



2012 Don and Rosemary Vial Awards for Digital Inclusion: Outstanding Performance by an Organization Nominee



Redwood Coast Connect (RCC) is an ongoing network of individuals & non-profit organizations whose goal is to make broadband Internet available to all residents in the four-county region of Humboldt, Del Norte, Mendocino, and Trinity. RCC was the first regional rural broadband consortium created in the state to partner with the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF). RCC was one of CETF's first matching grants, and the pilot project released a report in January of 2009. This report analyzed the region's: Demand—including willingness to pay, the relative importance of broadband to homes and businesses, present uptake rates, and potential for and challenges to demand aggregation; Supply—including mapping of current coverage, identifying unserved and underserved communities, and identification of critical missing infrastructure; and Current policy climate—including identification of policy barriers to rural deployment as well as opportunities for advocacy. The report's success sparked CETF to invest in other rural regions throughout the state following the same model.

Before the RCC Report, the regional strategy for increasing broadband was to beg existing large telecom companies to invest in rural Northcoast communities. Since the report, the region has attracted other players in the telecom industry to invest in rural Broadband infrastructure. Additionally, the RCC Report helped coalesce the region around the need for broadband planning on a large scale that has led to a successful multi-county middle mile proposal from the California Advanced Services Fund, which will provide connectivity to several of the regions most remote towns while meeting the more urban regions' redundancy needs.

RCC has conducted a series of Regional Broadband Forums that attracted an average attendance of 150 community members, business owners, Tribal leaders and public officials. These forums have resulted in a more complete picture of the concerns and ideas of rural people, enlisted buy-in for broadband connectivity and raised awareness of broadband as a critical component for rural prosperity. The RCC leadership committee is made up of some of the region's most respected organizations and one Board of Supervisors member from each of the four counties.

The long-term goal is to make ubiquitous broadband available to all rural communities in the region through the aggregation of users, engagement of providers, and simplification of county and municipal policies, and by enlisting the ingenuity of entrepreneurs in the region. RCC and its members were instrumental in assisting IP Networks Inc. in San Francisco in obtaining support from the California Advanced Services Fund for the Highway 36 Humboldt-Trinity Counties Project (Resolution T-17227). This project will provide high-speed infrastructure for Humboldt and Trinity counties. RCC leaders provided community engagement, gathering letters of support, and connections with anchor institutions and elected officials.

Rural Californians living in Humboldt, Del Norte, Trinity and Mendocino counties experience poverty and isolation to a much higher degree than most in the state. By bringing together a diverse coalition of stakeholders to work with the telecom industry, RCC is bringing practical, cooperative solutions to the formidable task of bringing broadband infrastructure into some of the most topographically challenging rural regions in California.