RIHousing Bridging the Digital Divide Fund

Application Deadline: Wednesday, January 26, 2022 at 3:00 pm

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 a 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 and providing free or low-cost internet access for low- and-moderate income Rhode Islanders.

There are a number of existing initiatives that connect low-income households with lower-cost 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) and to-be-deployed federal funding through the American Rescue Plan Act and the Infrastructure Investments and Job Act. Several federal housing development funds, such as HOME, Housing Trust Fund, and HOPWA can also be used to build infrastructure. However, these funds cannot be used to pay for internet access.

While there are a number of initiatives to help bridge the digital divide, there are still many residents who cannot afford adequate and long-term internet access. 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 Builders' partnership with OSHEAN to provide free public WiFi in Olneyville through a "community mesh network"; Younity and PCs for People's work to provide low-cost development wide broadband; Housing Authority of Los Angeles's partnership with Starry, an internet start-up, to provide low-cost internet access; and DigitalC's pilot project, Connect the Unconnected, with Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority.

FUNDING AVAILABLE AND GRANT TERM:
A total of $450,000 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 Wednesday, January 26, 2022. 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 Wednesday, January 26, 2022.

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:
- Proposals must clearly describe the following:
    - Project idea
    - How the grant funds would be used
    - Geographic area that would be served
    - Population that would be served
    - Demonstrated need
    - How many people are anticipated to be given internet access, and for how long
    - Clear plan for implementation, along with timeline
    - Program/project anticipated outcomes and metrics for measuring anticipated outcomes
    - Leveraged funds (letters of commitment must be submitted)
    - Project sustainability beyond the grant term
    - Proposed or committed partnerships
- Applicants must fill out and submit the attached outcomes and budget worksheet. The budget must include full project costs, and note what, if any, portion of the project is unfunded. Applicants must note how they anticipate those gaps being filled.
- Applicants should indicate which staff would be involved with the project and provide appropriate background information for each such person and identify his or her responsibilities.
- Proposal narrative must not exceed 4 pages.
- Applicants may submit references (encouraged if no prior working experience with RIHousing).
- Name, email and phone number for proposal contact.
- Incomplete and incorrectly submitted proposals will not be evaluated.

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	5
Need – Does the program/project meet a demonstrated need in the community?	5
Proposed Outcomes/Metrics – What are the expected results during and 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? If providing internet, will residents lose access after the grant term? If implementing infrastructure, is the technology adaptable and scalable for future technological improvements?	5
Partnerships – Identify partners who will be involved in the implementation of the project and their roles. Must include letters of commitment or formal agreements.	5
Leveraged Funds – Identify additional committed funds raised for the program/project (must include proof of commitment)	3
Matching Funds – Include any organizational financial contribution to program/project. Staff time is not eligible.	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 project implementation experience? 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	**40**

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.