



Broadband Technology Opportunities Program Key Revisions in Second Notice of Funds Availability

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The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) is making a number of targeted changes to the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) in the second funding round. These changes are based on public feedback and on the agency's experience administering the first round of funding. The primary goals of these changes are to increase efficiency, sharpen the BTOP's funding focus, and improve the applicant experience. The following are key revisions in the NTIA's Notice of Funds Availability (NOFA) for the second round of BTOP, though applicants should review the NOFA in its entirety.

Separate BTOP and BIP Applications for Increased Efficiency

In the first round, NTIA and the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) issued a joint NOFA for BTOP and RUS's Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP), giving applicants the option to file applications with both programs jointly. For the second round of funding, RUS and NTIA are issuing separate NOFAs to better promote each agency's distinct objectives. RUS and NTIA are, therefore, eliminating the option of filing joint BIP/BTOP applications, as the joint application process was burdensome for some applicants. Eliminating this option will also help NTIA review applications in a timely manner.

Focus on "Comprehensive Community" Infrastructure Projects for Maximum Investment Impact

With respect to infrastructure projects, NTIA's top priority is to fund "comprehensive communities" projects, focusing on middle mile broadband projects and the connection of key community anchor institutions as a way of maximizing the benefits of BTOP funds. In adopting this approach, NTIA has restructured the Broadband Infrastructure category of the first NOFA into the Comprehensive Community Infrastructure category.

Unserved and Underserved Areas

NTIA is removing the requirement that infrastructure projects connecting community anchor institutions, including community colleges, must be located in unserved or underserved areas, though projects in unserved and underserved areas will receive additional consideration.

Improved Online Application Process

NTIA has made numerous adjustments to the online application system to streamline the intake of information and make the process more user-friendly. These include reducing the number of attachments to be uploaded with the application, eliminating the proposed funded service area mapping tool, and modifying the service area delineations from Census blocks to Census tracts and block groups.

Clarifying NOFA Provisions

NTIA is clarifying a number of NOFA provisions. For example, NTIA is revising BTOP's eligibility factors and will use just three criteria – eligible entities, fully completed application, and matching – as the gating factors that determine whether an application is eligible for consideration. NTIA is also removing some factors from the eligibility requirements that are more effectively evaluated during the expert review and due diligence phases of application consideration. Additionally, NTIA is clarifying the process for requesting waivers from several key statutory and programmatic obligations.