USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Rural Development

Community Connect Grant Program

Fiscal Year 2023- Extended Window

Housekeeping

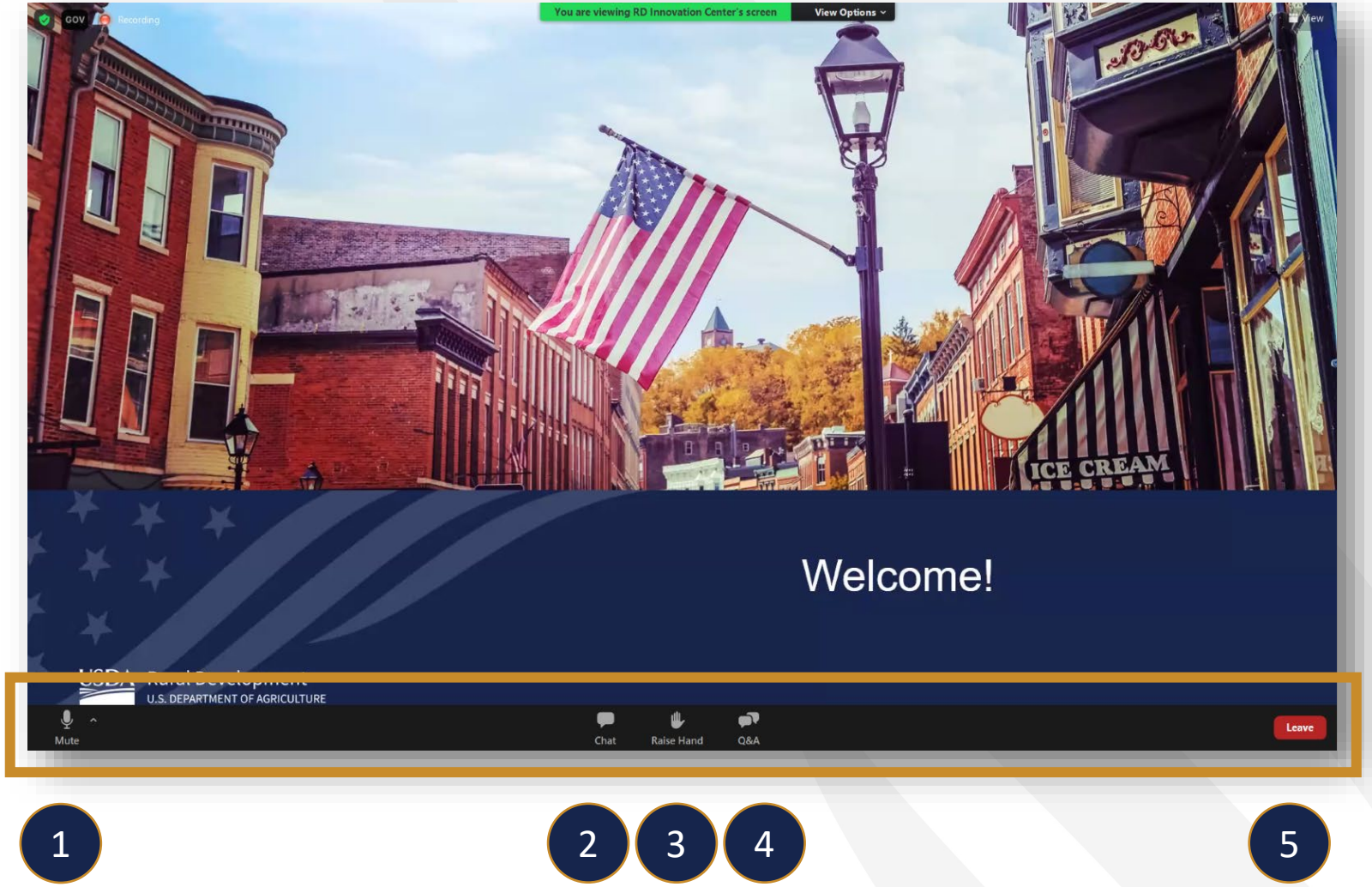
1. **Mute**
   Attendees are in listen-only mode unless unmuted by host

2. **Chat**
   Attachments and messages from panelists will show here

3. **Raise Hand**
   This feature is disabled for today's event.

4. **Q&A**
   Submit your questions to the presenters and panelists here

5. **Leave**
   You may exit the event here



Background

Community Connect Grant Program

- Created in 2002
- Competitive Grant Program

Program Regulation and FOA:

- Community Connect Grant Program Regulation, 7 CFR 1739 Subpart A.
- Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) published March 20, 2023 and correction notice published December 19, 2023. The NOFO sets the minimum and maximum grant amounts for the 2023 program as broadband grant speed and the correction notice sets the definition of broadband service at 10 Mbps down and 1 Mbps up to be consistent with the 2018 Farm Bill.

Funding Extension

On December 19, 2023, a correction notice was published in the Federal Register. Due to this, all applications which were submitted or started during the March 20, 2023 to June 20, 2023 window were reopened in the Salesforce application system. Those entities which applied previously must evaluate the revised terms and determine whether they want to submit their application again. Applications are open to be edited if adjustments to the existing application are needed. Applicants are also free to start a different application if they'd prefer. Those who did not start or apply under the prior window are also eligible to submit applications.

Key Definitions and Limits

Community Connect Grant Program

- **Broadband Service** means any terrestrial technology having the capacity to provide transmission facilities that enable subscribers of the service to originate and receive high-quality voice, data, graphics, and video at the minimum rate of 10 megabits per second download and 1 megabits per second upload for fixed service. **Satellite and mobile services** are not considered broadband service.
- **Broadband Grant Speed** means the minimum bandwidth of 100 megabits per second download and 20 megabits per second upload that an applicant must propose to deliver to every customer in the PFSA.
- Minimum and Maximum Grant Amounts:
  - $100,000 minimum
  - $5,000,000 maximum

Program Rules and Eligibility

Eligible Applicants

- An incorporated organization,
- An Indian Tribe or tribal organization, as defined in 25 U.S.C. 450b(e).
- A state
- A local unit of government, or
- A cooperative, private corporation or limited liability company organized on a for-profit or not-for-profit basis.

Individuals and Partnerships are not Eligible.

Applicants must have the legal capacity and authority to apply for funding and enter into a contract with RUS.

Applicants must have the legal capacity to own and operate a broadband system.

Eligible Project

To be eligible for a Community Connect grant, the Project must:

- Serve a Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA) in which Broadband Service does not exist;
- Offer service at the Broadband Grant Speed to all residents and business customers within the PFSA;
- Offer free service at the Broadband Grant Speed to all Essential Community Facilities (ECFs) located within the PFSA for at least 2 years starting from the time service becomes available to each ECF; 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 users for at least 2 years and is open and accessible to area residents before, during and after normal working hours and on Saturday and/or Sunday.

Eligible PFSA

Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA) means the contiguous geographic area within an eligible Rural Area in which the applicant proposes to provide service at the Broadband Grant Speed

Rural Area means any area, as confirmed by the latest decennial census of the Bureau of the Census, which is not located within:

- a city, town, or incorporated area that has a population greater than 20,000 inhabitants; or
- An urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants. For purposes of the definition of rural area, an urbanized area means a densely populated territory as defined by the US Census Bureau.
    - For purposes of the definition of rural area, an urbanized area means a densely populated territory as defined in the most recent decennial Census. Due to the removal of the term “urbanized area,” USDA will recognize any Census- designated “urban” area with a population per the 2020 Decennial Census as an “urbanized area.” Additionally, non-contiguous parts of any “urban” area will be considered eligible for funding consideration.

Eligible PFSA (Continued)

Broadband Service cannot exist in any portion of an eligible PFSA.

Applicants should use all available resources to determine if Broadband Service exists, including:
FCC data (https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov or https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/maps),

Information on areas served by existing RUS borrowers and grantees

https://rd.usda.gov/programs-services/all-programs/telecommunications-programs/telecom-maps
as well as within the mapping tool within the Community Connect Portal

View service provider websites and contact local service providers

*** A Public Notice Filing will be published on all applications for service provider comment. All Information Will Be Independently Verified By RUS***

Eligible PFSA (Continued)

Areas receiving, or under consideration for other Federal funds are eligible for Community Connect funding as long as an entity has **not received final approval to receive** other Federal funding to construct terrestrial facilities providing at least 10/1 Mbps service in the proposed funded service areas as of the date of the NOFO.

- For RDOF final approval for this notice means an RDOF awardee's long-form application has received final approval as ready-to-authorize or has been authorized to begin receiving support.
- Applicants submitting a project to serve an area in which an entity has already received final approval for other Federal funding must explain in the application why Community Connect funding is being requested and why RUS should provide additional funding, as funds must not be used for duplicative purposes.
- Awardees that receive both other Federal funds and Community Connect funding must submit a statement certifying that the funds requested from Community Connect have not and will not be reimbursed by another Federal award nor used to reimburse another Federal award, and that the Awardee will keep separate accounts for each source of funding to track the uses of the funding to support the certification statement submitted with the Community Connect application.
- RUS can consider adjusting the application if in the course of our review it is found portions of the service area are sufficiently served or if another award has received final approval in portions of the PFSA.

Eligible PFSA (Continued)

If the application proposes service over or on Tribal Lands:

- A certification from the appropriate tribal official is required that states that the applicant has permission to build facilities on or over Tribal Lands.
- The appropriate tribal official is the Tribal Council of the Tribal Government with jurisdiction over the Tribal Lands at issue.
- Any applicant that fails to provide a certification to provide service on the Tribal Lands identified in the PFSA will not be considered for funding.

Eligible Grant Purposes

1) The construction, acquisition, or leasing of facilities used to deploy service at the Broadband Grant Speed to all residents and businesses in the PFSA

- Buildings constructed with grant funds must reside on property owned by the awardee.
- Leasing costs will only be covered through the advance of funds period included in the award documents.

Eligible Grant Purposes (Continued)

2) The improvement, expansion, construction, or acquisition of a Community Center and provision of Computer Access Points.

- Grant funds for the Community Center are limited to the lesser of ten percent of the requested grant amount or $150,000.
- If the community center is constructed with grant funds, the center must reside on property owned by the awardee.
- Includes funding for at least 2 and up to 10 computer access points to be used in the Community Center.

3) The costs of providing the necessary bandwidth for service free of charge to the ECFs for 2 years.

Ineligible Grant Purposes

1) Funds may not be used to finance the duplication of any existing Broadband Service provided by other entities.

2) Operating expenses are ineligible with the exception of lease costs for facilities used to deploy broadband service and bandwidth expenses to ECFs.

Matching Contribution

- Applicants must provide a Matching Contribution which is at least 15% of the total amount of financial assistance being requested.
- Matching Contributions cannot include any financial assistance from federal sources unless there is a federal statutory exception.
- At the time of closing of the award, the awardee must contribute or demonstrate available cash reserves in an account(s) of the awardee equal to at least 15% of the grant.
- The Matching Contribution must be in the form of cash, to be used to fund operations of the project.

SUTA Provisions

If the Administrator determines that a community in trust land (as defined in section 3765 of title 38, United States Code) has a high need for the benefits of the Infrastructure Program, he/she may designate the community as a substantially underserved trust area (SUTA), as defined in section 306F of the RE Act. To receive SUTA consideration, the applicant must attach all of the information requested in 7 CFR 1700, Subpart D to the application and do both of the following:

1. Notify the Agency in writing that it seeks consideration as a substantially underserved trust area.
2. Identify the discretionary authorities of 7 CFR 1700, Subpart D that apply to the request.

The authorities which may be requested:

§1700.106 Discretionary provisions.

(a) To improve the availability of eligible programs in eligible communities determined to have a high need for the benefits of an eligible program, the Administrator retains the discretion, on a case-by-case basis, to use any of the following SUTA authorities individually or in combination to:

(1) Make available to qualified applicants financing with an interest rate as low as 2 percent;

(2) Extend repayment terms;

(3) Waive (individually or in combination) non-duplication restrictions, matching fund requirements, and credit support requirements from any loan or grant program administered by RUS; and

(4) Give the highest funding priority to designated projects in substantially underserved trust areas.

(b) Requests for waivers of nonduplication restrictions, matching fund requirements, and credit support requirements, and requests for highest funding priority will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis upon written request of the applicant filed pursuant to 7 CFR 1700.108.

(c) Notwithstanding the requirements in paragraph (b) of this section, the Administrator reserves the right to evaluate any application for an eligible program for use of the discretionary provisions of this subpart without a formal, written request from the applicant.

SECD

New for 2023, applicants may apply for funding under the Strategic Economic and Community Development (SECD) funding should indicate this in the Executive Summary and include the RD Form 1980-88. Up to 10% of available funds are set aside for such applications. See the SECD website at https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/strategic-economic-and-community-development for more information on how to qualify for a SECD award and information to address within the application to maximize chances of successfully getting SECD funding.

Applications must meet all other eligibility factors. Applications that apply for, but do not receive, SECD funding will still be considered under the general application window, there is no penalty for applying for SECD funding.

Technical Assistance

Prior to official submission of applications, applicants may request technical assistance or other application guidance from the Agency. RUS suggests that requests be made at least 15 days prior to the application closing. Technical assistance is not meant to be an analysis or assessment of the quality of the materials submitted, a substitute for agency review of completed applications, nor a determination of eligibility, if such determination requires in-depth analysis. The Agency will not solicit or consider scoring or eligibility information that is submitted after the application deadline. The Agency reserves the right to contact applicants to seek clarifying information on materials contained in the submitted application.

Application Processing

Review Standards

- Applications must be submitted by noon February 20, 2024 (11:59 am EST);
- Applications must be eligible and complete; and
- Applications must be technically and financially feasible.
- Mapping information will be put out as a Public Notice Filing for potential existing service providers to contest the eligibility of an application. Any information received will be verified by RUS and may be rejected if found to not be supportable.
  - Applications passing Steps 1 - 4 will be evaluated competitively based on the three scoring components.
  - Applications will be ranked and awarded in rank order until all grant funds are expended.
  - Awards announced.

Scoring

Up to 100 points are available. These points are broken into 3 Scoring Components:

- PFSA Needs (up to 50 points are available)
- Stakeholder Involvement (up to 40 points are available)
- Management Experience (up to 10 points are available)

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION AREA POINTS ARE NOT PART OF THE 2023 PROGRAM

APPLICANTS MAY SUBMIT MORE THAN ONE APPLICATION, HOWEVER, ONLY THE SINGLE HIGHEST SCORING ELIGIBLE APPLICATION WILL BE CONSIDERED FOR AWARD

Scoring (Continued)

In making the final selection among and between applications with comparable rankings and geographic distribution, the Administrator may take into consideration the characteristics of the PFSA.

- Persistent poverty counties that will be served within the PFSA;
- Out-migration communities that will be served within the PFSA;
- The rurality of the PFSA;
- The speed of broadband service that is offered to subscribers in the PFSA;
- Substantially Underserved Trust Areas (SUTA) that will be served within the PFSA; and
- Community members with disabilities that will be served within the PFSA.

How to Apply for a Grant

Application Information

For program regulation (7 CFR 1739), 2023 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), Standard Form 424 and instructions, and the Application Guide:

http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-connect-grants

For 2023, applications are submitted in an RUS online application system (https://rus-apply.rd.usda.gov/) Applicants register and associate with an applying entity, provide application information, draw a map, and attach the application schedules in this system. Instructions for using this system are also available on the program web site.

Community Connect Portal- Registering

If you are not yet registered to an organization in RUS systems:

Applicants must have a Level II eAuth account (https://www.eauth.usda.gov/home/)

Once obtained, applications must submit an Authorized Representative Request in the CC Portal system. You will hit the “Start an ARR” button in the CC Portal

Search via TIN, Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), or DUNS for your organization. If it exists in the system, select and proceed. If not, add the organization.

Once an organization is selected, you must submit a request for at least the Authorized Representative Signature Certifier

Community Connect Portal- Registering

Once the designated individuals have been added to the ARR form, the user must upload a signed board resolution before selecting the “Submit” button. The information in the signed board resolution must match all information that the user entered on the ARR form. Board resolutions must be uploaded in PDF format and may not exceed 25MB in size. Additional tips and sample board resolutions are available at: https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/arr-resolution-instructions-samples.pdf

Community Connect Portal

Community Connect

Thank you for your interest in the Community Connect Grant Program. The purpose of the Community Connect Grant Program is to provide financial assistance in the form of grants to eligible applicants that will provide, on a "community-oriented connectivity" basis, broadband service that fosters economic growth and delivers enhanced educational, health care, and public safety benefits.

You can create your Proposed Funded Service Area and upload your Community Connect Grant application by clicking the button below.

Get Started

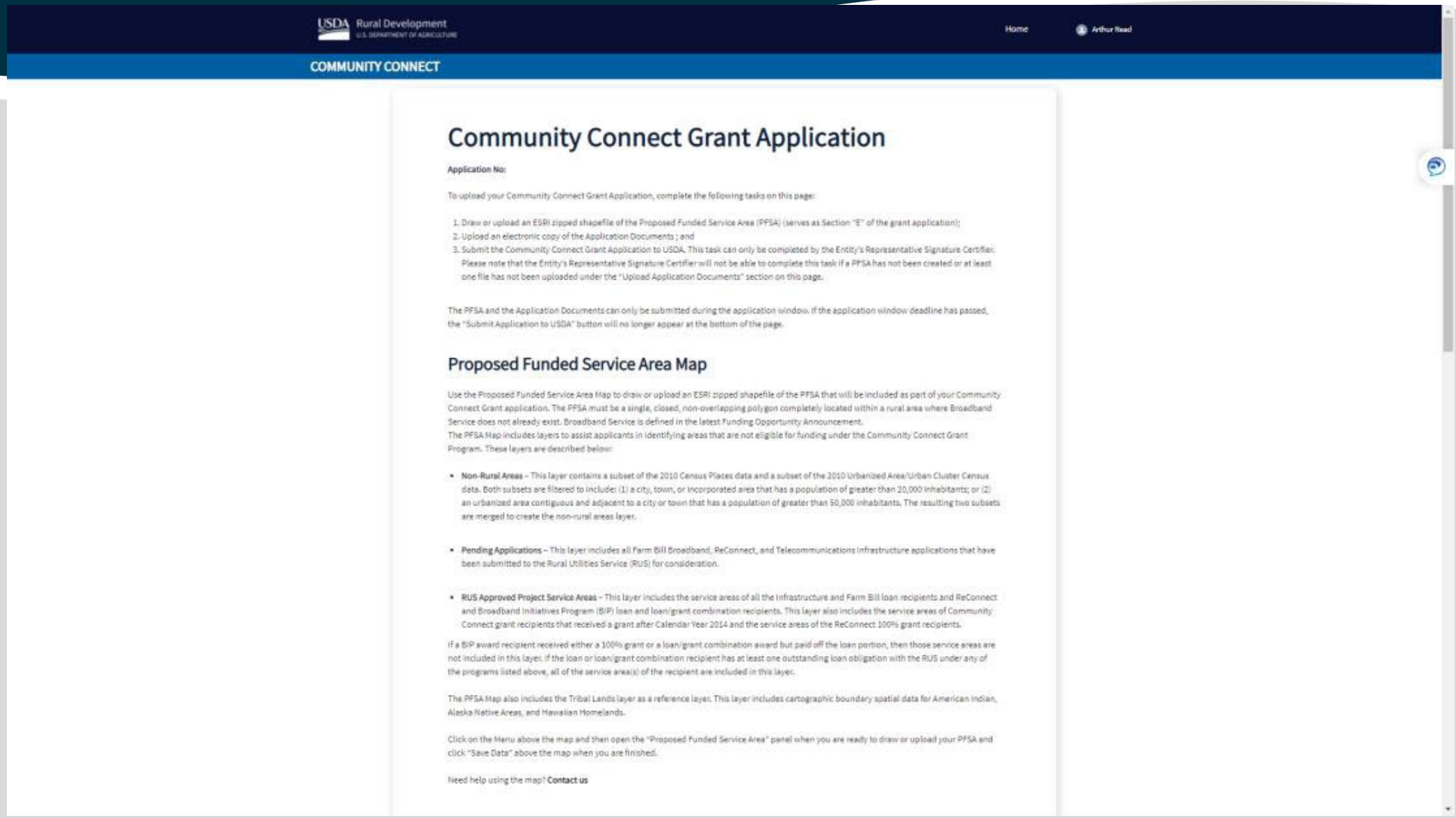
Applications

APPLICATION NO.	FUNDING WINDOW	START DATE	SUBMITTED
102000055	Jul 1, 2020 - Aug 15, 2020	08/05/2020, 08:02 AM	
102000054	Jul 1, 2020 - Aug 15, 2020	08/05/2020, 07:38 AM	08/05/2020, 07:52 AM
102000053	Jul 1, 2020 - Aug 15, 2020	08/05/2020, 07:16 AM	08/05/2020, 07:21 AM
102000052	Jul 1, 2020 - Aug 15, 2020	08/05/2020, 06:42 AM	08/05/2020, 07:03 AM

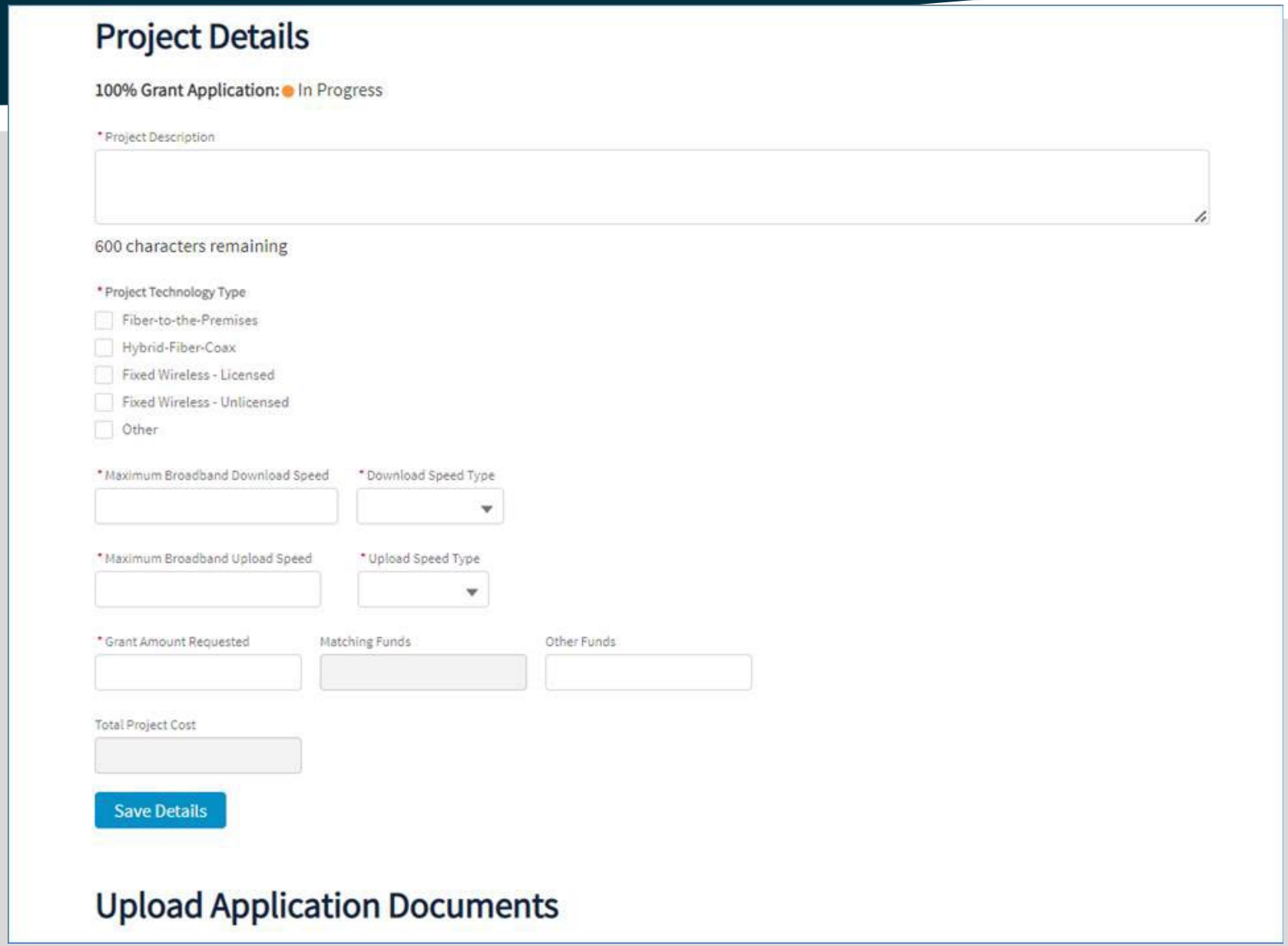
Community Connect Portal

- The CC Portal system is used to draw the map and upload required application schedules
- New for 2023 there is a Project Details section where the applicant provides a high level overview of the application (this information may be made public to those interested in the application)
- Maps can be either drawn via the tools in the system or a Shapefile can be uploaded
- Use the upload tool to upload application schedules.
- Once complete, submit the application
- The non-rural layer has been updated for 2020 Census information
- There are some updated Tribal layers

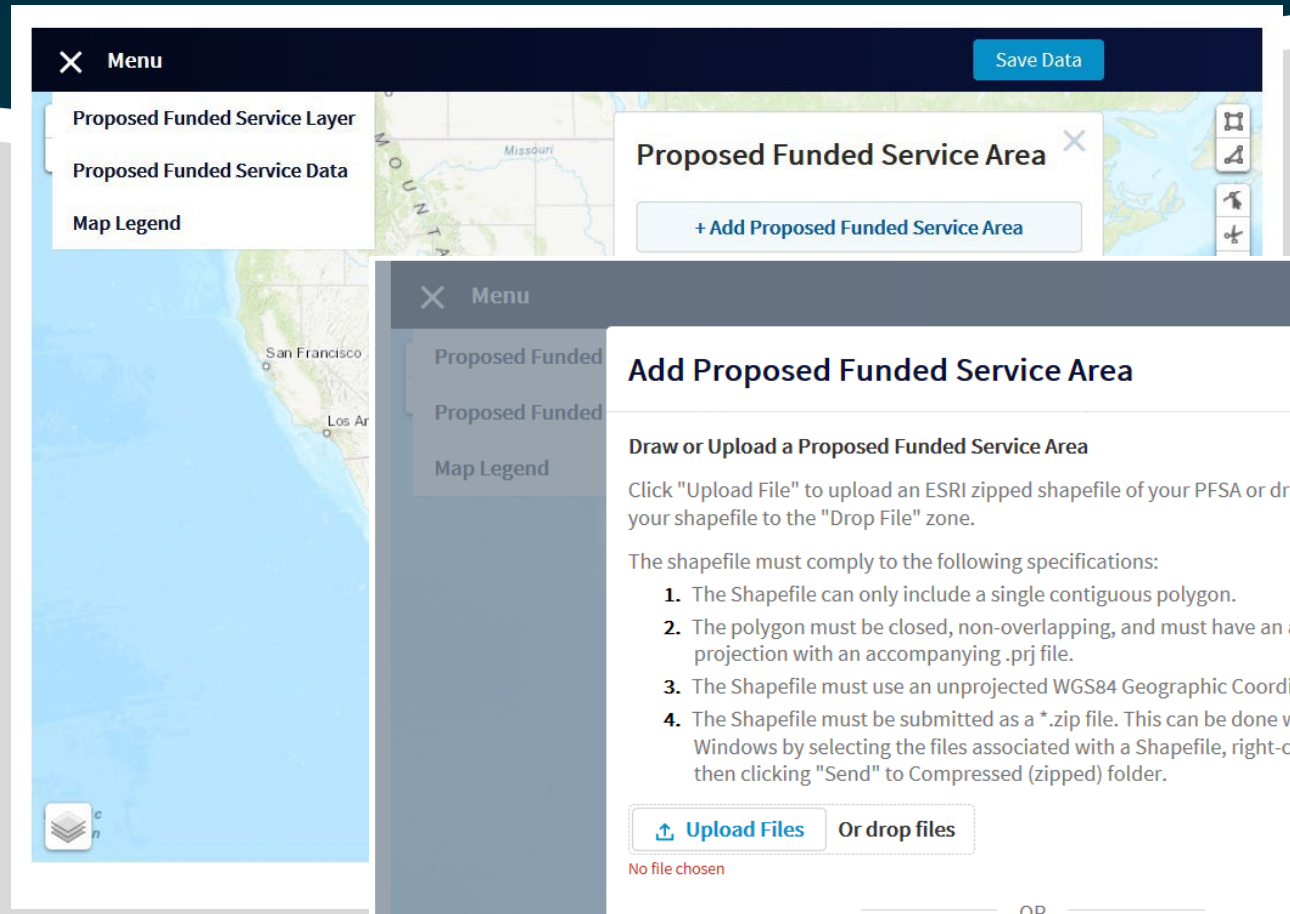
Community Connect Portal

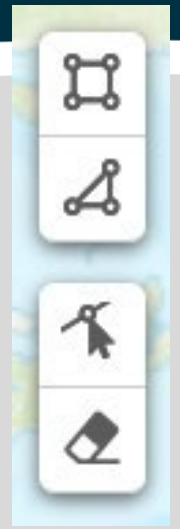


Community Connect Portal

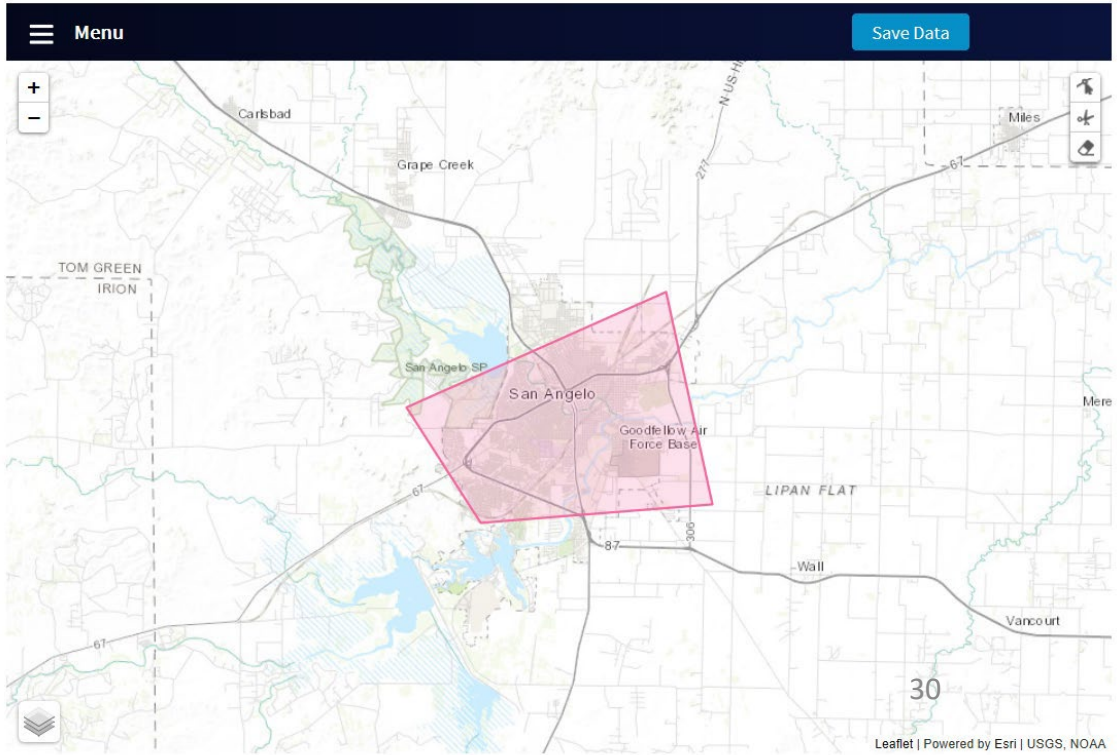


Community Connect Portal- Map





Hand drawing tools (if hand drawing)



Community Connect Portal- Upload Files

Need help using the map? **Contact us**

Upload Application

Click "Upload File" or drag and drop your file to the "Drop File" zone to upload an electronic copy of the grant application documents. Allowable file formats include .pdf, .docx, .xlsx, and .csv. The size for each uploaded document cannot be greater than 2 GB. Users have the ability to separate out the application into more than one file or file type.

USDA URLA Test Case 2_v5.15.20

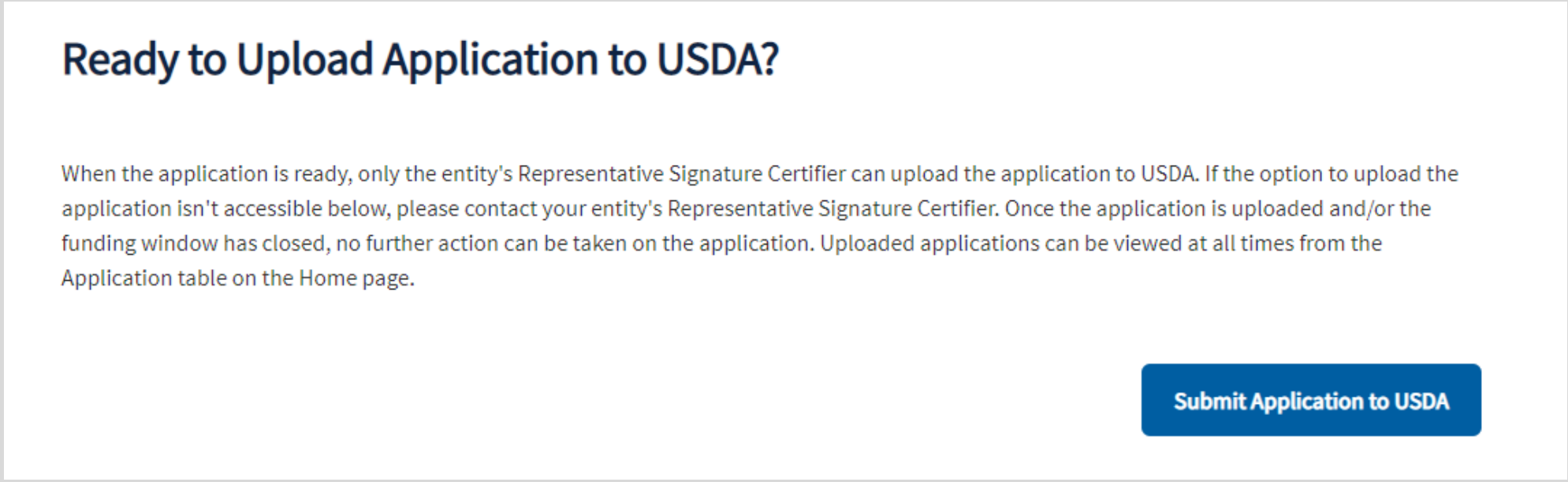
Ready to Upload Application to USDA?

Once the PFSA and accompanying Application Documents are ready to be submitted to USDA for consideration, the Entity's Representative Signature Certifier must click "Submit Application to USDA" button to submit the application to USDA. No further changes can be made to your Community Connect Grant Application once it has been successfully submitted to USDA. Submitted applications can always be viewed from the Applications table on the Home page.

Exit

Community Connect Portal- Submitting

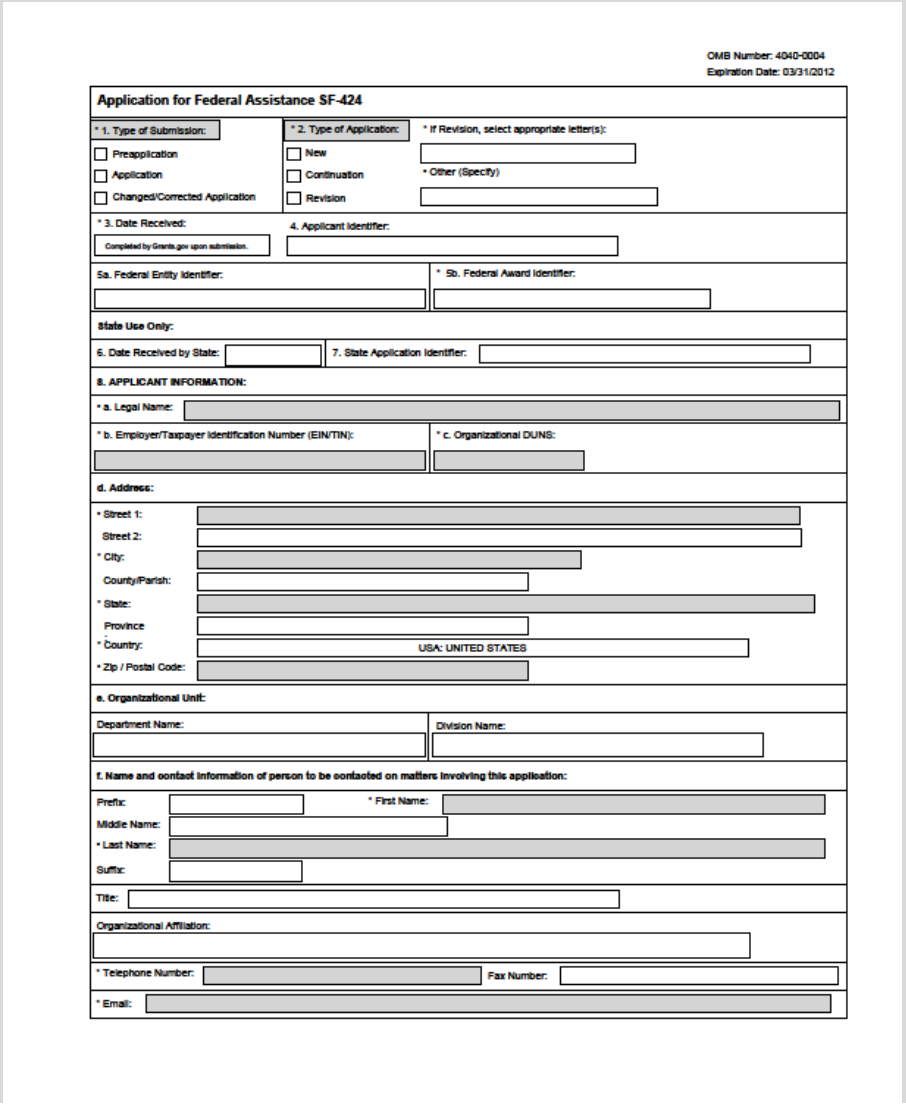
Once the application is ready for submission, the ‘Submit Application to USDA’ button is enabled for the Rep Sign Cert



Required Application Schedules

- Standard Form 424, SAM Registration and Other Documentation
- Executive Summary
- Scoring Criteria Documentation
- System Design (including Environmental Questionnaire)
- Service Area Demographics
- Scope of Work
- Community-Oriented Connectivity Plan
- Financial Information and Sustainability
- Statement of Experience
- Evidence of Funding Commitments from Other Sources
- Compliance with Other Federal Statutes and Regulations

Schedule A-1: SF 424



OMB Number: 4040-0004
Expiration Date: 03/31/2012

Application for Federal Assistance SF-424

* 1. Type of Submission:	* 2. Type of Application:	* If Revision, select appropriate letter(s):
☐ Preapplication	☐ New	
☐ Application	☐ Continuation	* Other (Specify)
☐ Changed/Corrected Application	☐ Revision	

* 3. Date Received:	4. Applicant Identifier:
Completed by Grants.gov upon submission.	

5a. Federal Entity Identifier:	* 5b. Federal Award Identifier:

State Use Only:

6. Date Received by State:	7. State Application Identifier:

8. APPLICANT INFORMATION:

* a. Legal Name:

* b. Employer/Taxpayer Identification Number (EIN/TIN):	* c. Organizational DUNS:

d. Address:

* Street 1:
Street 2:
* City:
County/Parish:
* State:
Province
* Country: USA: UNITED STATES
* Zip / Postal Code:

e. Organizational Unit:

Department Name:	Division Name:

f. Name and contact information of person to be contacted on matters involving this application:

Prefix: * First Name:
Middle Name:
* Last Name:
Suffix:

Title:

Organizational Affiliation:

* Telephone Number: Fax Number:

* Email:

Schedule A-2: SAM Registration

A DUNS number is no longer required in order to register in the SAM Database. Entities must get a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). See https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration if you have not previously registered. Existing entities should make sure their registration is active (registrations must be renewed annually). Registrations must be active before application submission and must remain active at all times while the application is under consideration. Registration in SAM.gov is free, but does take some time to take effect, please start this process early in the application process.

Schedule A-2 (Continued)

- Printout a copy of your registration in SAM.gov and include as Schedule A-2, must show activation date and CAGE code.
  - Registration, **with grant certifications**, must be active BEFORE application is submitted
  - Registration must remain current at all times while application is under consideration
  - Must be in the name of the applicant (not a parent, subsidiary, etc.)

Schedule B: Executive Summary

- Description of the Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA) and why the project is needed;
- A description of the applicant;
- Explanation of the total project costs;
- General overview of the proposed broadband system (types of equipment, technologies, and facilities);
- Documentation describing the procedures used to determine the unavailability of existing Broadband Service in the PFSA;
- A list of participating Essential Community Facilities; and
- Evidence that any remaining Essential Community Facility located in the PFSA has rejected the offer for free service at the Broadband Grant Speed.
- Address SUTA if you are requesting
- Address SECD if you are requesting

Schedule C: Scoring Criteria Documentation

1) PFSA Needs (up to 50 points)

    a. Economic Characteristics

    b. Educational Challenges

    c. Health Care Needs

    d. Public Safety Issues

2) Stakeholder Involvement(up to 40 points)

3) Management Experience (up to 10 points)

Special Consideration Area points are not included in the FY 23 program

Please refer to the application guide for details on each scoring component and additional criteria that will be used to differentiate your application from other applications.

Schedule D: System Design

- Detailed description of existing network if applicable.
  - Services offered
  - Customers served
  - Internet connection
- Detailed description of the proposed network.
  - PFSA description
  - Technology proposed
  - Existing network upgrades
- Description of the design parameters used in engineering the system.

Schedule D: System Design (Continued)

- Licenses and/or agreements required to construct and operate the network and the status of securing those licenses/agreements.
- Network Diagram (Schedule D-1) of existing and proposed network.
- Environmental Questionnaire (Schedule D-2)
- Recommend System Design is prepared by a registered engineer licensed in the State(s) where the network will be constructed.

Environmental Considerations

- Additional instruction is included in the FY 2023 Community Connect Grant Program Application Guide, providing additional clarification on what to provide and agencies to contact, depending on the scope of the proposed project.
- If agency correspondence is required, or if sensitive areas are involved in the proposed project, reach out to RUS for advice before beginning consultation.
- All facilities associated with the project must be described and mapped. If any facilities are located outside of the PFSA, such as transport routes, towers, etc., these must be described in the application.

Schedule E: Service Area Demographics

Use the RUS web-based Mapping Tool to map the PFSA in the online application system. Provide as Schedule E a summary of the demographic information. If numbers vary from the Census based information provided by the mapping tool, provide an explanation and support for any variations. Below is a sample format for providing information.

Service Area Demographics			
Service Area Name	Population	Households	Businesses

Schedule F: Scope of Work

- Description of the specific activities and services to be performed.
- Who will perform the activities and services.
- A construction build-out schedule (Schedule F-1).
- Detailed budget (Schedule F-2).

  -The total grant funds shown on the budget must be the same as those listed on the Application for Federal Assistance (SF 424).

  -Any ineligible items listed on the budget will NOT be considered for grant funding and could affect the eligibility of the application.

  -The budget must include funding for at least 2 and no more than 10 grant funded computer access points.

Schedule F-2: Budget

Schedule F-2

Project Budget

BUDGET	No. of Units	Unit cost	Total	Grant	Other Funding	Description
BROADBAND SYSTEM						Note: These items are general in nature, applicants should modify as required to describe their specific project.
Electronic Equipment (FTTH, wireless, etc.)						
Outside plant (fiber, coaxial, copper, etc.)						
Customer premises equipment						
Towers – new construction (monopole, lattice, etc.)						
Towers – lease						
Buildings – new construction						
Buildings – renovations/expansion						
Bandwidth Costs						
Collocation Costs						
Site preparation						
Engineering						
Total Broadband System			0.00	0.00	0.00	
COMMUNITY CENTER						Note: Grant funds provided for the community center are limited to the lesser of 10% of the grant amount requested or $150,000.
Construction of building						New building must be built on property owned by the applicant if grants funds are used for its purchase.
Renovations/expansion of existing building						
Furniture						
Computers/software/printers						Grant funds MUST be used to fund at least 2, and up to 10 Computer Access Points
Total Community Center			0.00	0.00	0.00	
SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURES						
Broadband System						
Community Center						

Schedule G: Community-Oriented Connectivity Plan

- List of all Essential Community Facilities located in the PFSA;
- Description of the services that will be provided;
- The hours of operation of the Community Center in addition to the activities available to the public*
- Description of the consultation with the telecommunications carriers and their anticipated roles in the proposed telecommunications systems.
- Evidence of commitment from authorized personnel or owner to utilize building space for Community Center

* Building must be accessible to all members of the community before, during and after normal working hours AND on Saturdays or Sundays. This must be specifically addressed in the application.

Schedule H: Financial Information and Sustainability

- Description of the sustainability of the project
- Audited financial statements
  - Existing organizations (Prior two years)
  - If audited statements are not available, applicant must submit unaudited financial statements for those two years. The unaudited financial statements should include an income statement, balance sheet and statement of cash flows.
  - Start-up companies (Opening balance sheet dated within 30 days of application submission.)
- Annual financial projections
  - Include detailed assumptions that support the financial projections
  - Multiple applications from a single entity may be submitted, however only the highest scoring application will be considered. As a result, the version of the pro-formas for multiple applications provided in previous years has been removed since no entity will receive more than a single award.

Frequent Financial Flaws

- Historical Financial Data that doesn’t match the Audit
- Balance Sheets that don’t balance
- Cash Flow, Income Statements and Balance Sheets that don’t tie together
- Equipment purchases on Balance Sheet must match System design
- Not enough Cash in the 5-year forecast to support the projections or negative cash balances
- Matching funds must be clearly reflected in the financial forecast
- Forecasts that don’t include detailed assumptions

Assumption Examples

Bad assumption example 1:

Our company is currently offering broadband service, and anticipates greatly increasing this service over the five year period. The company currently has a penetration rate of 85% for its existing service areas. The projected rate for the PFSA will be the same as our existing rates.

Assumption Examples

Good Assumption example 1:

Revenues

Broadband Data Service:

The Company has been serving five communities for three years. Currently, our company offers broadband data service at speeds of 100 Mbps downstream/20 Mbps upstream, at a rate of $50 per subscriber per month. For the prior two historical years, our company has had 70, and 85 subscribers respectively. Based on historical data, the company is projecting that our existing service area subscribers will increase by 10 subscribers per year over the five year forecast.

Based on the interest from community leaders, the company has projected that the PFSA for the community connect project will have a 20% penetration rate by year five of the project. Service plans for the new PFSA are projected to be consistent with our current offerings. The company is projecting 8 subscribers in the new service area in year one, and increasing by 10 new subscribers per year in years two through five.

Assumption Examples

Bad assumption example 2:

Customer Care expenses are the personnel and related costs of providing customer care operations to customers. This is projected to increase by 2% per year.

Good Assumption example 2:

Customer operations expense consists of the cost of customer care personnel, which includes one sales/marketing manager, three customer service representatives, and the associated employee benefits. The marketing manager has a salary of $30,000 a year, and the customer service representatives $18,000 per year. Benefits include the cost of health care insurance, calculated as 8% of each employee's salary per year. Base salaries are projected to increase by 2% per year to keep up with inflation.

Schedule I- Statement of Experience

Provide a narrative that describes your organization's capability and experience, if any, in operating a telecommunications system, or any project similar to the proposed project, including the qualifications of key staff.

Schedule J: Additional Funding

Applicants must provide evidence of matching funds equal to at least 15% of the requested grant amount.

-A recent bank statement in the name of the applicant showing the available funds

Or

-Evidence of external funding commitments

The match must be in CASH and AVAILABLE at the time of closing.

In-kind contributions will NOT be accepted.

Schedule J: Additional Funding (Continued)

If funding is going to be provided by another entity, additional information must be provided:

- Agreement between the entity and the applicant or a letter from the entity to the applicant
- Clearly state the name of the entity that is making the commitment to the applicant
- Include the amount of the commitment
- State the purpose of the commitment
- Demonstrate the ability of the entity making the commitment by a recent bank statement reflecting the appropriate amount of funds in the account.
- The agreement or letter should be signed by an authorized representative of the entity providing the commitment.

Because no entity is eligible to receive multiple awards under the 2023 NOFO, Schedule J no longer needs to address the scenario where multiple awards are approved.

Schedule K: Compliance Certifications

Applicants have required certifications they must make. Some are handled via government wide certifications made in SAM.gov. Some are handled via the Application Checklist provided in the application guide, and the Assurance Agreement is provided as an attachment.

Common Mistakes with Applications

- Insufficient Match Funding
- Inadequate documentation that funding is available
- Little or no documentation or support from Community Leaders or organizations within the PFSA
- Insufficient or no historical financials provided
- Inadequate assumptions or no assumptions included
- Lack of specifics
- Inconsistencies within the application
- Lack of details on the Community Center: where it is located, who owns the property, hours, number of stations, access and availability to public and what services will be offered in it.

Common Mistakes with Applications (Continued)

- The PFSA on the mapping tool does not match the PFSA described in the application
- The entire PFSA is not rural
- All premises (households & businesses) in the service area are not offered service at the Broadband Grant Speed
- The application was insufficiently detailed as to determine the technical feasibility of the proposed system.
- Detailed descriptions of the existing and proposed networks were not provided
- Community Center not located in PFSA boundaries.

Applications: What to do

- Be specific
- Be clear
- Make sure all schedules are included
- Check for consistency

Applications: Submitting

Electronically via the RUS application system, no paper applications will be accepted. Application deadline is 11:59 am EST, February 20, 2024. Submission will be disabled after this time. It is strongly recommended you submit well before this time to avoid any possible last minute technical issues.

Questions?

Contact Information
(202) 720-0800
https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/telecommunications-programs/community-connect-grants#contact