Q&A

The following section provides answers to frequently asked questions related to this type of project. If your question is not included, please contact us at propuestas@vpnet.net for additional information.

1. What is the total length of the route (aerial and underground)?

Answer: The route runs from Patillas (18.005337, -66.015453) to Cidra (18.177561, -66.147418). Exhibits A-1 and B-1 contain the detailed engineering plans with exact mileage by segment. We recommend attending the site visit scheduled for September 4, 2026.

2. How much underground vs. aerial excavation is expected?

Answer: The Scope of Work (Exhibit A-2) specifies 840 service drops and 149 hand holes. The exact distribution between aerial and underground construction is detailed in the engineering plans. A minimum depth of 3 feet is required in low-traffic rural areas.

3. Who is responsible for obtaining permits?

Answer: vpnet is responsible for easements, rights-of-way, and RUS environmental approvals before the Notice to Proceed (Section 3.6.1.3). The selected contractor must support:

- Traffic control plans
- Utility locates
- Field coordination with DTOP, municipalities, LUMA Energy, and AAA

4. Are soil studies or existing utility reports available?

Answer: Exhibit B-2 contains the environmental certification (Categorical Exclusion). Proponents are responsible for conducting their own due diligence during the site visit period. vpnet does not guarantee subsurface conditions; contractors are expected to visit the full corridor before bidding.

5. What does Build America, Buy America (BABA) mean, and how does it differ from Buy American?

Answer:

- RUS Buy American (7 CFR 1787): materials financed with RUS funds must be domestic products.
- BABA (2 CFR Part 184 / IIJA): ALL iron, steel, manufactured products, and construction materials must be produced in the U.S. (melting, manufacturing, >55% domestic content).
- Both apply in parallel (Section 6.4.7A). BABA waivers must be requested from USDA before acquiring non-compliant materials.

6. What happens if a critical material is not available in the U.S.?

Answer: You may request a BABA waiver under three categories:

- Nonavailability: not available in sufficient quantity/quality in the U.S.
- Unreasonable cost: increases the project cost by >25%
- Public interest: inconsistent with the public interest
- Waivers must be approved by USDA before acquisition. Do not assume they will be granted.

7. Is prevailing wage / Davis-Bacon required?

Answer: Yes, if applicable under federal regulations (Section 6.4.5). All laborers and mechanics must receive prevailing wages determined by the Secretary of Labor. vpnet will confirm applicability before award.

8. What is the 10% contingency and how is it used?

Answer: The contingency (maximum 10% of the Construction Subtotal, Attachment 4) is only for unforeseen changes during construction (utility conflicts, archaeological findings, agency directives). It does NOT cover:

- Bidder estimating errors
- Post-contract material increases
- Rework due to non-compliance
- Any change order >$25,000 requires approval from the RUS GFR.

9. When are payments made?

Answer: RUS Form 515 (Telecommunications System Construction Contract) will be used. Payments are processed through the Reimbursement Method according to progress on approved Assembly Units (AU). vpnet maintains a Pledged Deposit Account; funds flow after inspection by the RUS GFR.

10. Is a bid bond required?

Answer: Yes, 5% of the Total Bid Price (Section 1.2.8), from a surety with a minimum A.M. Best rating of A- VII, licensed in Puerto Rico. A performance bond is also required pursuant to 7 CFR 1788 Subpart C.

11. What is the expected start date?

Answer:

- Public Bid Opening: October 8, 2026
- Notice of Award (expected): October 19, 2026
- Executed contract (expected): October 26, 2026

NO work may begin without a written Notice to Proceed from vpnet after final permits and RUS approval.

12. How much time is allowed to complete the project?

Answer: Not specified in the IFB; it must be included in the Construction Schedule (Attachment 4, Section 3.6.1.4). Time extensions >30 aggregate calendar days require approval from the vpnet Board and modification of the RUS award.

13. Are there floodplain areas?

Answer: Yes. Portions of the corridor are in Special Flood Hazard Areas (FEMA). Regulation No. 13 (Exhibit H-1) applies. The environmental certification (Exhibit B-2) includes compliance conditions.

14. Who coordinates with LUMA Energy, AAA, and municipalities?

Answer: vpnet is the primary liaison with agencies (Section 3.5.5). The contractor must perform field coordination (utility locates, traffic control, scheduling) and prepare permit submittals that vpnet will sign as Awardee.

15. Can I subcontract all the work?

Answer: Permitted under RUS Form 282 (Subcontract). The prime contractor retains full responsibility for subcontractors' acts. All subs must comply with BABA, bonding, insurance, and Puerto Rico licensing. Minimum qualifications (Section 5.4) apply.

16. Is a Puerto Rico professional license required?

Answer: Yes, pursuant to Act 173 of 1988 (Section 3.6). The Project Manager or engineer in charge must hold a valid Professional Engineer License in Puerto Rico if supervising design or critical technical decisions. Verify requirements with the Puerto Rico Board of Examiners of Engineers and Architects.

Respuesta: Sí, conforme Act 173 de 1988 (Sección 3.6). El Project Manager o ingeniero a cargo debe poseer Professional Engineer License válida en Puerto Rico si supervisa diseño o decisiones técnicas críticas. Verificar requerimientos con la Junta Examinadora de Ingenieros y Arquitectos de Puerto Rico.

17. What insurance is required?

Answer: Attachment 5 details the minimum coverage:

- General Liability: $2M per occurrence / $4M aggregate
- Auto Liability: $1M combined single limit
- Workers' Comp: Puerto Rico statutory limits
- Umbrella/Excess: $5M per/aggregate

- Builder's Risk: Total value in progress

vpnet and RUS must be Additional Insureds. Insurance certificates must be submitted before Notice to Proceed.

18. What type and capacity of optical fiber will be installed?

Answer: The specific details (strand count, single-mode/multimode fiber type, optical specs) are in Exhibit A-1 (Engineering Plans). The contractor must comply with TIA/EIA and IEEE standards for splicing, OTDR testing, and insertion loss. The Scope of Work includes acceptance testing (Section 3.6.3.1).

19. What is the minimum trench depth?

Answer:

- Low-traffic rural areas: 3 feet minimum (Section 3.6.2.1)
- Road crossings: pursuant to DTOP permits and applicable regulations
- Urban areas: according to municipal and DTOP permits
- All trenches must be photographically documented and compacted with compaction certification.

20. Is direct-buried fiber required or is conduit mandatory?

Answer: HDPE conduit is mandatory (Section 3.6.2.2). Direct-buried fiber is not permitted in this project. This protects against physical damage, allows future removal, and complies with RUS requirements for funded projects.

21. What is a "hand hole" vs. a "splicing chamber"?

Answer:

- Hand holes (149 units): small underground access points (typically 2'x2' or prefab) for pull-in, identification, and management of fiber slack.
- Splicing chambers (quantity TBD in A-2): larger sealed enclosures for fusion splicing of optical joints, protected against water/moisture.
- Both must be watertight and accessible for maintenance.

22. What are the acceptance criteria for the fiber?

Answer: Pursuant to Exhibit A-1 (Technical Specifications), this includes:

- OTDR testing (path loss per kilometer)
- Insertion loss (splice loss, typically <0.1 dB)
- Continuity of all strands
- Return loss (if applicable)

All tests must be documented in a written report (Section 3.6.3.1). The RUS GFR verifies before closeout.

23. Who performs the final inspection?

Answer: Joint final inspection (Section 3.6.3.2):

- vpnet engineer
- Contractor (Selected Respondent)
- RUS General Field Representative (GFR)
- vpnet representative

Any deficiency must be corrected at no additional cost (Section 3.6.3.5). The RUS Form 515 Step-by-Step Procedure for Closeout from the ReConnect Program Construction Procedures is used.

24. What documentation is required for closeout?

Answer: RUS Form 515 Closeout (Section 3.6.3.4) includes:

- RUS Form 724 (Final Inventory, Certificate of Completion)
- RUS Forms 724a/724b (Assembly Units / Material Items)
- RUS Form 213 (Buy American Certificate)
- As-built drawings (AutoCAD DWG + PDF in GIS-compatible format)
- Change Order Log (contingency reconciliation)
- BABA compliance pack (manufacturer certifications, country of origin, waivers)
- Release of Liens (subcontractors, suppliers)
- Insurance certificates (valid through final acceptance)

25. How much time do I have to submit As-Built drawings?

Answer: There is no specific deadline, but they must be included in the closeout package before final reimbursement (Section 3.6.3.3). Required format: native AutoCAD DWG + PDF, reflecting the actual configuration vs. original plans, with documented deviations.

26. Is a warranty required?

Answer: Yes, minimum 1 year (Section 3.6.3.6) from final acceptance. All workmanship and material defects must be remedied at no cost to vpnet. This covers splice failures, fiber breaks, and performance degradation.

27. How are changes approved during construction?

Answer: Pursuant to Section 6.1.7 (Change Order Procedures):

Identification: Contractor notifies utility conflict, subsurface condition, or agency directive

Documentation:

- Change narrative with GPS/references
- Evidence photos
- Cost estimate using unit prices from Attachment 4
- Schedule analysis
- BABA compliance certifications
- Authorization:
- <$10K: vpnet Project Manager
- $10K–$50K: vpnet VP + notification to RUS GFR
- $50K: vpnet Board + prior written RUS GFR approval

DO NOT begin change work without written authorization.

28. Does the contingency cover every type of change?

Answer: NO. Eligible changes (Exhibit A-2):

- Unforeseen underground utility conflicts
- Rock / unsuitable soil not identified during the site visit
- Post-contract directives from DTOP, PREPA, municipalities
- Archaeological / environmental findings

Ineligible:

- Contractor estimating errors
- Item omissions in the original bid
- Rework due to non-compliance with specs
- Poor scheduling / delays due to insufficient personnel