



United States Department of Agriculture

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News Release

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NEK Broadband Receives \$2.84 Million USDA Grant to Help Rural Residents in Groton Secure Online Access

Project Partners Celebrate More than \$20.5 Million in Federal Funding for Connectivity Throughout Northeast Kingdom

ISLAND POND, Vt., Oct. 30th, 2024 – Sarah Waring, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) State Director for Rural Development (RD) in Vermont and New Hampshire, announced today that NEK Broadband received \$2,847,276 through the [Community Connect Grant program](#). The fiber infrastructure project will provide more than half the residents of Groton, Vt., a town of roughly 1000 people in Caledonia County, with reliable access to high-speed internet. Christa Shute, NEK Broadband’s Executive Director, hosted Senator Peter Welch and other project partners at the organization’s fiber warehouse in Island Pond to celebrate the announcement as well as previous USDA broadband investments.

Including today’s funding, RD has invested \$20,501,567 in Northeast Kingdom connectivity projects through NEK Broadband, a nonprofit organization known as a Communication Union District (CUD). In August, NEK Broadband and CVFiber, a CUD serving towns in Central Vermont, merged to form NEKCV. In May 2023, USDA broadband funding of [\\$17,463,911 through the ReConnect Grant Program](#) coincided with Capitol Hill testimony from Shute in Washington, D.C., as honored guest of Senator Welch, who is Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee’s Rural Development and Energy Subcommittee and has made broadband expansion a visible priority. The ReConnect funding will benefit 3,295 people, 94 businesses, 183 farms and 11 educational facilities with access to high-speed internet. In August 2021, NEK Broadband received a \$190,380 [Rural Business Development Grant](#) to extend the fiber network into western Concord and the town of Waterford.

“Among the many things we learned over the last few years, is that having reliable online access should be seen as a human right for everyone—especially those living in our remotest rural communities,” said Waring. “Securing important goods and services, and simply being connected to friends and family, can no longer be a hit-or-miss proposition that depends on your area code. We all know the stories of kids at home who can’t access school assignments, or small businesses who can’t make online sales, or the inadequate delivery of telemedicine where there’s no high-speed internet access. That’s why I am so proud that the Biden-Harris Administration continues to send a clear and resounding message to our neighbors in this remote corner of our state: we’re here, with your local providers, working hard to get you connected.”

Shute shared that “This Community Connect grant is special because of the way in which residents and town officials in Groton stepped up to find solutions in coordination with regional,

state, and federal resources to contribute to NEK Broadband's mission to build public infrastructure and help bring service to the unserved in over 70 towns in northeastern and central Vermont. With the assistance of this grant from USDA, NEK Community Broadband dba NEKCV takes another step forward in our digital equity program by staffing and equipping three community centers in Groton and Ryegate that will help provide opportunities for the residents to access high speed internet during days, evenings, and weekends, while providing training, teaching and resources to build digital literacy."

"The Community Connect Grant will transform the ability of our residents and area organizations to access & leverage the enormous potential of the Internet for jobs, education, healthcare, public safety, and community development," added Michael Gaiss, Groton's primary representative on the Governing Board of NEK Broadband. "The impact on our town and region will be felt for years to come. Our grateful thanks and appreciation to the USDA for this opportunity."

About USDA Rural Development

USDA Rural Development supports infrastructure improvements; business development; housing; community facilities such as schools, public safety and health care; and high-speed internet access in rural, tribal and high-poverty areas. Visit the [Rural Data Gateway](#) to learn how and where these investments are impacting rural America. To subscribe to USDA Rural Development updates, visit the [GovDelivery Subscriber Page](#). To learn more, visit www.usda.gov/vt-nh

About NEK Community Broadband dba NEKCV

NEK Broadband is a Communications Union District formed under [30 VSA Chapter 82](#) that includes 71 towns including every town in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. NEK Broadband works in conjunction with neighboring CUDs to provide service in adjacent counties as deemed necessary or expedient based on utility distribution lines. This is a joint coordination to help bring service to the unserved along these town and county boundaries. In August 2024, NEK Broadband and CVFiber united resources, expertise, and a shared commitment to deliver exceptional high-speed internet services to 71 communities as a single CUD. To learn more, visit www.nekbroadband.org.

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