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Poultney, Westside in pilot computer program

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Poultney and West Rutland will get new computers and other services as part of a pilot program run by the Vermont Council on Rural Development.

The Council announced earlier this month that the towns were two of the 12 chosen to participate in the "e-Vermont Community Broadband Project," a pilot program aimed at helping Vermont towns make better use of the Internet.

The two-year program, which will bring in 12 more towns next year, has \$3.7 million in funding.

"It's not really about money," said Paul Costello, VCRD's executive director. "It's about a set of services that will help towns take Internet use to a whole new level over a couple years."

Part of that is giving more computers to schools and libraries, Costello said, and part of involves locally directed initiatives.

"We're looking at trying to get our tax maps online with the listers' information on them," said Mary Ann Goulette, West Rutland's town manager.

Goulette said the town was also keen on the extra computers following a survey of the third- and fourth-grade classes that found only 35 percent of students have computers in their homes.

"Everyone needs access to computers in this day and age," she said. "Our library only has three, so there's potential to expand."

Poultney's application to the program proposed creating a community website as well as holding workshops on computer skills for seniors and business owners.

Costello said the program will be tailored to each community, where VCRD will work with a local committee to determine what people in town are most interested in. He said they could help individual businesses decide how to better use the Internet or help a group of businesses put together a tourism package.

"If there were 10 students who wanted a course on making a wiki site or blogging, we might do a class with the colleges," Costello said. "It's going to be custom-driven based on community needs."

Costello said \$2.5 million of the funding came from stimulus money and the remainder was donations and in-kind services from partners including Comcast, Dell and

Microsoft.

Other communities chosen for the program in 2010 are Brighton, Bristol, Canaan, Cambridge, Grand Isle County, Ludlow, Middlesex, Newport, Pownal and Sunderland.

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