

ConnectME Announces Second Round of Grants

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Maine Governor John E. Baldacci and the ConnectME Authority announced that applications are now available for the second round of its grant program to expand Mainers' access to broadband service. More than \$1.5 million is expected to be available; nearly twice what was available for the first round. The grants will continue to be targeted to areas of the state that have no form of broadband or high-speed internet service available.

“The ConnectME initiative is spurring private investment in broadband and cellular service in Maine. These investments are enabling people in rural areas enhanced access to technology, transforming our state economy, and expanding business opportunities for more Mainers,” said Governor Baldacci.

The first round of grants awarded last year funded broadband service to more than 50 unserved communities, representing 14,400 households and businesses -- a 2.8 percent increase in broadband availability. The ConnectME Authority received 17 grant applications requesting more than \$2.4 million in gap funding, for projects totaling more than \$6.7 million. The Authority awarded seven grants totaling nearly \$800,000, for total project amounts of more than \$1.7 million. The grant projects range in size from \$38,000 to \$368,000 from Chebeague Island to 26 communities in Piscataquis County; from single projects in Somerville and Monson, to a project serving 18 communities in Washington County; and to a project that provides wireless service to Mount Desert and Cranberry Islands.

“Among the many reasons that we believe that access to broadband service is a necessity, are: the ability to telecommute, access to government services, and better access to health services and educational opportunities,” said Jean Wilson, the Authority's Chair. “And, according to a recent Brookings Institution Report, for every one percentage point increase in broadband penetration in a state, employment is projected to increase by 0.2 to 0.3 percent per year.” Eligible applicants are municipalities, co-ops, community groups, and broadband service providers.