



APPLICATION

South Carolina 2021 Rural Broadband Grant Program

Applicant Information

Applicant Name/Organization TruVista Communications, INC f/k/a The Chester Telephone Company

Applicant FCC Registration Number (FRN) 0001887116

Primary Contact Name Eric Ramey

Title VP- Regulatory & Administration

Mailing Address 112 York Street

Phone Number 803-581-9152

City, State, Zip Chester, SC 29706

Email eric.ramey@truvista.biz

Broadband Service Provider Experience

Date of Applicant's Initial FCC Form 477 Submission 12/9/2014

Date of Applicant's Most Recent FCC Form 477 Submission 03/15/2021

Applicant and/or Project Partner has Experience:

- Delivering broadband service via fiber and/or hybrid fiber-coax infrastructure
- Delivering broadband service via fixed wireless infrastructure
- Building and operating broadband networks in rural areas
- Operating broadband networks in low-moderate income areas

Project Area Information

Eligible County Impact

Counties

(list) Fairfield

(Project: Fairfield 03)

Cities/Towns/Municipalities

(list) Winnsboro

Households 124

Businesses 2

Health Care Facilities 0

Community Anchor Institutions 0

Educational Institutions 0

Contiguous County Impact

Counties
(list)

Cities/Towns/Municipalities
(list)

Households

Businesses

Health Care Facilities

Community Anchor Institutions

Educational Institutions

Broadband Infrastructure Information

Indicate the type(s) of broadband infrastructure technology to be deployed in the project area.

- Fiber to the Premises* Minimum Sustainable Download/Upload Speeds 1 Gbps
- Hybrid fiber-coax* Minimum Sustainable Download/Upload Speeds
(symmetrical upload/download speeds)
- Hybrid fiber-coax* Minimum Sustainable Download/Upload Speeds
(non-symmetrical upload/download speeds)
- Fixed wireless* Minimum Sustainable Download/Upload Speeds

Broadband Pricing Schedules or Tiers

Indicate all rate tiers for wireline projects of at least 100/20 Mbps or fixed wireless at 50/5 Mbps or faster that will be offered to customers in the project area:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rates less than \$10/month | <input type="checkbox"/> Rates between \$20 - \$24.99/month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rates between \$10 - \$14.99/month | <input type="checkbox"/> Rates between \$25 - \$34.99/month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rates between \$15 - \$19.99/month | |

Project Timeline

Project Start Date 07/15/21	Customer Premises
Project Construction Activity Begins 09/06/21	<i>Installations Begin</i> 10/29/21
Project Construction Activity Complete 10/29/21	<i>Installations End</i> 10/31/22
	Overall Project Completion Date 10/31/22

Project Cost Information

Total Project Cost \$667,985.00	Average Cost per Location Served <i>(all locations or structures)</i> \$5,301.47
Upfront Cost Requirements	
Cost of Building and/or Extending Infrastructure to Customer Premises \$750.00	Average Cost per Housing Unit \$5,301.47
	Average Cost per Business \$5,301.47

Project Funding Information

South Carolina Rural Broadband Grant Program Funds requested (\$) 333,992.50

Applicant-Provided Funding (\$) 333,992.50

Non-Public Funding

Amount (\$)

Source(s)

Additional Information

- 1) Describe Applicant's and/or project Partner's experience building and/or operating broadband networks.

"2021 South Carolina Broadband Experience" - attached

- 2) Describe how your proposal meets the needs of the community to be served as described in the "Guidelines."

"Meeting the Needs" - attached

- 3) Describe any plans or programs you have developed to improve adoption in the community described in this proposal. Please include letters of support from key community partners that indicate their awareness of your project.

"Plans or Programs" - attached

- 4) Provide documents that demonstrate your organization currently has the necessary funds (50% of total project cost) to complete this project/proposal. List documents here and attach documents to this proposal.

Matching Funds Affidavit - attached

- 5) List any lease, franchise agreement, interconnection agreement, authorization, permit, or other items needed to complete this project.

DOT permits needed

Attachments and Exhibits

Please attach the following items to application:

- Map of project area (*PDF and Shapefile formats*)
- Letters of support evidencing community need and strategic partnerships
- Any additional information evidencing community need for project
- Most recent FCC Form 477 filing

Certification and Signature

CERTIFICATION: The Applicant certifies that information included in this application is factual to their knowledge.

Signature: *Eric Ramey*

Print Name of Signatory: Eric Ramey

Title of Signatory: VP- Regulatory & Administration

Date: 05/14/2021

All questions and completed applications should be submitted to Broadband@ORS.SC.GOV

Facsimile signatures and email signatures shall be as effective as original signatures to bind any party.



South Carolina
Department of Commerce
Just right for business.



APPLICATION

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1) Describe Applicant's and/or project Partner's experience building and/or operating broadband networks.

TruVista Communications (TruVista) has been in business since 1897 and has a strong legacy of providing telecommunications service in the rural markets where we operate. Our Broadband experience begins with the offering of DSL over our copper network in 2000. The initial offering was 256K to the end-user, and we currently offer a maximum of 100M over our ADSL network in our copper footprint with up to 750M in our Coax footprint. Inside our Fiber footprint, we can address almost any customer requirements. The highest speed currently offered to our residential customers in our Fiber markets is 1G with 10G available in some markets in Q4. Higher speeds can certainly be accommodated if requested, and speeds to our commercial customers can go as high as 10G currently (if requested). Customer requirements are constantly being evaluated to determine if higher speeds are needed. When the market demands require, we are willing and capable of upgrading our core network to accommodate.

In an effort to become a “broader” provider of Internet Services, TruVista executed a strategy to obtain CATV/COAX facilities in our existing footprint or complementary territories as a part of our growth strategy. The first acquisition came in **2002** with a Cable purchase (from Comporium) in the Winnsboro, SC market. This initial CATV purchase required TruVista to build out a fully functioning Head End in order to provide video/internet services over the COAX facilities. TruVista personnel were closely and deeply involved with the buildout, which provided a tremendous opportunity for in **2006**, TruVista purchased the cable franchise located in Chester, SC from Charter Communications. This acquisition allowed TruVista to provide higher internet speeds to customers in our ILEC footprint. **2006** also saw TruVista purchase from Charter Communications their CATV franchise in Camden, SC.

This acquisition was followed closely by purchases from Comporium in Lewisville, SC, and from Cablevision in the Great Falls, SC marketplaces. These acquisitions occurred in **2007**.

2012 saw the remaining acquisitions (to date). Both of these occurred in Georgia and were purchased from Northland Communications and Gumlog Cable. Combine these purchases and the growth strategies associated; the upgrades and growth strategy in our copper footprint and finally our edging out strategy with FTTX, we have seen tremendous growth in our Broadband Subscribers. In the last 5 years (YE 2015 –YE 2020), we have seen subscriber growth rate grow 30+% in total. Our entire technician workforce is Broadband trained. Our NOC is Broadband trained, and education continues as the technology evolves.

TruVista continues to invest millions of dollars annually in capital primarily to ensure our ability to build, successfully deliver, upgrade and successfully maintain our Broadband Subscriber Base. Since 2012, TruVista's Capital Budget directly associated with the Network has grown 300+%. The primary driver of the increase and easily the majority of the investment is directly related to increasing and retaining Broadband Subscribers with FTTX technology utilized in all new buildouts.

Through the Vice President level, the TruVista leadership team has a vast and extensive knowledge of the communications industry. With a combined 180+ years of industry experience, this team manages significant projects on a regular basis. When Brian Singleton took over the leadership role as President and CEO 17 years ago, he began to assemble his key leadership team from talent he has known within the industry. Brian, currently CEO, has recently recruited a new EVP/CFO, Tim Geyer, who has 23 years of experience in the telecom industry and maintains his CPA certification. Tim's experience in the financial arena will be invaluable in maintaining the integrity of the finances. Brian also recruited Carla French, who is now serving as President/COO. Brian knows Carla from previously working with her at BellSouth. With her tenure at TruVista included, Carla brings 35 years of telecom experience to the team

Beginning with 2015's Capital Budget thru 2020 and budgeted for 2021, there will be \$100,000,000+ spent on network projects, of which 75-80% can be associated with Broadband. This funding is private to TruVista and does not include grants won over the last couple of years. The projects range from small fiber buildouts to major projects. In 2021 TruVista is planning to pass 6000 premises with FTTH. We continue a Beautification Fiber Project partnering with the city in the historical Camden, SC (Kershaw Co) area, and to date, we have invested \$5M+ in Capex. TruVista is currently constructing a \$12.14M USDA ReConnect Project in Kershaw County. We expect the ReConnect project to complete near YE 2021, over 3 years ahead of schedule. TruVista has also taken on a private project budgeted to be over \$5M to provide FTTH services to an underserved section of lower Richland County, passing over 2,000 premises. TruVista continuously evaluates opportunities to provide FTTH services in underserved geographies within South Carolina.


112 York Street
Chester, SC 29706


800.768.1212


TruVista.net

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2) Describe how your proposal meets the needs of the community to be served as described in the "Guidelines."

TruVista is committed to providing high quality, reliable and fast broadband connections to all households within reach of our service areas. When the opportunity to apply for funding through the SC Broadband Grant Program to help provide broadband services to unserved/underserved areas became available, TruVista recognized that it is uniquely positioned to build to the areas outlined in this application. TruVista will provide Fiber to the Premise (FTTP) based internet product to approximately 126 homes with symmetrical speeds of up to 1 Gbps.

Provided we are awarded funds; these projects will provide approximately 126 underserved households in this application area with broadband internet access that will facilitate distance-learning opportunities, telehealth applications, and enhanced Work-From-Home options. With 150+ employees in the South Carolina communities we serve, we are keenly aware of the needs of the communities. These folks are neighbors and friends of existing customers and potential customers. We proactively meet with community leaders to keep them informed of our Fiber deployment efforts. For example, we meet with City, County and Education leaders of Kershaw County to keep them informed of the USDA deployment. We also meet with interested community leaders around FTTX efforts. For example, we have recently met with the Santee-Lynches COG to brainstorm on FTTX efforts within their geography.

TruVista recognizes that speed to market is paramount to underserved communities and we are committed to deliver High Speed Broadband as quickly as possible. One example is our USDA ReConnect Round 1 award allowed for 5 years to complete the project, but our commitment (based on the USDA's ability to respond to "checkpoints") is to have the project completed in less than 2 years. TruVista will always strive to exceed expectations on delivery of service.

TruVista will continue to be active partners with communities and community leaders to work together to identify both needs and potential solutions.

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3) Describe any plans or programs you have developed to improve adoption in the community described in this proposal. Please include letters of support from key community partners that indicate their awareness of your project.

TruVista is committed to bringing reliable broadband and Wi-Fi services to our communities. We have previously been awarded a USDA ReConnect grant to bring high-speed internet to unserved and underserved areas of Kershaw County, SC. TruVista recently worked with the South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff to craft a broadband offer for low-income Students' in our service footprint who do not currently have an internet connection, anticipating a significant amount of classroom activity taking place in a virtual environment. This offer was intended to assist these lower-income households in ensuring their school-aged children have the resources to continue their educations successfully. At the time of school closings in March of 2020, TruVista committed to providing **free**, up to 25Mb internet service to homes with school-aged children but no Broadband connection. TruVista connected 1600+ student households, without charge, through the end of the school year. Internally the free internet offer was named Educate 2020, and it was offered across the TruVista footprint in South Carolina and Georgia. The Educate 2020 Program resulted in over 1,600 HSD connections. TruVista also participated in the 2020 Fall program to provide FTTH to student households and exercised a tremendous amount of energy to connect student households that were approved by the individual school districts/State of SC. TruVista has also participated in training community leaders in Chester and Fairfield Counties on the Broadband efforts and benefits of deployment. Also, we provided technical overviews to help these leaders better understand the technology itself and why Fiber was the desired technology.

TruVista was also recently approved as a participant in the Emergency Broadband Program. This program will help in the acceleration of Broadband adoption in unserved and underserved communities. TruVista has set up "registration" kiosks within all our retail facilities providing access to our customers or potential customers to apply for the EBB Program. We have also trained all of our customer facing reps on the program. Although we are not allowed to apply for the customer, we are attempting to make it easier for these potential customers to complete full applications.

March 13, 2021

Jim Stritzinger
Broadband Coordinator
State of South Carolina
Office of Regulatory Staff
1401 Main Street, Suite 900
Columbia, SC 29201

Re: South Carolina 2021 Rural Broadband Grant Program Letters of Support
TruVista Communications, INC (“TruVista”)

Dear Mr. Stritzinger,

TruVista has reached out to each of the authors of the attached Letters of Support for additional broadband infrastructure in South Carolina. Each of the authors has consented to TruVista continuing to use their support letter for the SC 2021 Rural Broadband Grant Program.

If you have any questions or if you need anything else, please let us know.

Sincerely,

TruVista Communications, INC.
112 York Street
Chester, SC 29706


112 York Street
Chester, SC 29706


800.768.1212


TruVista.net

JAMES E. CLYBURN
6TH DISTRICT, SOUTH CAROLINA

MAJORITY WHIP

CHAIR
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4006

March 11, 2020

Mr. Chad Rupe
Administrator
United States Department of Agriculture
Rural Utilities Service
1400 Independence Avenue, Southwest
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Rupe:

I am writing you in strong support of an application for funding which is being submitted to the United States Department of Agriculture for funding under the ReConnect Grant Program by TruVista Communications of Chester, South Carolina. In it's application, TruVista proposes to utilize project funding to currently unserved and underserved portions of rural Richland and Fairfield Counties.

This expansion of service would positively impact K-12 students in these communities who are provided mobile devices by their respective school districts however, they lack broadband access at their rural residences. Accordingly, they are unable to complete assignments and research. In addition, this expansion would enable the many senior citizens who live in these communities access to telehealth from home. This issue is particularly acute in Fairfield County which has closed its only hospital.

Administrator Rupe, I have long been a strong advocate for closing the digital divide in this nation's rural communities. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and the Rural Utilities Service for working with our rural communities to ensure that accessible and affordable broadband access is available for all citizens.

With kindest regards, I am

Sincerely,

James E. Clyburn
Majority Whip
U.S. House of Representatives



Dr. J.R. Green
Superintendent

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
Fairfield County School District

P.O. DRAWER 622
1226 HIGHWAY 321 BY-PASS SOUTH
Winnsboro, South Carolina 29180
PHONE: (803)635-4607
FAX: (803)635-6578

March 10, 2020

Chad Rupe, Administrator
USDA Rural Development, Rural Utilities Service
STOP 1510, Rm 5135
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1510

RE: Support Letter for **USDA ReConnect Application | TruVista Communications**

Dear Mr. Rupe,

On behalf of the Fairfield County School District, I write today to express my personal support, and that of my entire faculty, staff and administration, to TruVista Communication's (TruVista) grant application for the USDA ReConnect program. TruVista is the preferred Internet Service Provider in our county and they are also a go-to community partner. Impressively, they have been providing outstanding telecommunications service to our residents – and my students - since 1897. Therefore, I want to do whatever is necessary to support this grant application.

As Superintendent, my vision is to provide a rigorous, student-centered, and engaging educational experience. In addition to ensuring that students are proficient in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics, we make a commitment to giving each student the opportunity to develop his/her talents in the areas of Arts and Athletics. We also have an extraordinary one-to-one program and every child in Fairfield County has their own device. We understand that this comprehensive experience contributes to maximizing the personal and academic potential of each of our students.

That said, we further understand that there is a huge digital divide in our rural community and many of our students, due to a lack of Internet access, find it impossible to complete their assignments or do research at home. With better connectivity, we also feel confident that student achievement will improve dramatically in Fairfield County.

TruVista is a vital, trusted partner to the Fairfield County School District. TruVista staff members live and work in our community and many of their children attend our schools. We think the USDA would be wise to fund this application.

This grant has the potential to completely transform Fairfield County and positively impact our students, residents, and businesses for many years to come. Please contact me if I can provide any further information in support of this application.

Sincerely,

J. R. Green, Superintendent

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House of Representatives

State of South Carolina

Committees:
Medical, Military,
Public and Municipal
Affairs

March 20, 2020

Chad Rupe, Administrator
USDA Rural Development, Rural Utilities Service
STOP 1510, Rm 5135
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1510

RE: Support Letter for USDA ReConnect Application | TruVista Communications

Dear Mr. Rupe,

I write today to express strong support to TruVista Communication's (TruVista) grant application for the USDA ReConnect program. In its' application, TruVista proposes to utilize project funding to reach currently unserved and underserved portions or rural Fairfield and Richland Counties.

This expansion of service will positively impact K-12 students, improve resident healthcare, drive economic development, increase property values, decrease emergency response times and, in general, improve the vibrance of both Fairfield and Richland Counties. Of particular note, this project will impact over 1400 households, cover 220 square miles, and install approximately 425 miles of desperately needed fiber.

In addition, I need to express my complete confidence in TruVista. They are definitely the preferred Internet Service Provider in the region and are also a go-to community partner for projects big and small. Impressively, they have been providing outstanding telecommunications service to our residents since 1897. I feel certain that they will get the project done on-time and on-budget.

In short, I think this investment will completely transform two of my counties and I express my full support of their application.

Please contact me if I can provide any further information in support of this application.

With kindest regards, I am.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Annie E. McDaniel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Representative Annie E. McDaniel
SC House District 41
803.960.5782 (Mobile)