

1. Impact (35 points)

A description of the scope, magnitude and severity of the identified problems – 7 points

In the 21st century, affordable broadband access is no longer simply a competitive advantage to a region's economy, but an infrastructure that will dictate its viability. It is also true for the viability of a region's communities, as many people consider affordable broadband a basic need, almost on par with essentials like food, electricity, and shelter. Planning and programs are needed to ensure that rural areas like Piscataquis County have a broadband (internet at download speeds of at least 200Kbps) infrastructure to compete for businesses and people. Piscataquis County's Comprehensive Economic Development Plan lists as one of its objectives that "all businesses will have access to high-speed internet service and all employees will have the technical ability to telecommute." However, as it currently stands, there are significant gaps in broadband access between the towns in Piscataquis County and also within individual towns themselves.

Verizon DSL service is generally available within 18,000 (cable) feet distance of its functional switching stations, of which there are currently only four (Dover-Foxcroft, Greenville, Guilford, and Milo), with download speeds ranging from 750Kbps to 3.0Mbps, and ranging in price from \$17.00 to \$30.00 per month. Time Warner high-speed cable service is available only in three towns: Brownville, Dover-Foxcroft, and Milo, and usually only in areas within those towns where there are at least 20 homes per mile. Cable download speeds are advertised as being higher (up to 8.0Mbps), but typical speeds are usually slower due to over-subscription. Cable prices tend to run slightly higher than DSL, starting at roughly \$45.00 per month. While satellite service is theoretically available in all parts of Piscataquis County, it is too expensive for many individuals, is weather-sensitive, and is generally less reliable than DSL or cable. For larger businesses with sufficient financial resources, cable or DSL service can be obtained in wider areas. However, for most smaller businesses and individuals, slow dial-up is the primary means of internet access.

In the face of this patchwork quilt of broadband access none of the municipalities in Piscataquis County has a plan for where broadband facilities are located or where they should be placed in support of an information-based economy. Clearly, the local and regional policy vacuum that now exists relative to broadband infrastructure planning is limiting the advancement of the technology in Piscataquis County.

How the problems were identified – 7 points

The Executive Director of the Piscataquis County Economic Development Council ("PCEDC"), through outreach to numerous employers and self-employed individuals, has learned that lack of affordable broadband access is one of their highest priorities. One particularly noteworthy case is the one of a software designer who resides in Dover-Foxcroft, but must take his computer to the Center Theatre (in downtown Dover-Foxcroft) to have access to broadband. Another case is the PCEDC Community Development Specialist who writes numerous articles from home in Parkman, and whose efficiency greatly suffers from having to use dial-up for her online research.

Past efforts to deal with the identified problems – 7 points

All past efforts to deal with the lack of access to affordable high speed internet have been attempted by the private sector, with generally lackluster results (neither Verizon nor Time Warner have anything approaching widespread coverage). Furthermore, Verizon's and Time

Warner’s more detailed broadband availability information and their future rollout plans remain proprietary and unable to be accessed by the public.

Impact of the problem on LMI persons or slum/blight conditions – 7 points

The lack of affordable high-speed internet access is currently an obstacle in attracting entrepreneurial individuals from outside the County, who have the ability to carry out their business from anywhere in the world, and who would like to do it here. In addition, a significant percentage (26.0%) of the businesses in Piscataquis County are microbusinesses. Whether or not they are vendors of information-based products, affordable high-speed internet access is critical for the vast majority of them to carry out their business efficiently. Lack of access is a disincentive to individuals wishing to start a business in Piscataquis County. The current situation is not helping Piscataquis County decrease its extremely high LMI rate of 48.7%, second-highest among Maine’s sixteen counties.

Why CPG funds are critical for the project – 7 points

The only other parties with the resources to conduct a study of this magnitude would be the large broadband service providers. However, the private sector perceives that this area lacks the customer base necessary to justify any investment in infrastructure; perhaps this study could prove them wrong and encourage their voluntary investment.

2. Development Strategy (35 points)

A description of the planning tasks proposed to solve the identified problems and specific use of CPG funds – 8 points

The proposed strategy is to create a *Broadband Infrastructure Plan* that improves access to affordable broadband technology in Piscataquis County. It includes identification of gaps in existing infrastructure and services, and development of a plan to fill them in a way that serves business and community development. The plan will be completed by:

- 1) Dynamic GIS mapping of existing infrastructure and broadband capability relative to other critical infrastructure (3-phase power, transportation linkages, regional services, industrial parks, Pine Tree Development Zones, growth areas of service centers)
- 2) Identification of gaps in critical broadband infrastructure, through a market survey as well as interviews with the current and potential private service providers. The market survey will ask businesses, local officials and individuals in Piscataquis County about the type and level of satisfaction with existing broadband services. The interviews with ISP providers will address their service footprints, expansion plans, and amount of necessary investment for increased coverage.
- 3) Analysis of the range of alternatives available for meeting identified needs including: cost comparisons of construction, delivery of service and maintenance; and reliability and speed of service.
- 4) Outreach to municipal officials and regional development organizations.
- 5) Identification of models for municipal management, regulation and licensing including: permitting issues, licensing requirements, and fee structures to re-coup regulatory costs; multiple service provider facility demands at prime sites; and model ordinances.

Project timeline, including a start date, tasks completed to date and how CPG funds will be expended within 12 months or less – 12 points

Task	Start Date	End Date
Dynamic GIS mapping	11/1/07	1/1/08

Identification of gaps	1/1/08	3/1/08
Descriptions of range of alternatives	3/1/08	5/1/08
Outreach	5/1/08	6/1/08
Identifications of models	6/1/08	8/1/08

How community partnerships including local government, citizens, agencies and local businesses will work together to develop effective solution strategies – 5 points

The PCEDC Executive Committee, which will serve as the project advisory committee, is a diverse group, consisting of town managers, small business owners, corporate executives, state agency employees, attorneys, corporate executives, educators, and bankers. In addition, all six individuals who attended the required public hearing expressed an interest in serving on the advisory committee, and two other individuals have expressed interest in being consultants on the project.

A chief component of the above development strategy will be the gathering of information from these various groups through the survey process, including municipal governments, local businesses, and citizens, in order to help determine the current condition of internet access. There will be collaboration with municipal governments as well as with Eastern Maine Development Corporation (“EMDC”) in the developing of this plan.

How the planning efforts would lead to solution strategies that would benefit LMI persons or alleviate slum/blight conditions - 6 points

Having this plan in place will allow for more effective investment in broadband capacity, which will in turn serve to help existing businesses stay and expand, and to attract new businesses to the area. These businesses will be looking to hire LMI individuals. There could be a “dividend” of entrepreneurs, investors, and workers (in particular semi-retirees who are also part-time telecommuters), which would undoubtedly help Piscataquis County lower its LMI percentage.

Experience of the applicant community with planning projects – 4 points

The plan will be completed by the PCEDC in partnership with the towns of the County and EMDC. The PCEDC has been instrumental in economic development across the County for over a decade. Staff from EMDC (which was involved with the *Washington County Telecommunications Infrastructure and Assessment Plan*) assigned to this project will include planners and economic development professionals who possess over 25 years of combined experience.

3. Project Leverage (10 points- No narrative response required)

4. Citizen Participation (20 points)

How overall citizen participation process directly relates to identification of solution strategies and application development - 4 points

The proposal for this planning grant was circulated among members of the PCEDC Executive Committee to invite additional comments, as well as among individuals who attended the mandatory public hearing. All of the managers from the applicant and co-sponsor towns, as well as the Executive Director of the PCEDC, have gotten numerous comments and suggestions about broadband needs in Piscataquis County (see above).

Effective use of any media (newspapers, radio, TV, etc) to further public awareness and participation – 4 points

This planning grant (and the public hearing for it) was the subject of a monthly column written by the Executive Director of the PCEDC, which ran in the *The Piscataquis Observer* and the *Moosehead Messenger* (the County's two primary newspapers), and was also posted on the PCEDC website, along with a rough draft of the proposal in order to solicit comments on it from the public. There were two additional articles about this grant in the *Messenger*. The need for affordable high-speed internet access was also the main focus of a meeting between Congressman Michaud and members of the PCEDC on July 6th, 2007, which was covered by WVII-TV Channel 7 and the *Observer*. The public hearing notice was run in both the *Observer* and the *Messenger*, and both of those newspapers, as well as other media outlets, were invited to cover the public hearing. Going forward, the Town and the PCEDC will use press releases/briefings and e-mail to keep the communities informed as to the progress of this project, and to encourage participation in the market survey.

Relevance of listed meeting/hearing activities/comments (not counting required public hearing) on application and project development – 4 points

Following the public hearing, the grant was again discussed at the August 1st meeting of the Greenville Board of Selectmen, where there was further discussion between the Executive Director of the PCEDC, the Selectmen, and the Town Manager, and consistent support for it. This grant was also mentioned at the July 10th meeting of the Rural Broadband Coalition, a group of economic development professionals from rural Maine who are working towards improved broadband access in those areas, as well as at the aforementioned Michaud meeting. Finally, rural broadband access will also be the panel discussion topic at the upcoming PCEDC Quarterly Meeting on September 6th.

Involvement of potential LMI project beneficiaries in development of application and project and how the required public hearing relates to the application development and citizen participation process – 4 points

Due to the high percentage of LMI individuals in Piscataquis County (48.7%), and the fact that the PCEDC represents a diverse cross-section of residents (including income), there are undoubtedly LMI project beneficiaries among the PCEDC membership who helped develop this application. The draft application was also posted on the PCEDC website in order to solicit comments and suggestions from the public, many of which are undoubtedly LMI.

The public hearing served as an opportunity for individuals to help shape the development strategy of this grant application. The Town Manager presented an overview of the grant proposal at the hearing, and provided a summary sheet and copies of the narrative for the attendees. Despite there being only six attendees from Greenville and Beaver Cove, there was significant and spirited discussion revolving around access problems, and the pros and cons of different broadband technologies. One attendee also wrote a letter, and there were two other individuals who could not attend but requested the meeting minutes.

How other local resources (cash and in-kind) are directly related to the project and the establishment of a cash value equivalent for all in-kind contributions – 4 points

The PCEDC is committing cash resources in the amount of \$4,000 for the implementation and completion of this plan. We also expect significant volunteer time on this project, with a conservative estimate of 240 hours (10 people x 2 hours/month), with a cash value of \$2,520 (@ \$10.50/hour).