ConnectALL - Connectivity Innovation – Mobile Service

Request for Applications

A Division of Empire State Development

Issued: April 11, 2025

Contact: **wireless@esd.ny.gov** using the subject line “Connectivity Innovation - Mobile Service Request for Applications (RFA)”

This Request for Applications (“RFA”) is posted on the Empire State Development website:

April 11, 2025

Applications must be submitted through the New York State Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) Portal:

https://apps.cio.ny.gov/apps/cfa/

APPLICATION DUE DATE:

June 17, 2025

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Glossary

Wireless	A system of radio signals rather than wires to connect computers, wireless telephones, etc. to each other.
Mobile Phone	Phones that communicate via radio waves. Telephone calls and data are connected using a network to relay calls between telecommunications networks.
Network Equipment	Equipment location in a stationary location that provides connectivity between Mobile Phones and Mobile Networks via Radio Frequency (RF).
Mobile Network Service Provider	A private sector institution that holds FCC licenses and/or other permissions to operate Mobile Networks and sell Mobile Phones.
Mobile Network Coverage Gap	The inability for a Cell Phone in a specific geographic location, to connect with a Mobile Network, which may be due to limited coverage – the signal does not reach an area -- or capacity – the signal is present, but the network cannot support the users in the area. Connectivity is influenced by many factors including proximity to a cell site, physical obstacles and signal interference.
Wireless Mobile Coverage Solution	Any innovative wireless solution that can establish Mobile Phone connectivity to the Mobile Networks operated by the Mobile Service Providers
Private Network	A customized Wireless Telephone network that is owned and operated by a business or organization that typically is not a Wireless Telephone Service Provider.
Lead Applicant	An entity that submits an application on behalf of a partnership. The Lead Applicant is responsible for meeting all Program requirements as set forth in the Request for Applications and for fulfilling the obligations of the grant award. The Lead Applicant is responsible for apportioning and distributing funding to subrecipients that they are partnering with and establishing clear roles and responsibilities within the partnership.
Partnership	A collaborative arrangement between two or more organizations for the purpose of deploying a Wireless Mobile Coverage Solution
Public Private Partnership	A long term arrangement or collaboration between a government entity and a private sector institution.
Project Team	All entities involved in a single application, with delineated roles and responsibilities

1. Introduction

The mission of the New York State Urban Development Corporation d/b/a Empire State Development (ESD) is to promote a vigorous and growing state economy, encourage business investment and job creation, and support diverse, prosperous local economies across New York State through the efficient use of loans, grants, tax credits, real estate development, marketing, and other forms of assistance. ConnectALL is Governor Kathy Hochul's initiative to address New York State's digital divide, transform the state's digital infrastructure, and ensure that all New Yorkers have access to reliable and affordable high-speed broadband internet service. ESD's ConnectALL Office, as the entity responsible for implementing the ConnectALL initiative, offers grants through multiple programs to close the digital divide, promote a robust broadband marketplace, and ensure all homes and businesses have access to reliable, affordable, high-speed internet.

a. Program Objectives

ConnectALL's Connectivity Innovation Program will provide funding to assist internet service providers, mobile network operators, system integrators, equipment vendors, research institutions, nonprofit organizations, government entities, and other well-situated stakeholders to research, develop, test, deploy, and document new technologies, business models, and use cases for the purposes stated by the Governor, consistent with the statutory authority described above, and in furtherance of the ConnectALL mission.

The ConnectALL Office will be the administrator of the Program. As such, the ConnectALL Office, or its duly authorized representative, will determine Program structure and requirements, evaluate Applicant information, monitor Grantees for project completion and satisfactory performance, collect Grantee data to ensure compliance with all Program requirements and verify allowable uses of funds, and approve disbursement of grant funds to selected Grantees.

b. Request For Application

This Mobile Service Request for Applications (RFA) under the ConnectALL Connectivity Innovation Program seeks to address the current market conditions that support deployment by Mobile Network Service Providers to most but not all of New York State. There are still Mobile Network Coverage Gaps in a variety of areas due to capacity and coverage constraints. Under current conditions, Providers are the only entities that can address those Gaps, leaving State, County, Local governments, and other civic entities with minimal recourse to meet the needs of constituents. These entities have a need for direct solutions to eliminate Mobile Network Coverage Gaps. This RFA seeks innovative ways public or other civic entities can implement a solution to enable mobile connectivity and expand coverage of Mobile Networks for broadband and other uses.

2. Background

a. Program Background

Section 16-GG*2 of the New York State Urban Development Corporation Act ("UDC Act"), Chapter 174 of the Laws of 1968, as amended, establishes the Division of Broadband Access, with the stated goal to "assist in ending the digital divide, supporting a more robust and competitive internet marketplace, and carrying out other actions to ensure universal access to high-speed, reliable, and affordable broadband." See UDC Act, §16-GG*2(1).[1] The statute also establishes the "ConnectALL Innovation Grant Program…which is authorized to develop, pilot, and deploy innovative models and technologies for the delivery of broadband services." Pursuant to the statute "grants issued pursuant to this program shall: (a) benefit the development of innovative and new broadband solutions and technologies; (b) deploy innovative broadband technology to rural, low-income, or other areas that would be unlikely to otherwise see such deployment; (c) promote critical private sector investment in such technologies; (d) provide seed funding for the development of such technologies and products; or (e) foster collaboration between the academic research community and the business sector for such purposes. " (See UDC Act, §16-GG*2(9))

Grants awarded through this Request for Applications ("RFA") will provide eligible applicants (see "Eligible Applicants" below) with grants to develop, test, deploy, and document new technologies to provide solutions for areas unserved or underserved by mobile cellular coverage. ConnectALL developed this RFA based on engagement with state agencies, municipalities, counties, regional planning boards, regional economic development organizations, tribal governments, utilities, internet service providers, mobile network operators, equipment manufacturers, researchers, and other stakeholders. ConnectALL identified the market gaps and deployment challenges to inform the RFA through the planning and implementation of other ConnectALL programs.

b. Funding Sources

This Program is funded from the New York State Executive Budget FY '22-'23.

3. Program Assistance and Eligibility

a. Grants

This RFA for Connectivity Innovation – Wireless Mobile Coverage Solutions RFA will provide financial assistance through competitively awarded grants to Eligible Applicants. Funds are available for the eligible uses described under Eligible Uses, and for the specific activities to be set forth in an Incentive Proposal and Grant Disbursement Agreement (GDA) that ConnectALL will negotiate and execute with each Grantee. ConnectALL anticipates awarding a total of $5 million dollars through three grant awards of $1-2 million each.

Awards are offered as an incentive to undertake a project. Therefore, the project should not begin, and expenses should not be incurred, before the Recipient executes an Incentive Proposal with ESD. Expenses incurred prior to submission of an application should not be included in the project budget. Expenses incurred after an application is submitted but prior to executing an Incentive Proposal are not eligible for reimbursement.

Grant payments will be disbursed in arrears as reimbursement following completion and approval of milestones and submission of invoices and proof of payment.

Grants awarded through this program are subject to Minority- and Women-Owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) participation goals. Empire State Development typically assigns a 30% target for MWBE participation. This target may be adjusted based on the applying entity, the scope of work, and whether the work will be contracted or self-performed by the applying entity.

b. Eligible Applicants

- Municipalities, counties, regional planning boards and/or regional economic development organizations
- Tribal governments
- Municipal utilities
- Internet service providers
- Mobile network operators, system integrators and/or equipment manufacturers
- Businesses with an innovative use case for connectivity
- Partnerships of Eligible Applicants listed above with a designated Lead Applicant

c. Eligible & Ineligible Uses of Funds

Eligible uses of Program funds include:

- Securing required leases, licenses, rights of way, easements, or other land rights or site access.
- Permitting activity including any required federal, state, or local zoning and permits required.
- Community engagement and/or public awareness and education.
- Technical and/or engineered plans and designs and environmental studies.
- Construction activity associated with the infrastructure and physical assets including site preparation.
- Materials, equipment or other physical assets.
- Software, software licenses.
- Backhaul connectivity.
- Financial Monitoring and Reporting.
- Project integration, testing and monitoring.
- Project management, operations, and maintenance.

Ineligible Uses of Program funds include**:**

- Duplicative project costs such as expenses funded by another award.
- Indirect or overhead costs.
- Any activities conducted outside the State of New York.

4. Project Requirements

a. Project Requirements

Projects funded through this RFA must meet the requirements below. If an Applicant would like to request a waiver for any of the requirements based on hardship, then written justification must be provided to explain the reason(s) for the hardship and the purported inability to comply with the requirement.

For all Applicants, the minimum requirements are as follows:

1) A terrestrial based project located in the State of New York.
2) A solution that enables a public or other civic entity to deploy Network Equipment that provides a mobile coverage solution to areas unserved or underserved by Mobile Network Service Providers.
3) A solution that demonstrates new and emerging technologies or the use of existing technology in novel, innovative ways.
4) A solution that provides an open environment capable of accommodating connectivity to multiple Mobile Network Service Providers and/or for other future Wireless uses. Examples include but are not limited to:
    a. Private Networks
    b. Open Radio Access Networks
    c. eSIM
    d. Spectrum sharing
    e. Passpoint Wi-Fi
    f. Software or equipment interoperable among Mobile Network Service Providers.
    g. Infrastructure capable of supporting multiple Mobile Network Service Providers.
5) All associated infrastructure and equipment must comply with State and Federal licensing, permitting, and siting regulations, including but not limited to the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act, New York State Historic Preservation Act, and the New York State Smart Growth Public Infrastructure Policy Act.
6) All proposed work must be completed within 36 months of issuance of an award which includes at least 12 months of equipment operability and testing.
7) Applicants must demonstrate an ability to administer the awards, ensure the fulfillment of all obligations and meet all ConnectALL reporting requirements.[1]

[1]Reporting requirements will be further enumerated in the relevant GDA but will at minimum include semiannual reporting of areas to be served by the project, the status of deployment, descriptions of facilities constructed, results from speed and coverage tests or comparable performance indicators, details of service being offered, utilization rates, any contracts or subcontracts awarded, details on project expenditures, and details on project workforce utilization.

b. Project Preferences

For all Applicants, please provide information and available supporting documentation for these preferred project attributes:

1) Public ownership of the project or a Public Private Partnership, or potential capability to progress towards full public ownership.
2) Intended for operations on and coverage of public land, in whole or part. In-building solutions (such as but not limited to signal boosters or repeaters) and wireless coverage strategies for enhancing reliable communication during recurring public event coverage solutions will also be considered.
3) Minimal ongoing operating costs or the ability to generate revenue in balance with operating costs, including a share of revenue for the continuing role of the public partner.
4) Preference for project(s) with letters of support, engagement or commitment from local partners, Mobile Network Service Providers, or other meaningful stakeholders.
5) Preference for project(s) that solve a unique challenge created by a Mobile Network Coverage Gap or other mobile wireless service challenge.
6) Preference for project(s) with identified locations and robust and comprehensive design documentation available for submission.
7) Preference for project(s) with a business plan that are intended to remain viable to provide a long-term solution, either in place or repeatedly re-deployed.

c. Project Performance Objectives

For all Applicants, please provide information and available supporting documentation for these Minimum Performance Requirements:

1) Reliable enhanced connectivity to Mobile Network Service Providers with commercially reasonable signal strength and download/upload speeds throughout the project area.
2) Demonstrate ability to accommodate future Wireless uses.
3) The Grantee's cybersecurity plan should reflect the latest version of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Framework for Improving Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity (currently Version 2.0) and the standards and controls set forth in Executive Order 14028.

d. Other Requirements

1) Applicants must follow all the applicable requirements of the New York State WIRED Broadband Act[2] and applicable laws.
2) Applicant acknowledges that any construction activity completed under this grant is subject to prevailing wage and will indicate inclusion of prevailing wage on budget estimates.
3) Completed Funding Request Template to provide details on the proposed project budget, sources of funds, cost share, and pro forma projections.
4) Completed disclosures and acknowledgements as required in the Consolidated Application Portal.
5) A match of project costs not less than 10% towards the total project cost in the form of equity contributed after the Grantee's written acceptance of ESD's Incentive Proposal. Equity is generally defined as cash injected into the project by the Recipient and should be auditable through a Grantee's financial statements or accounts, if so requested by ESD. Equity cannot be borrowed money secured by the assets in the project. ConnectALL may, in its discretion, award additional

[2] *See* https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/S8008 at Part MMM.

points for applications that satisfy or exceed the general cash-match equity contribution percentage requirement.

6) Payment of an administrative fee of 1% of the grant amount, in addition to the equity contribution.
7) Completed Waiver Request Template to identify any Program Requirements for which the Applicant seeks a waiver. For each waiver request, clearly specify the requirement the Applicant seeks to have waived and provide a justification to explain the reason(s) for the hardship and the purported inability to comply with the requirement.
8) Participation in meetings with ConnectALL to share progress, status updates, and best practices.
9) Coordination with ConnectALL on publicity about the program, including availability to support communication and public events as approved by ConnectALL.

5. Application Contents, Process and Timeline

a. Application

Responses to this RFA must be submitted through the Empire State Development Consolidated Funding Application Portal ("CFA"), which can be found at https://apps.cio.ny.gov/apps/cfa/. ConnectALL recommends that Applicants review the CFA early in their application process. The application can be downloaded from the CFA. All supplemental application materials including templates, appendices, and additional reference files are available on ConnectALL's website: [program page URL]. Applicants must use the ConnectALL-provided template(s). If application materials are submitted in alternative formats or modified versions of the ConnectALL template(s), they will not be reviewed, and the Applicant will be asked to re-submit their information using the correct templates.

b. Application Process and Timeline

Table 2: Grantee Selection Timeline

Milestone	Date
RFA issued / Opening of Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) Portal	April 11, 2025
Information session	To be announced
Application submission deadline	June 17, 2025
Anticipated announcement of conditional awards	July 2025
Anticipated incentive proposal execution	September 2025
All RFA schedule descriptions and dates are tentative and subject to change.	

Information Session

ConnectALL will hold a Program Information Session via Webinar which will be announced on the website **http://broadband.ny.gov**. All parties interested in responding to this RFA are encouraged to attend and can register via the website: **http://broadband.ny.gov**. Anything stated at this Information Session is not intended to change the solicitation document. Any changes will be in writing in the form of an addendum issued by ConnectALL posted on the website: **http://broadband.ny.gov**. Slides and the recording of the Program Information Session will be made available following the session at **http://broadband.ny.gov**.

Q&A Process

Applicants may communicate with the ConnectALL Office. All questions or requests for clarification must be in writing, sent by email to **Wireless@esd.ny.gov**. Please include "Applicant Connectivity Innovation – Mobile Service RFA" in the subject line of the email.

Applicants are encouraged, but not required, to submit questions in advance of the Information Session.

Deadline and Procedures for Submitting Applications

Applications to this RFA must be received by ConnectALL no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on June 17, 2025 Respondents are encouraged to submit applications as soon as they are able; Applications must be submitted via New York State's Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) at **https://apps.cio.ny.gov/apps/cfa**. Applications will be accepted through the CFA beginning on April 11, 2025. The application package can be found at **http://broadband.ny.gov**.

ConnectALL reserves the right to modify the schedule to meet the goals of the Program.

Application Review

ConnectALL will review applications for eligibility, completeness, quality, readiness, and conformance with this RFA. Applications shall be processed in full compliance with the applicable provisions of federal and state law, including 16-GG*2 of the New York State Urban Development Corporation Act[3].

6. Selection Criteria and Agreement Terms

a. Selection Criteria

Following the evaluation of the proposals based on the requirements listed under **Project Requirements**, ConnectALL will score the projects based on the following evaluation criteria. Based on the availability of funds, ConnectALL will deem the highest-scoring proposals to be conditionally eligible for an award.

Table 3: Application Evaluation Criteria

#	Evaluation Criterion	Scoring Weight
1	Project Ownership	20
2	Support for the project (letters of support and funding)	15
3	Project demonstrates a unique solution to a challenging mobile coverage issue	40
4	Project's business plan demonstrates a long-term coverage solution	25

b. Agreement Terms

All capital grants $250,00 and under require ESD CEO approval, public hearing and Public Authorities Control Board Approval. All capital grants above $250,000 are subject to ESD Board Approval, a public hearing, and Public Authorities Control Board Approval.

As a condition of the grant award, ConnectALL and the Grantees will enter into a Grant Disbursement Agreement (GDA), which will outline the Program's stipulations for compliance with Program requirements and penalties for failures to comply.

The financial structure of the GDA may differ based on each Grantee (or Subgrantee), the agreed-upon scope

[3] *See* https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/UDA/16-GG*2.

of work, the regional variation in costs associated with the Project, and the pricing of the work in relation to market fluctuations as best as the pricing can be understood in advance of the work execution. Depending on the project, Subgrantees may be party to the GDA.

The anticipated terms of the Grant agreements awarded will range, including start dates beginning later in 2025. Payments will be made as expense reimbursements after ConnectALL has approved milestone deliverables and received invoices and proof of payment for expenses. Deliverables will be enumerated in the Grant Disbursement Agreement to be mutually agreed on by ConnectALL and the Recipient. Operating expenses will not be eligible for reimbursement.

Respondents must submit a fee and contracting structure that ensures competitive pricing, compliant with all applicable laws and regulations. A not-to-exceed (NTE) amount will be established as part of the contract negotiations. However, ConnectALL reserves the right to select any payment structure that is in the State's best interest.

ESD typically requires a commitment fee of 1% of the capital grant amount. Grantees will be required to submit a commitment fee upon execution of their GDA.

Appendix A: Non-Discrimination and Contractor Diversity:

Pursuant to New York State Executive Law Articles 15-A and Article 3 of New York State Veterans' Services Law, ESD recognizes its obligation under the law to promote opportunities for maximum feasible participation of certified minority and women-owned business enterprises (MWBEs) and service-disabled veteran-owned businesses (SDVOBs) in the performance of ESD projects. The Recipient shall be required to use Good Faith Efforts (pursuant to 5 NYCRR §142.8 and 9 NYCRR § 252.2(m) to achieve MWBE and SDVOB Participation. In addition, ESD's MWBE and SDVOB Participation/Equal Employment Opportunity Policy will apply to this program. Specific goals related to the total value of ESD's funding will be established on a grant-by grant basis.

ESD has an agency-wide goal of 30% for MWBE participation, 15% for New York State-certified Minority-owned Business Enterprise ("MBE") participation and 15% for New York State-certified Women-owned Business Enterprise ("WBE") participation (based on the current availability of MBEs and WBEs). ESD has an agency-wide goal of 6% for SDVOB participation, based on the current availability of qualified SDVOBs.

Appendix B: Document Change Log

Version	Date Published	Summary of Changes
1.0	April 11, 2025	Initial publication