RIHousing Comprehensive Community Development
Bridging the Digital Divide Fund

RIHousing seeks proposals from eligible applicants to propose innovative and long-term sustainable projects to increase internet access for low- and moderate-income households. High-speed internet is increasingly considered a basic necessity for employment, education, and day-to-day tasks, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to remote work and school. However, many low- and moderate-income households cannot access high-speed internet at home.

RIHousing is seeking proposals for expanding internet access for low-and-moderate income Rhode Islanders through one or both of the following:

- Creating infrastructure needed for internet access
- Providing free or low-cost WiFi for people in their homes

There are a number of existing initiatives that connect low-income households with internet access, such as Verizon's Lifeline Program, and Cox's Connect2Complete program. Some schools have also provided students with temporary solutions for internet access, such as mobile hotspots.

There are a number of Federal resources to help build the infrastructure for high-speed internet, such as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). A number of Federal housing development funds, such as HOME, Housing Trust Fund and HOPWA, can also be used to build infrastructure. In many cases, however, these funds cannot be used to pay for internet access. Statewide, the Rhode Island Office of Innovation and Rhode Island Office of Healthy Aging have over the last few years launched initiatives to provide tablets and hot spots and improve internet use and digital literacy.

While there are a number of initiatives to help bridge the digital divide, there are still gaps in access to high-speed internet. Additionally, some of the initiatives noted above are short term, such as the ones that require school aged children living in the home.

RIHousing recognizes that high-speed internet access is now considered a key utility and seeks proposals that will provide low-and-moderate income Rhode Island residents with free or low-cost long-term access to the internet. Partnerships, pilot projects, out of the box thinking and replication of successful projects from across the country are strongly encouraged. Examples of such projects include ONE Neighborhood Builder's partnership with OSHEAN to provide free public WiFi in Olneyville through a "community mesh network;" Housing Authority of Los Angeles's partnership with Starry, an internet start-up, to provide low-cost internet access; DigitalC's pilot project, Connect the Unconnected, with Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority; and New York City's LinkNYC initiative to provide kiosks that are equipped with high-speed WiFi, tablet for city services and device charging stations.

FUNDING AVAILABLE AND GRANT TERM:
A total of $250,000 is available in funding. The maximum award per grant is $75,000. The grant term is one year.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS:
Non-profit and for-profit organizations, public housing authorities, municipalities, faith-based organizations and community housing development organizations are eligible to apply.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION:
Proposals are due by 3:00 p.m. on Friday, March 12, 2021. Proposals must be submitted via email to swasserman@rihousing.com in Adobe PDF format or Microsoft Office files (Word, Excel).

No proposals, including electronic submissions, will be accepted after 3:00 PM on Friday, March 12, 2021.

All questions must be submitted via email to swasserman@rihousing.com. All answers will be posted on https://www.rihousing.com/rfps-rfqs/.

APPLICATION PROCESS:
- Applicants should submit proposals on organization letterhead. Proposals must clearly describe the following:
  - Project idea
  - How the grant funds would be used
  - Geographic area that would be served
  - Demonstrated need
  - How many people are anticipated to be assisted
  - Clear plan for implementation, along with timeline
  - Program/project anticipated outcomes and metrics for measuring anticipated outcomes
  - Project sustainability beyond the grant term
  - Proposed or committed partnerships
- Applicants must submit a budget
- Applicants must include resumes of all staff proposed to administer the project.
- Proposal narrative must not exceed 4 pages.
- Incomplete and incorrectly submitted proposals will not be evaluated.
- Applicants may submit references (encouraged if no prior working experience with RIHousing).
- Name, email and phone number for proposal contact

PROPOSAL SCORING CRITERIA:

A committee comprised of RIHousing staff will review all submissions in accordance with the following criteria:

Criteria	Maximum Score
How many people will the program/project reach - Provide justification or data to support this reach, including estimated cost per person reached	10
Need – Does the program/project meet a demonstrated need in the community?	5
Proposed Outcomes/Metrics – What are the expected results at the end of the grant period? How will those be measured?	5
Program Sustainability – How will the project sustain itself once the grant funding is depleted?	5
Partnerships – Identify partners who will be involved in the implementation of the project. Must include letters of commitment or formal agreements.	5
Innovation – Is the project new for the community? Is it original and/or creative in thinking?	5
Leveraged Funds – Identify additional <u>committed</u> funds raised for the program/project (<u>must include proof of commitment</u>)	3
Matching Funds – Include any organizational contribution to program/project	3
Budget – Is the budget clearly detailed, with appropriate costs and sources outlined for each item?	3
Organizational and Staff Capacity – Does the organization have the ability to implement the program/project as demonstrated by prior working experience with RIHousing or through references? Is there an appropriate level of staffing in place? Is there a clear plan for executing the program/project, including adequate timeline?	3
RIHousing financed property residents – Will the program or project serve residents of RIHousing financed or administered properties?	3
TOTAL POSSIBLE SCORE	50

RIHousing reserves the right to reject any and all proposals and to repost the original or an amended Request for Proposals. RIHousing reserves the right to make those decisions after receipt of responses. RIHousing's decision on these matters is final.