

Accessing Federal and State Support for Broadband Projects

Microsoft Fall Rural America ISP Summit

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Finding Federal and State Funding

- Federal
 - USDA/RUS grant and loan programs
 - Federal universal service fund (FCC)

- State
 - State grant programs

New USDA Broadband Program

e-Connectivity Pilot Program

- \$600 million in funding from 2018 Appropriations Bill
- USDA has asked for comment on how to measure broadband availability, but not asked for comment on program requirements – believed ARRA rules to be used.
- Notice of Funds Availability (NOFA) to follow 4Q18-1Q19

New USDA Broadband Program

e-Connectivity Pilot Program

- NOFA will specify all program qualifications and rules
- Grants/loans to areas with <20,000 residents and lacking 10/1 speed
- Minimum speeds expected to be at least 10/1, possibly 25/3
- Program information at: <https://www.usda.gov/broadband>

Rural Utilities Service Programs

RUS - Community Connect Grants

- Funding window March-May each year; \$30M appropriated for 2018
- Specify an area using RUS mapping tool and commit to serve all homes/businesses in the area
- Provide two wireless access points & free service to a community center for two years
- 15% match required
- Minimum speed 25/3
- For reference, the RUS 2018 solicitation is here:

<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2018-03-15/pdf/2018-05200.pdf>

Rural Utilities Service Programs

RUS - Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants

- Grants to provide broadband and equipment
- 15% match; may be in-kind
- Maximum of 20% of project funding may be spent on broadband facilities; the rest for AV equipment, inside wiring, computers
- STEM learning and opioid treatment projects receive extra credit
- Need not be a telecom carrier
- No speed requirement
- Application window April-June of each year
- Webinar slides: https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/DLT-2018_Webinar.pdf

Rural Utilities Service Programs

RUS - Infrastructure Loans/Guarantee Program

- Provides loans and loan guarantees for broadband projects.
- Applications accepted on a rolling basis throughout the year
- Rural wireless carriers find limited utility due to difficult program requirements and low cost of private capital for loans
- Complete package at:

https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/2018_InfrastructureApp_Guide.pdf

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Connect America Fund Phase III

- Price Cap Carriers (e.g., AT&T/CTL/FTR/Fairpoint) receive support through 12/31/20 based on a formula
- Starting 1/1/21, support will be awarded via auction, to be conducted late 2019
- Rulemaking to establish required throughput/latency, eligible geographic areas, and length of term expected 4Q2018
- Any technology that can deliver the performance requirements is eligible to bid to 'take over' subsidy and provide broadband

Connect America Fund Phase III

- Fixed wireless providers should advocate for rules that allow TVWS technologies to deliver broadband in rural areas
- To succeed at auction, providers will need to identify areas, build a plan to serve required number of locations, and assess how much support is needed

State Broadband Funds

- Many states developing broadband programs, or considering legislation or new rules
- Our overview of state funding sources document outlines 16 states with various funding opportunities
- Of the 16, AL, CA, CO, IN, NM, and MO have active funds
- Key needs:
 - A project director
 - A good grant writer
 - Technical support to build business plan tailored to the program
 - Someone to work the process at the PUC

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State Broadband Funds

Reference document on state legislation:

<http://www.ncsl.org/research/telecommunications-and-information-technology/broadband-statutes.aspx>

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