



VERMILION ADVANTAGE

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RFI for Broadband Partnerships

Vermilion Advantage (VA) is the economic development agency for Vermilion County, IL. VA is soliciting proposals from Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to partner with VA and the County to bring better broadband to the rural parts of the County which are considered as unserved or underserved for purposes of the upcoming BEAD grant program.

VA commissioned and received a Broadband Feasibility Study, which created a broadband master plan for the County to address existing digital inequities and barriers to access, adoption, and utilization of broadband by residents, businesses, and institutions. In addition, the report provided an overview of the significant amount of federal and state resources available for broadband expansion. The plan documented research and findings related to pursuing grants, such as identifying broadband gaps, estimating the cost to build a fiber network, market research related to market penetration, and other findings. One of the primary recommendations of the feasibility report is to engage with existing Internet Service Providers to understand their interest in expanding broadband networks into the unserved and underserved parts of the County. Providers may access the full study by downloading a copy from the VA website at [Vermilion-County-Broadband-Report.pdf](#).

The Illinois Office of Broadband has created a map of BEAD-eligible locations that shows 1,512 unserved and underserved locations eligible for a BEAD grant.¹

We hope to identify ISP partners that are planning to request BEAD grants in the County that will help us ensure that everybody in the County gets better broadband. VA is willing to provide one or more local grants to assist ISPs that want to pursue the BEAD Funding. The County will also provide a letter of recommendation to selected ISPs. Both the grant and the letter of support will help an ISP score higher in the Illinois BEAD Grant scoring process.

This RFI asks ISPs to submit proposals to participate in our local grant funding and to receive letters of recommendation from the County.

¹ List the link to the Illinois BEAD map is <https://illinois-broadband-cngis.hub.arcgis.com/>. The final list of BEAD eligible locations can be found at <https://dceo.illinois.gov/broadband/bead/sub-grantee-selection-process.html>

1. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS / BACKGROUND

Broadband expansion has been determined to be a high priority by VA and the County. This RFI is offering local matching grants of up to \$150,000 to Internet Service Providers (ISPs) that plan on applying for BEAD grants. This RFI aims to gather information about the level of interest of ISPs to build robust broadband networks that solve identified broadband gaps in rural Vermilion County.

The map in Addendum A shows grant-eligible areas defined by the Illinois Office of Broadband (IBO). This same data can be obtained from the IBO. We will not accept grant applications to fund areas that are considered by the state to be served.

For convenience in preparing a response, a map and shapefile of the County boundaries and the eligible areas is available at:

<https://www.vermilionadvantage.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Vermilion-County-Final-BEAD-Eligible-Locations.jpeg>.

VA will utilize the responses to this RFI to determine its willingness to deploy one or more broadband grants.

ISPs should consider the conditions for an ISP that wins a local grant from VA:

- The grant award is tentative and will only be awarded if the ISP is successful in winning a BEAD grant for the proposed study areas.
- The ISP must be willing to offer service to every unserved and underserved home and business in the proposed service area(s).
- Proposed projects must deliver broadband speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps, although more consideration will be given to proposals that deliver faster speeds.

Note that this RFI is for planning purposes only, and VA is not obligated to make any funding awards.

2. RFI RESPONSE INSTRUCTIONS

The submitted response must comply with the requirements set forth in this RFI. Adherence to these requirements will ensure a fair and objective analysis of all RFI responses. Failure to provide any information requested may result in the rejection of the RFI response.

RFI Timeline

Following is the timeline for the major RFI events:

RFI Issued	December 18, 2024
RFI Questions Due	January 2, 2025, by email by 5:00 PM CST
RFI Answers to Questions	January 3, 2025, by email to providers by 5:00 PM CST
RFI Responses Due	January 10, 2025, by email by 5:00 PM CST

If you have questions regarding any part of this RFI, please submit questions electronically by email to the Project Contact listed below by January 2, 2025 by 5:00 PM CST. Questions posed by ISPs will be answered and sent to all ISPs who have indicated an interest in the RFI by January 3, 2025 at 5:00 PM. If you want to be included on the list that sees responses to questions, please email the Project Contacts below.

Completed RFI responses should be submitted electronically by email by 5:00 PM CST on January 10, 2025, to the Project Contacts below. The written response to the RFI should be submitted as a single PDF file containing the complete response. Respondents should send additional files showing Shapefiles or KMZ maps of your proposed project area. ISPs who respond after the due date will not be considered. Please send questions and completed proposals to the following:

Project Contacts

Mike Marron
CEO/President
Vermilion Advantage
mike@vermilionadvantage.com

Also send a copy of the questions and the completed proposal to :

Doug Dawson
President
CCG Consulting
Blackbean2@cggcomm.com

Other Information

The respondent should carefully examine this RFI. Respondent shall address all items as specified in this RFI. Failure to address selected items may disqualify a Respondent from further consideration. Submitting a proposal shall constitute evidence that the respondent is free of any uncertainty concerning conditions that would affect the execution and completion of this project.

The respondent shall be fully responsible for all costs incurred in the development and submission of the proposal and any other costs incurred before the issuance of a contract between VA and the Respondent. VA shall not assume any contractual obligation because of the issuance of a proposal request, the preparation or submission of a proposal, the evaluation of proposals, or the final selection of a proposal.

VA is not going to share RFI responses with the local government or any other parties other than the consultant listed above. If you want a non-disclosure agreement in place before sending your response, please provide a signable copy to the Project Contacts. VA is a non-profit corporation and is not subject to public disclosure rules.

VA will evaluate each respondent's information to determine the winner(s) of the RFI. VA will be the sole judge and have complete discretion in selecting the successful respondent(s). VA may reject any or all proposals, request modifications to proposals, request new proposals, or request in-person or online interviews with one or more respondents.

3. CONTACT WITH VERMILION ADVANTAGE AND VERMILION COUNTY EMPLOYEES

To ensure a fair and objective evaluation of all RFI responses, vendors must submit all inquiries to the Project Contact listed in Section 3 above. Without the Project Contact's approval, no other contact should be made with Vermilion Advantage or County Employees.

4. RFI RESPONSE FORMAT

In order to facilitate a timely and fair evaluation of RFI proposals, a standard response format has been developed and is documented in this section. All Respondents are required to format their proposal in a manner consistent with the guidelines below:

Section	Topic
1	Letter of Transmittal
2	Executive Summary
3	Respondent Information
4	Engineering and ISP Services
5	Additional Information

5. SPECIFIC RESPONSES REQUIRED

Letter of Transmittal

Please provide a one- or two-page transmittal letter with the following:

- A brief statement of the respondent's understanding of the proposed partnership. This should be no more than two pages.
- Highlights the respondent's qualifications and ability to perform the proposed solution.
- Provide the name, title, phone number, email address, and street address of the person(s) in the respondent's organization who will respond to questions about the RFI response.

Executive Summary

Provide an executive summary (no more than two pages) that describes why the County should consider the respondent as a partner to serve the proposed Service Area(s) and that discusses the benefits of working with the respondent.

Respondent Information

Company Overview

Provide an overview including the following information about the respondent:

- Company name, date established, number of employees, business address, phone number, and website.
- Other lines of business conducted by the respondent.
- Description of any recent mergers or acquisitions.
- Respondent should indicate the name, title, and contact information of the person who will be authorized to enter into an agreement with the County if selected.

Financial Viability

Please provide information to demonstrate the financial viability and stability of the ISP. If the ISP has declared bankruptcy within the last ten years, please describe the resolution of the bankruptcy. Describe any pending lawsuits related to the ISP business. Include details about any bankruptcies or any major litigation in the last ten years.

Experience

Describe the following:

- List all communities served in Illinois and other States where Respondent is an active retail ISP.
- List communities already served using the technology being proposed in your response.
- How many broadband customers does the respondent have in Illinois? In other states?
- How long has the respondent been serving customers in Illinois?
- How many employees does the respondent have in Illinois?

Cost of Construction

It's not mandatory, but it would be helpful if you provide a summary of your estimated cost of building the proposed project(s).

Engineering and ISP Services

Overall Design Parameters. The ISP should describe its technical approach for bringing faster broadband to the Serving Area(s). Please provide a high-level overview of the following technical issues involved in bringing the proposed solution:

- What technology are you proposing?
- What is the maximum broadband speed the proposed network can deliver?
- If a wired network, what mix of the aerial and buried plant are you proposing?
- Provide information about key company personnel that would implement the project. Information should include a short resume of each staff member.

Engineering Requirements. Please verify that you are ready and able to meet the following requirements in the when designing the network in the proposed Service Area(s).

- A Professional Engineer licensed in Illinois shall approve all network designs.
- A new network should be designed to pass every underserved and unserved home, business, and government location within the proposed study area.
- The network should be capable of delivering the speeds you are proposing.
- The network should be designed to continue providing the promised broadband speeds at the expected busy hours when the network carries the most local broadband traffic.
- Respondent must certify that it will adhere to all local regulations concerning rights-of-way, permitting, and construction practices.

Additional Information

Details of Each Proposed Service Area

For each proposed Service Area, provide the following details:

- An estimate of the number of passings covered.
- For wired networks, an estimate of the route miles to be constructed.
- An estimated total construction budget, broken down by major cost categories to bring broadband to each proposed Sector.
- ISPs are **required** to submit an electronic version of each proposed Service Area in a shapefile or KMZ format.

ISP Operations

The respondent should provide a high-level discussion describing how you will operate the ISP business. Please respond to the following questions and issues:

- Describe the respondent's future expansion plans within Vermilion County and the surrounding region.
- What are the respondent's expectations regarding your achieved customer penetration rates by three after a grant award? By the fifth year?
- Please describe your broadband products by speed and price for residents and businesses. Describe any additional products and rates for ancillary charges for modems, Wi-Fi routers, etc.
- Please describe any products you offer for low-income households.
- Please answer the following questions along with any other information you care to provide about your customer service:
 - Where are your closest broadband customers to the county?
 - Where is the nearest office to the county that includes live customer service agents?
 - What's the location where calls from customers will be answered?
 - Where will the home base location be for any outside technicians assigned to the County?
- For a period starting with the execution of a contract with VA for this project and lasting until two years after completion of construction, the Respondent will not charge customers in the Service Area(s) any non-recurring charges to be connected to the network.

Proposed Schedule for Completing Construction

The respondent should provide a timeline describing your best estimate of when any proposed network would be completed and ready to serve customers.

6. RIGHT OF REFUSAL

VA reserves the right to reject all RFI responses in their entirety or to select certain solutions from the RFIs. VA reserves the right to award the contract in any manner that complies with Illinois law and which it deems in the best interest of the citizens of Vermilion County.

7. PAYMENT

VA plans to make a one-time award to any grant recipients in the first quarter after you sign a BEAD contract with the State Office of Broadband.

