



Community-Oriented Connectivity Broadband Grant Program

The Community-Oriented Connectivity Broadband Grant (“Community Connect”) Program provides grants to eligible applicants to establish service at the broadband grant speed in rural areas where no broadband service exists today. The grants will provide, on a “community-oriented connectivity” basis, broadband service that fosters economic growth and delivers enhanced educational, health care, and public safety benefits.

Grant Program Features

Grant applications are accepted annually through a competitive process. The open season for applications is announced each year, usually in the spring, through a Notice of Funds Availability (NOFA) in the *Federal Register*. Minimum and maximum grant award amounts are specified in the NOFA.

Eligibility Information

Who Is Eligible for Assistance?

Entities that are legally organized as:

- An incorporated organization;
- An Indian Tribe or tribal organization;
- A State or local unit of government; or
- A cooperative, private corporation or limited liability company organized on a for-profit or not-for-profit basis.

Who Is Ineligible?

- Individuals and partnerships are not eligible.

What Are the Basic Eligibility Requirements?

Applicants must:

- Provide matching funds equal to at least 15 percent of the grant amount requested, which must be in the form of cash, to be used to fund the operations of

the project;

- Serve a proposed funded service area (PFSA) in which broadband service does not currently exist. A PFSA must be a single contiguous geographic area within an eligible rural area;
- Offer service at the broadband grant speed (set in the NOFA) to all residential and business customers within the PFSA;
- Offer free service at the broadband grant speed to all critical community facilities (such as public schools, fire stations, and public libraries) located within the PFSA for at least 2 years; and
- Provide a community center with at least two computer access points and wireless access at the broadband grant speed, free of all charges to all users for at least 2 years.

What Are the Eligible Purposes for the Grant Funds?

- Construction, acquisition, or leasing of facilities — including spectrum, land or buildings — used to deploy service at the broadband grant speed to all residential and business customers located within the PFSA and all participating critical community facilities, including funding up to 10 computer access points to be used in the community center;
- Improvement, expansion, construction, or acquisition of a community center and provision of computer access points, to be limited to 10 percent of the requested grant amount; and
- The costs of providing the necessary bandwidth for service free of charge to the critical community facilities for 2 years.

Elements of Scoring:

In ranking applications, the agency will consider the following criteria based on a scale of 100 possible points:

- A. Analysis of the challenges of the following criteria, laid out on a community-wide basis, and how the project proposed to address these issues (up to 50 points):
 1. Economic characteristics;
 2. Education challenges;
 3. Health care needs; and
 4. Public safety issues.
- B. The extent of the project's planning, development, and support by local residents, institutions, and critical community facilities (up to 40 points).
- C. The level of experience and past success of operating broadband systems for the management team (up to 10 points).

In making a final selection among and between applications with comparable rankings and geographic distribution, the agency administrator may take into consideration:

1. Service provided to persistent poverty counties within the PFSA;
2. Service provided to out-migration communities within the PFSA;
3. Rurality of the PFSA;
4. Speed of service provided by the project;
5. Service provided to substantially underserved trust areas within the PFSA;
6. Service provided to persons with disabilities within the PFSA; and
7. Any other factors that may be outlined in the NOFA.

For More Information

For more information or to obtain an application packet, visit the Community Connect Web site at http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/utp_commconnect.html.

Or write to your local or State USDA Rural Development office (see the U.S. Government listing in your phone directory under U.S. Department of Agriculture), or the National Office at:

USDA Rural Development
 Broadband Division
 1400 Independence Ave., S.W., Room 2868,
 So. Building
 Mail STOP 1599
 Washington, DC 20250-1599

Toll-Free Phone: 1 (800) 670-6553
 Phone: (202) 690-4673
 Fax: (202) 690-4389

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