds allocated to this Program: **\$24,956,500.00***

** This only reflects the actual CPF program funds. Admin funds are not included in this amount.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rhode Island has set the following goal:

Leverage a best-in-class, resilient, sustainable, and scalable broadband infrastructure to propel the state's 21st century economic, education, healthcare, civic and social engagement, and quality of life, by ensuring all Rhode Islanders have

access to affordable, accessible, reliable high-speed internet in their homes, at their places of employment, and at public facilities by 2027.

To reach this goal, Rhode Island will leverage Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund (CPF) dollars to directly support broadband infrastructure projects across the state through the ConnectRI Broadband Deployment Program, which is in development. Specifically, Rhode Island Commerce will use CPF funding to do two things:

- 1) Improve speed, resilience, and latency of current last-mile networks to ensure these networks can support 100/100mbps average real speeds for all users. If it is determined to be impracticable for a project to deliver services at 100/100mbps due to geography, topography, or excessive cost, the proposed project must be designed so that it reliably meets or exceeds 100/20mbps and is scalable to a minimum of 100/100mbps.
- 2) Provide affordable broadband access to all homes and businesses connected through CPF-funded projects. To do so, when reviewing CPF-funded projects, the State will consider whether the broadband service options offered will be affordable to their target markets in the proposed service area and ensure that the service provider for CPF-funded projects participate in federal programs that provide subsidies on broadband internet access services to low-income consumers.

The projects will directly support opportunities for Rhode Islanders to use broadband services for work, education, and health monitoring. All projects will be designed to address a critical need of the community that the project will serve.

Rhode Island has not yet obligated or spent CPF funds. However, the ConnectRI Broadband Deployment Program is in development, and the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation (Rhode Island Commerce) has retained a mapping vendor whose work is necessary to select specific locations as well as vendors and project specifics for ConnectRI projects.

USES OF FUNDS

Rhode Island does not have a pre-existing last-mile broadband infrastructure program. The ConnectRI Last-Mile Grant Program will develop a targeted last-mile competitive grant program with combined funding from the Capital Projects Fund (CPF) and the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program.

The ConnectRI program will deploy grants in three rounds, allowing the State to focus on targeted populations (whether demographic or geographic) in each of the rounds—and to update those priorities based on continued stakeholder engagement and updated mapping information as grants are administered, and access and affordability are increased. Given current feedback from stakeholders, priority groups for the first round of funding may include K-12 students, residents of publicly assisted housing, and/or older adults, as well as locations with unserved and underserved

residents and businesses. There is additional desire from stakeholders to focus on the state's largest islands.

All subgrant information, including subgrant application announcements, subgrant applications, requests for proposals, subrecipient scoring rubrics, subaward grant agreements, and outreach operational plans will be shared with Treasury for review and approval.

Though the State will prioritize the use of fiber whenever possible, there will be multiple technology interventions utilized for this initiative; each will be leveraged according to the use-case or demographic group this program seeks to support, the currently available middle mile network in the area, and the geographic topography of the zone. Cost will be considered in all solution deployments as well.

Rhode Island Commerce estimates that a \$25 million investment in broadband infrastructure would improve broadband internet access for 7,500 locations. It based this estimate on current broadband data mapping analyses, costs to access deployment materials and conduit, and supply chain restrictions, among other factors. This is an estimated cost of \$3,333 per location, which is consistent with broadband infrastructure deployments in comparable geographies and population densities.

PROMOTING EQUITABLE OUTCOMES AND ADDRESSING CRITICAL NEEDS

Treasury encourages uses of CPF funds that promote strong, equitable growth, including racial equity, in communities with a critical need, such as high-poverty and rural areas. Consistent with these goals, the grant program will adhere to the following principles:

- Equity is and will remain a core and foundational principle for any state broadband initiative. In addition to targeting underserved locations, consistent with the Treasury's goals, Rhode Island will continue engagement efforts with populations often lacking broadband access including, but not limited to, households with incomes at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty line, individuals aged 60 and above, incarcerated individuals, and individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group.
- To address affordability as a barrier to broadband adoption, Rhode Island will consider whether broadband service options offered by program recipients will be affordable to their target markets in the proposed service area based on median household income.
- Participating service providers will be required to participate in the Affordable Connectivity Program.

LABOR

ConnectRI has not yet awarded grants for broadband infrastructure deployment. Consistent with Treasury's goals, the program will use strong labor standards to promote effective and efficient delivery of high-quality infrastructure projects while also supporting the economic recovery through employment opportunities for workers.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ConnectRI has not yet awarded grants for broadband infrastructure deployment. However, consistent with Treasury's goals, Rhode Island Commerce's broadband team has been conducting significant community engagement and stakeholder outreach over the last year, when it hired a director of broadband strategy. The Rhode Island Commerce broadband team has:

- convened three meetings of the state's newly formed Broadband Advisory Council,
- hired a Community Outreach Coordinator,
- established a monthly ConnectRI newsletter to inform interested parties of Rhode Island Commerce's activities and new opportunities to get involved,
- co-hosted (along with the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns) an Internet for All: ConnectRI Broadband Summit.

The broadband team has also held numerous listening sessions and one-on-one meetings with state agencies, municipalities, internet service providers, libraries, public housing authorities, nonprofits, and others interested in improving broadband connectivity in the state.

CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLIANCE

Rhode Island Commerce's ConnectRI program will meet legal requirements relating to nondiscrimination and nondiscriminatory use of Federal funds. Those requirements include ensuring that entities receiving Federal financial assistance from the Treasury do not deny benefits or services, or otherwise discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin (including limited English proficiency), disability, age, or sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity) in accordance with the following authorities: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), 42 U.S.C. 2000d-1 et seq., and the Department's implementing regulations, 31 C.F.R. part 22; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), 29 U.S.C. 794; Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), 20 U.S.C. 1681 et seq., and the Department's implementing 17 regulations, 31 C.F.R. part 28; Age Discrimination Act of 1975, 42 U.S.C. 6101 et seq., and the Department's implementing regulations at 31 C.F.R. part 23. Rhode Island Commerce understands that Treasury will collect and review information to ascertain their compliance with the applicable requirements after providing financial assistance.