



Leading the Charge: How USDA Rural Development Supports Climate Smart Solutions for Schools

USDA Rural Development (RD) is in a unique position to make climate-smart investments in rural infrastructure to help America build back better and stronger. Connecting and powering our rural schools and buses is part of that commitment. RD agencies play an important role in meeting the Biden-Harris Administration's economic recovery, education, and climate goals. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has directed us to identify and – wherever possible – expand funding that supports rural education.

In rural parts of the country – home to 20 percent of Americans – and nearly 70 percent of America's road miles – EVs can be an especially attractive alternative to conventional vehicles. More than their urban counterparts, rural residents spend more on fuel and vehicle maintenance, and they often lack access to alternatives like public transportation. Over the long run, EVs will help rural residents reduce costs and minimize the environmental impact of transportation in their communities.

Of the 13,185 unified school districts in the U.S., 5,881 are powered by a rural electric cooperative. Among these, at least 15 percent of the students in 3,177 districts live below the poverty line.

USDA RD agencies offer a host of programs that can help rural schools meet their energy and climate goals:

The **Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program** (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xzPWR>) offers competitive grants so eligible schools can use telecommunications technologies to offer courses and services in an affordable, efficient manner. DLT grants help

eliminate travel time and energy use for students, parents, and teachers. The DLT program also supports opportunities for lifelong – not just school-aged – distance learning.

Certain Community Facilities Programs (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xzPBG>) can finance school construction and rehabilitation, as well as fund the acquisition of electric school buses and other service vehicles. Community Facilities funding can also support charging infrastructure owned by a school district, nonprofit or government agency.

The **Rural Energy Savings Program** (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xzPKE>) supports partnerships between schools – and the utilities that serve them – to finance energy-efficiency improvements using an innovative relending program.

RD programs can work directly, or in partnership, with utility service providers to finance renewable energy investments at schools, including the creation of “solar schools.” According to the *2020 Brighter Future Report*, more than 7,300 schools nationwide are now using solar power; an impressive increase of more than 80 percent since 2014. This represents about 5.5 percent of all Kindergarten – grade 12 public and private schools in the U.S., and we know we can help boost those numbers even higher.

Certain RD Electric Loans (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xzPkM>) can help finance EV charging stations and their associated costs at schools and other rural locations.

Certain Rural Business-Cooperative Service Programs (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xzP83>) provide financing to create rural jobs and economic opportunity, including businesses that serve educational institutions, as well as renewable energy and energy efficiency investments at rural businesses and farms.



To learn more about these exciting, planet-friendly funding opportunities, visit us at <https://www.rd.usda.gov>. You'll also find a list of our state-based offices at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xzPNd>.

RD's Community Programs, Rural Business and Cooperative Service, and Rural Utilities Service programs all offer funding support for powering rural schools and EV charging infrastructure. See below for a snapshot of how that looks today.



Community Programs

Schools are essential infrastructure in every community. With Community Programs funding, USDA Rural Development can support electric school bus purchases and EV charging infrastructure in America's rural schools and communities.

| Program | Uses |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Community Facilities Direct Loans and Grants (available at this link: https://go.usa.gov/xtG6s) | Loan and grant funding for electric school buses; financing for school construction, retrofitting or renovations, including energy efficiency investments |
| Community Facilities Guaranteed Loans (available at this link: https://go.usa.gov/xtG6F) | Municipal EV charging stations for vehicle fleets and for use in rural municipal parking lots |
| | EV charging stations for use at rural community facilities including hospitals, medical clinics, schools, colleges, libraries, and town halls, among others |



Rural Business-Cooperative Service

RBCS offers programs to help start and grow rural businesses by supporting renewable energy and EV charging infrastructure.

| Program | Uses |
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| Rural Energy for America Program* (REAP) Renewable Energy Systems & Energy Efficiency Improvement Guaranteed Loans and Grants (available at this link: https://go.usa.gov/xtGM4) | Can support renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements in eligible, for-profit rural educational institutions |
| Business & Industry Guaranteed Loans (available at this link: https://go.usa.gov/xtGMZ) | Can help a business or community finance EV charging station equipment for retail and public use |

*At present, REAP funds are statutorily prohibited from being used to finance equipment to dispense energy at the retail level (for instance, at a public-use filling station).



Rural Utilities Service

RUS provides funding for foundational infrastructure such as water and waste treatment, electric power, and telecommunications services. Together, these programs help ensure access to clean drinking water, broadband internet service, and renewable energy and energy efficiency technology in rural schools.

| Program | Uses |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Electric Programs (available at this link: https://go.usa.gov/xtGtv) | Can help finance electric utility infrastructure, including charging stations owned by utilities |
| Rural Energy Savings Program (RESP) (available at this link: https://go.usa.gov/xtGtG) | Can be used by utilities to re-lend funds to pay for consumer energy efficiency measures (including energy efficiency and renewable energy investments, as well as EV charging stations) at rural schools or other consumer locations Note: The utility – not the consumer – applies for RESP funding. |
| Electric Infrastructure Loans and Loan Guarantees (available at this link: https://go.usa.gov/xtGtH) | Can provide financing for electric service vehicles owned and used by a utility to deliver electric service (examples include emergency, crew, and service vehicles, among others) |

To learn more, contact your state-based RD energy coordinator. A list is available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xtAzB> (PDF).