

# VERMONT ACCESS NETWORK (VAN)

8 June 2020

**MEMO TO:** Reps. Tim Briglin, Chair and Laura Sibilgia, Co-Chair, HE&T Committee

**FROM:** Lauren-Glenn Davitian, CCTV Center for Media & Democracy/ VAN, [davitian@cctv.org](mailto:davitian@cctv.org), 802.777.7542

**RE:** COVID-19 Funding Proposal for Public, Educational, and Government (PEG) Access (V2)

Thank you for the opportunity to follow up to [testimony provided by Vermont Access Network \(VAN\) to the House Energy and Technology Committee on June 4th 2020](#). We estimate the cost of providing essential service to Vermont during the COVID-19 period to be: for additional computing/ bandwidth to support remote processing of PEG content, for additional technical/ production services.

This does not include lost revenue from earned/ philanthropic revenue or anticipated revenue to be lost through Q2 and 2020 due to cable cord cutting \$700K.

<b>I. Estimated Cost - VAN COVID-19 Recommendations</b>				
	<u>Unit</u>	<u>Media Centers</u>	<u>Unit Cost</u>	<u>Total</u>
Remote Worker Equipment/ Bandwidth to Support Processing, Production, Distribution				
Workstation	1	25	\$5,000	\$125,000
Bandwidth/ Monthly	1	25	\$1,000	\$25,000
Zoom Subscriptions (\$160)/ Telework Software (\$500/year)	1	25	\$660	\$16,500
Live Streaming Computing & Storage to Support Increased Demand for Livestreaming Services by Government and Community Based Organizations	1	25	\$7,000	<u>\$175,000</u>

				\$341,500
	<u>hours</u>	<u>Media Centers</u>	<u>per hour rate</u>	
Increased Services Technical & Production Support	100	25	\$100	\$250,000
<b>Total</b>				<b>\$591,500</b>

We appreciate your consideration and are available to discuss this Memo in more detail, at your convenience.

**1. Value of PEG is Established:** The State of Vermont recognizes the value of public, educational, and government (PEG) access channels and services through thirty-five years of cable utility case law. More recently the Legislature authorized a Study Committee to look at the future of funding for community media and recommended further analysis of funding and policy alternatives to declining cable franchise fee dollars. [\(S.318\)](#)<sup>1</sup>

**2. Essential Service Delivery:** Vermont’s 25 community media centers are providing essential public, educational and government (PEG) access services during the COVID-19 period. In response to the health emergency, Vermont’s community media centers pivoted immediately to deliver emergency communications, expand service as needed, and maintain continuity of operations, as follows:

- **Ongoing emergency management updates** (e.g. Governor’s press conferences, local hospital and legislator updates, public service announcements produced in multiple languages covering a range of topics, including health and food access).
- Production and technical support to enable the **live streaming and archiving of remote government meetings** (local and state).

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<sup>1</sup> S.318 seeks expert analysis of how Vermont can extract public benefit from commercial uses of its rights to support, for example, PEG.

- Production and delivery of **educational programs for Vermonters of all ages**. These include: programming for elementary and high school students, such as the Fairbanks Museum’s Virtual Learning series with KATV; community based training to navigate COVID period” such as “Work with What You’ve Got” (live sessions post produced in to short videos), and ongoing webcasts produced with the Vermont Chamber, VBSR, DOL and other state intermediaries to better understand PPP & EIDL, plans for re-opening, and implications of the economic downturn.
- **Election coverage** includes emerging candidate forums and transparency for absentee ballot casting. In Milton, for example, LCATV will cover the “drive through voting” for the school budget while providing an all-day live stream shot of the voting machines to provide security and public peace of mind.
- Live streaming and archiving of **important community-weaving events** (e.g. graduations from hundreds of schools, varied religious services).
- Continued open forum for the **expression of ideas and solutions** (e.g. current anti-racism demonstrations).
- **Bulletin board and social media postings** sharing relevant information on local schedules and current information.

**3. Financial Implications of COVID-19 Period:** As Vermont’s community media centers expand their coverage, we are experiencing financial impacts, including:

**Increased Operating Costs:** VAN staff members are working remotely as the demand for live streaming/ archiving increases resulting in unanticipated but necessary expenses:

- **Remote Workforce with Necessary Computing/ Bandwidth Needs:** Vermont’s community media centers moved immediately to remote worksites, with staff now processing and managing a hundreds of hours of programming from their homes. Because most staff do not have the necessary equipment at their homes, community media centers paid to upgrade newly remote staff workstations with computing and bandwidth necessary to process and distribute large video files from their homes to regional playback centers and online platforms.

- **Increased Programming and Technical Service Delivery** - In addition to increased production to respond to the health emergency, PEG staff provides free technical support to municipalities to get their meetings online quickly and support the explosion of livestreaming requests by community based organizations. Literally hundreds of hours have been spent by PEG staff to the community switch to remote video interactions.
- **Remote Meeting Subscriptions** - This switch has been further supported by the unanticipated subscriptions to remote video production platforms (e.g. Zoom) and collaborative work spaces (e.g. Slack).
- **Increase Live Streaming and Storage Capacity** - The increased demand for live streaming of meeting and events by local government and community based organizations has also necessitated the immediate purchase of computers, software and storage capacity to ensure high quality audio & video signals for simultaneous live broadcasting & streaming.