

Second Quarter 2013 SBDD Program Report – Vermont
July 5, 2013 – Submitted by Caro Thompson

Outreach

Municipalities

Information was sent to 23 towns eligible for broadband expansion funding. It included an announcement of the new BroadbandVT.org website function that provides information for those yet without broadband service about who their future provider will be. This resulted in three inquiries about the funding opportunity.

The Vermont Telecommunications Authority June Board of Directors meeting took place in Bennington County. Invitations were sent to area legislators, town managers and town clerks, plus economic development leaders. Seven people attended. Four gave statements during public input period.

Legislators

Distributed project updates to Bennington and Windham County legislators. Compiled detailed information for the Rupert representative about new services coming to his constituents. Responded to request to meet with Royalton legislator and her constituent to hear concerns and share updates.

Media

During the quarter, three media releases were distributed about projects-in-progress or newly funded projects. Independent stories were written in three separate newspapers about broadband expansion.

BroadbandVT.org and Social Media

Redesign of the home page and Find Broadband Services in your area function pages was executed.

19 postings were added to the broadbandvt.org Facebook page. The Twitter feed by Marketing Partners continued at an average rate of 15 per week. Seven blogs have been researched and written. They are scheduled to begin posting beginning early next quarter.

Conference Attendance by Outreach Coordinator

Vermont Travel Industry Conference April 3 – Focus on Social Media Workshops
SBI National Workshop on May 1 – National Update and Effective Use Brainstorming
Schools, Libraries & Healthcare Broadband Coalition Conference May 2 & 3 – Focus on Effective Use Projects around the Country
Northeast Kingdom: Today and Tomorrow, June 16 - Education Technology Discussion

Webinars

Attended the BTOP Broadband Toolkit and Connect2Compete webinars.

Citizens

The Broadband Outreach Coordinator continues to respond regularly to inquiries from citizens about broadband expansion projects-in-progress in relation to specific addresses.

Effective Broadband Internet Utilization – Kelley Spear, Research; Caro Thompson, Outreach

Staff developed an action plan for increasing awareness about the effective use of services available through broadband Internet connections. The plan includes research into results reported by projects already in place in other states and developing recommendations for development of a state plan based on ideas generated by existing relevant successes elsewhere.

Initial research is focused on the Broadband Toolkit recently released by the NTIA. Those having to do with outreach in rural locations and grassroots organizations are prioritized because many issues found there are similar to those experienced within Vermont. Projects undertaken by ToledoTel, MIRC by the Bland Foundation and GetConnected by the California Emerging Technology Fund have been identified as having approaches that may be adapted in Vermont.

Effective Use - Education and Healthcare Sectors

Two roundtable discussions on effective use have been scheduled in partnership with USDA-RD Broadband Coordinator. Healthcare policy makers and providers have been invited to a three-hour session on July 31. The education roundtable will take place November 5th.

Effective Use - Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs)

A survey has been developed and will initially be sent to CAIs involved in the Vermont FiberConnect project to determine the impact and outcomes of higher connection speeds. Expansion of survey recipients will be explored next quarter.

Effective Use - Project Partnerships

The Broadband Outreach Coordinator is working closely with the Vermont Center for Rural Development, Vermont Department of Libraries and the USDA-Rural Development to maximize all funded efforts regarding effective usage.

Data Verification - Erik Amalixsen

At the beginning of this quarter the number of sites listed in the VTAs 2013 Notice of Grant Funding - 137 was 495. Applications were received in April, May & June for this ongoing funding round. Applications often included status updates on individual locations that were previously identified as unserved, thus reducing the target number of sites for funding broadband expansion.

After each round, a reconciliation of updated information is gathered from several sources. The Vermont Agency of Administration (AoA), Public Service Department (PSD) and the Vermont Telecommunication Authority (VTA) all play a part in gathering information regarding what sites have broadband service and from what provider. Regular meetings with VCGI, PSD, AoA and Stone Engineering continue, to ensure efforts are synchronous.

A variety of other tactics are also used to identify site status. The PSD sends requests to utility companies to see if a location has phone and power lines to determine whether the site is serviceable or off-grid. The VTA has utilized mapping analysis and site visits to determine if residents can provide first-hand knowledge about whether a site currently has service or not. The VTA continues to receive responses to a direct mailing sent out several months ago to determine service at 494 sites identified as unserved.

During each grant round, additional sites found to be unserved have been added to the list. After the completion of the June round of grant applications, the number of sites as yet unserved is 146. The VTA board will be reviewing applications in early July to determine which funding options most closely meet criteria in the effort to bring service to a significant portion of the remaining sites.