By this Public Notice, the Wireline Competition Bureau (Bureau) authorizes rural broadband experiment support for First Step Internet, LLC (First Step) and Northeast Rural Services, Inc. (Northeast Rural Services) for the winning bids identified in the Attachment of this Public Notice. The $1,299,730.45 in support that we authorize today will bring new broadband to 202 census blocks in three states.

On December 5, 2014, the Commission announced the first round of provisionally selected bidders for the rural broadband experiments.1 By specified deadlines, the provisionally selected bidders were required to submit certain technical and financial information, a letter of credit (LOC) commitment letter from a bank meeting the Commission’s requirements, and documentation of their eligible telecommunications carrier (ETC) designations in all of the areas for which they will receive support, and certify that the information submitted is accurate.2 After reviewing these materials, the Bureau announced on May 27, 2015 that it was ready to authorize support for 15 specific bids and set a deadline of June 10, 2015 for the provisionally selected bidders to submit a least one acceptable irrevocable standby LOC and Bankruptcy Code opinion letter from legal counsel.3

For each of the winning bids identified in the Attachment, the Bureau has reviewed the winning bidders’ submissions, including the LOC and Bankruptcy Code opinion letter from the winning bidders’ legal counsel. Based on the representations and certifications in the winning bidders’ applications, the Bureau now authorizes support for the winning bids listed in the Attachment. A list of the relevant census blocks is available at https://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/rural-broadband-experiments.

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Upon issuance of this Public Notice, the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) is
directed and authorized to obligate and disburse from the Connect America reserve account the support
amounts identified in the Attachment to the winning bidder associated with each study area specified in
the Attachment. USAC shall disburse the support amounts to Northeast Rural Services in 120 equal
monthly installments over the 10-year support term. First Step elected to receive 30 percent of the total
support upfront in exchange for meeting accelerated deployment obligations. USAC shall disburse 30
percent of First Step’s total support amount with the first monthly payment, and disburse the remaining
70 percent of its support in 120 equal monthly installments over the 10-year term. USAC will make
disbursement payments to the account on file for the Service Provider Identification Number associated
with the rural broadband experiment study area code (SAC).

In the Rural Broadband Experiments Order, the Commission adopted a requirement that
recipients file an interim report on November 1, 2015, describing the status of their project (i.e., whether
vendors have been hired, permits have been obtained, construction has begun) and including evidence
regarding the locations (if any) that the recipients have built out to in their project areas by September 30,
2015. This interim reporting requirement is subject to approval by the Office of Management and
Budget under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. We will announce by public notice when approval
is granted and set a deadline for submission of this interim report at that time. We also note that we
previously concluded that there is good cause to waive on our own motion the general high-cost support
program requirement that the relevant states file a section 54.314 certification on rural broadband
experiment recipients’ behalf by October 1, 2015 with respect to the use of rural broadband experiment
support.

We also remind recipients that a winning bidder that has been authorized to receive rural
broadband experiment support will default if it fails to meet its build-out obligations to offer service
delivering the requisite speed, latency, usage and pricing, fails to keep open and renew its LOC, or fails to
fulfill any other term or condition of rural broadband experiment support. Under the terms of the LOC,
the Commission will be entitled to draw upon the LOC upon a recipient’s default after the opportunity to
cure. Recipients may also be subject to other sanctions for non-compliance with the terms and
conditions of the rural broadband experiments or the Commission’s rules.

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4 Rural Broadband Experiments Order, 29 FCC Rcd at 8794, para. 75.
5 Id. at 8796, para. 81.
7 See Rural Broadband Experiment Support Authorized for Ten Winning Bids for Skybeam, LLC, Consolidated
Communications Networks, Inc., Delta Communications LLC, and Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative, Inc.,
8 Rural Broadband Experiments Order, 29 FCC Rcd at 8799, para. 90.
9 Id. at 8799, paras. 92-93.
10 Id. at 8800, paras. 94, 96.
We note that price cap carriers that serve the census blocks where the rural broadband experiment winning bidders have been authorized to receive support no longer have a federal high-cost ETC obligation to continue to offer voice in those census blocks pursuant to the forbearance granted in the December 2014 Connect America Order.\footnote{Connect America Fund et al., WC Docket Nos. 10-90 et al., Report and Order, 29 FCC Rcd at 15663-71, paras. 50-70 (2014); see also 47 C.F.R. § 54.201(d)(3). We will remove these census blocks from the list of census blocks where price cap carriers continue to have the federal high-cost ETC obligation to provide voice service. The “List of Census Blocks Subject to Federal High-Cost Voice Obligations” is available at https://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/price-cap-resources.}

For further information, please contact Heidi Lankau, Telecommunications Access Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau at 202-418-7400 or at TTY (202) 418-0484.

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