

Maine Broadband Authority to Seek Its Cut of USDA Funds

July 10, 2018



(TNS) — The ConnectME Authority and the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development are planning to apply for a share of \$600 million of available federal funding to improve rural broadband Internet access.

ConnectME and the U.S. Department of Agriculture will be hosting several community meetings this month throughout Maine as a precursor to filing the application, the agencies said Monday in a statement.

ConnectME has developed a statewide broadband action plan in partnership with DECD through a collaboration with broadband experts and Maine communities, along with a review of models used in other states, the statement said. The plan sets forth initiatives to meet Maine's broadband needs within five years of initial funding, and it assumes substantial local, state, federal and private-sector investment.

Currently, broadband expansion in Maine is funded through an assessment on consumer landline phone bills and totals an average of about \$850,000 a year, it said. While the assessment supports small projects and community planning, it will not support a statewide broadband expansion.

A federal omnibus bill that includes \$600 million for rural broadband nationally was recently passed by Congress and will be allocated through the USDA Office of Rural Development.

ConnectME and the USDA will be hosting several community meetings this month throughout Maine to help cities and towns give input on their planned broadband expansion projects.

ConnectME is a public arm of Maine state government whose mission is to facilitate the universal availability of broadband Internet access to Maine households and businesses. An estimated 20,000 households in Maine currently do not have access to reliable broadband Internet service, according to state experts.

©2018 the Portland Press Herald (Portland, Maine) Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

<http://www.govtech.com/network/Maine-Broadband-Authority-to-Seek-Its-Cut-of-USDA-Funds.html>