

The Virgin Islands Consortium

FCC Approves Additional \$64 Million In Immediate Funding To Restore Communications Networks In USVI, Puerto Rico

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The Federal Communications Commission (F.C.C.) said on Tuesday that it has approved additional immediate funding to accelerate the restoration of communications networks in U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico that were damaged and destroyed during the 2017 hurricane season.

According to the release, the FCC is also seeking comment on injecting almost \$900 million in medium- and long-term funding into expanding and improving broadband access on the islands. To accomplish these goals, the commission said it has created

the "Uniendo", a Puerto Rico Fund (Bringing Puerto Rico Together Fund) and the "Connect USVI Fund".

"The commission's action today will not only help complete the recovery from last year's devastating storms, but seeks comment on much-needed funding for long-term improvement and expansion of broadband throughout Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands," said FCC Chairman Ajit Pai. "During my visits to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, I saw that it was critical for the F.C.C. to not only address today's urgent needs, but to look ahead to support the broadband networks the islands need to thrive in the 21st Century."

The Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking includes:

- An immediate infusion of approximately \$64 million in additional funding for short-term restoration efforts.
- Conversion of \$65.8 million in advanced funding the Commission provided last year to carriers in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands into new funding by declining to recover that advanced funding from future universal service support payments.
- Solicitation of public comment on a proposal to allocate over the next decade for the expansion of fixed broadband connectivity approximately \$444.5 million in funding for Puerto Rico and \$186.5 million for the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- Solicitation of public comment on a proposal to allocate approximately \$259 million in medium-term funding for the expansion of 4G LTE mobile broadband connectivity in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

To expedite buildout, opportunities for the first stage of funding are open to all facilities-based providers in Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands of voice and broadband service, subject to receiving an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC) designation, according to the release. To participate, providers must certify their eligibility no later than 14 days after publication of the Order in the Federal Register.

Mr. Pai has visited Puerto Rico twice since the hurricane hit last year, [traveling](#) to Puerto Rico initially last November. He also [visited Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands](#) from March 7-10, where he led a team to review recovery efforts, evaluate lessons learned from Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and prepare for the upcoming hurricane season.

The F.C.C. said it has taken numerous actions to promote public safety and connectivity in the aftermath of last year's hurricanes. In addition to providing public information on network outage conditions and sending staff to monitor and aid recovery efforts, the commission said it offered the territories nearly [\\$77 million](#) in advanced universal service funding to help recovery, accelerated the [post-incentive auction transition](#) to support Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands broadcasters, [granted](#) temporary waivers of Lifeline's recertification rules, expedited approval of experimental licenses for Alphabet's [Project Loon](#) to provide Internet access to residents, approved targeted and flexible [E-Rate support](#) to help restore connectivity of schools and libraries, and granted more than 500 waivers and requests for Special Temporary Authority (STA) to help re-establish communications in hurricane-affected areas.