

Community Connect & Reconnect Grant Programs

Success Story: NEK Broadband Builds High-Speed Internet Access for Rural Residents

\$2,847,276

Community Connect Grant
Sept '24

525

Groton Residents
Benefitting from CC Grant

\$17,463,911

ReConnect Grant
May '23

3,295

NEK Residents Benefitting
from ReConnect Grant

\$190,380

Rural Business Development
Grant, Aug '21

71

Vermont Towns Served by
NEKCV

The Essential Needs of **COMMERCE & COMMUNICATION**

For people living in rural communities, the crucial need for connection to the online community can often be a hit-or-miss proposition. Modern goods and services of the information age have proven an essential part of everyday life for those who live in areas where a doctor's appointment or run to the store can take up the entire day. Vermont's Northeast Kingdom (NEK) is one of five national Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP) zones, meaning it has Congressional recognition as economically underserved, and as a result, is eligible for special funding. NEK Broadband, a Communications Union District (CUD), leads the effort to bring high-speed broadband to the NEK.

Local Commitment to **BROADBAND IN EVERY AREA CODE**

Vermont's CUDs feature resourceful local volunteers with different backgrounds, all trying to solve the riddle of implementing rural broadband. Among other tasks, NEK Broadband Executive Director Christa Shute applied her legal expertise and resourcefulness to the task of applying to federal grant applications. Through her leadership and vision, NEK Broadband secured a USDA Rural Business Development Grant in August, 2021 to extend fiber into Concord and Waterford. In May, 2023, on the day Shute delivered congressional testimony about the difficulty of getting broadband to rural communities, USDA obligated a \$17.4 million ReConnect grant to the CUD.

The Benefits of **COORDINATION & COLLABORATION**

In August, 2024, NEK Broadband merged with CVFiber, a CUD serving Central Vermont, to combine 71 Green Mountain towns into one service provider, NEKCV. Leaders on the NEK Broadband board from the town of Groton worked with Shute to find more federal funding, and their partnership paid off. More than half the town population will know the benefits of reliable high-speed internet, thanks to further collaboration between NEK Broadband and the USDA. In September 2024, RD obligated \$2.84 million through a Community Connect grant, furthering the momentum to build out fiber networks throughout the region and keep rural residents connected.

For program regulations and requirements, please go to the USDA RD Fact Sheets: [1](#), [2](#)



NEK Broadband Director Christa Shute, top left, and CVFiber Director Jenille Smith, right, joined USDA Deputy Secretary Xochitl Torre-Small, below, along with other CUD reps from around the State during a March 2023 broadband roundtable hosted by the Fairbanks Museum in St. Johnsbury, VT.

