

e-Connectivity for Rural America

Partnering to bring modern opportunities to rural communities

Reliable and affordable broadband e-Connectivity, or electronic connectivity, is vital for economic development and quality of life in the 21st Century. USDA has a website to assist leaders with resources, program information, and best practices for bringing broadband infrastructure to rural communities. Visit www.usda.gov/broadband for more information.



The ReConnect program is a new opportunity for rural communities with fewer than 20,000 residents that are lacking in high-speed Internet connectivity. Ultimately, the goal is to connect rural communities to support agriculture production and marketing, e-Commerce, health care, and education.

Q: Why is this new rural broadband program being offered?

A: To build improved broadband e-Connectivity infrastructure for as many rural families, businesses, farms, schools and health care facilities as possible so that they can succeed in the 21st Century.

Q: What will USDA offer with this new rural broadband program?

A: The law allows USDA to offer applicants loans and grants to build infrastructure and install equipment that provides modern, reliable, high-speed Internet service in rural America. Project eligibility specifications are available at reconnect.usda.gov.

Q: Who is eligible to receive the funds?

A: Rural telephone and broadband service providers, rural electric cooperatives, national and regional private companies, nonprofit organizations, tribal entities, and state and local government instrumentalities are likely to be awarded funds, but eligibility depends on state and local laws. An applicant must be able to supply retail broadband to customers. The only ineligible entities are sole proprietors and limited partnerships.

Q: Where will USDA's new rural broadband funds go?

A: The language in the law requires that funds be spent in rural areas with a population of less than 20,000 residents, where there is not sufficient access to broadband service with speeds of 10 megabits per second (mbps) downstream and 1 mbps upstream. The funding is technology neutral, as long as it funds infrastructure that reliably supplies retail service to customers at 25 mbps downstream and 3 mbps upstream.

Q: How will USDA know where there are broadband services at 10 mpbs/1 mbps speeds currently provided?

A: When USDA receives applications for this pilot program, we will use the best available tools and information to determine if the proposed new service area already has 10

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mbps/1 mpbs speed connections at the household level. This includes USDA following our standard process for determining service availability, such as:

1. Consulting various sources of information about broadband service offerings in the area, including maps published by the Federal Communications Commission, the Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), state governments, and others;
2. Notifying service providers that are in the area about the application for funds for proposed service area, so current Internet service providers can inform USDA if service is already available at those households at 10 mbps/1 mpbs speeds; and
3. Performing e-connectivity testing to determine the availability of service by sending USDA representatives to the proposed service area.

Q: When will USDA begin disbursing the new rural broadband funds?

A: USDA announced the final rules and requirements on December 13. Application deadlines begin in April 2019 so that over the next 4 months, rural communities, cooperatives, and companies can begin to create the parameters of their rural broadband project. Funding award maximums are \$25 million for a grant, \$50 million for a loan and grant combination, and \$50 million for a loan. USDA will publish a notice in the Federal Register in late February to advise applicants that the online application portal is open. Awards are anticipated to be disbursed in late 2019.

Q: How can I apply for the new funds?

A: After reviewing the rules of the pilot program at reconnect.usda.gov, begin creating the rural broadband project that your community, cooperative, or company wants to submit for federal funding from USDA. The online application portal has not yet opened, but you can develop all details of your rural broadband project and begin assembling all required information to apply. Information you will need includes the following:

- Geographic boundaries of the proposed service area that currently lacks 10/1 mpbs Internet speeds.
- Type of technologies that will be used to provide new rural broadband service of 25/3 mpbs or above (could be fiber, fixed wi-fi, and certain terrestrial components of satellite service).

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- Number of rural premises you will be connecting, such as homes, schools, libraries, healthcare facilities, farms, ranches, and businesses.
- Business plan for how the service will be constructed and on what timeframe services will be available to customers.
- Information about the structure and financial well-being of the community, cooperative, or company that is submitting the application.
- System design for delivering 25/3 service including cost estimates of proposed facilities.
- How the project will satisfy NEPA, Section 106, and other environmental requirements.

We will announce the opening of the online application portal in the Federal Register in late February and with a press release.

Q: Where can I find technical assistance with my application?

A: USDA and its partners will hold technical assistance webinars that will be recorded and available for viewing on demand after their initial broadcast. Six regional in-person workshops will be held across the country in Greenville, Alabama; Hood River, Oregon; Washington, Pennsylvania; Newton, Kansas; Gila River, Arizona; and Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. Webinar and workshop dates and times, and additional technical assistance is available through reconnect.usda.gov.

Q: When are applications due to USDA?

A: There are three separate application deadlines, depending on what type of funding you are seeking. 100% grant applications are due April 29, 2019; 50/50 loan and grant combination applications are due May 29, 2019; 100% loan applications are due June 28, 2019.

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