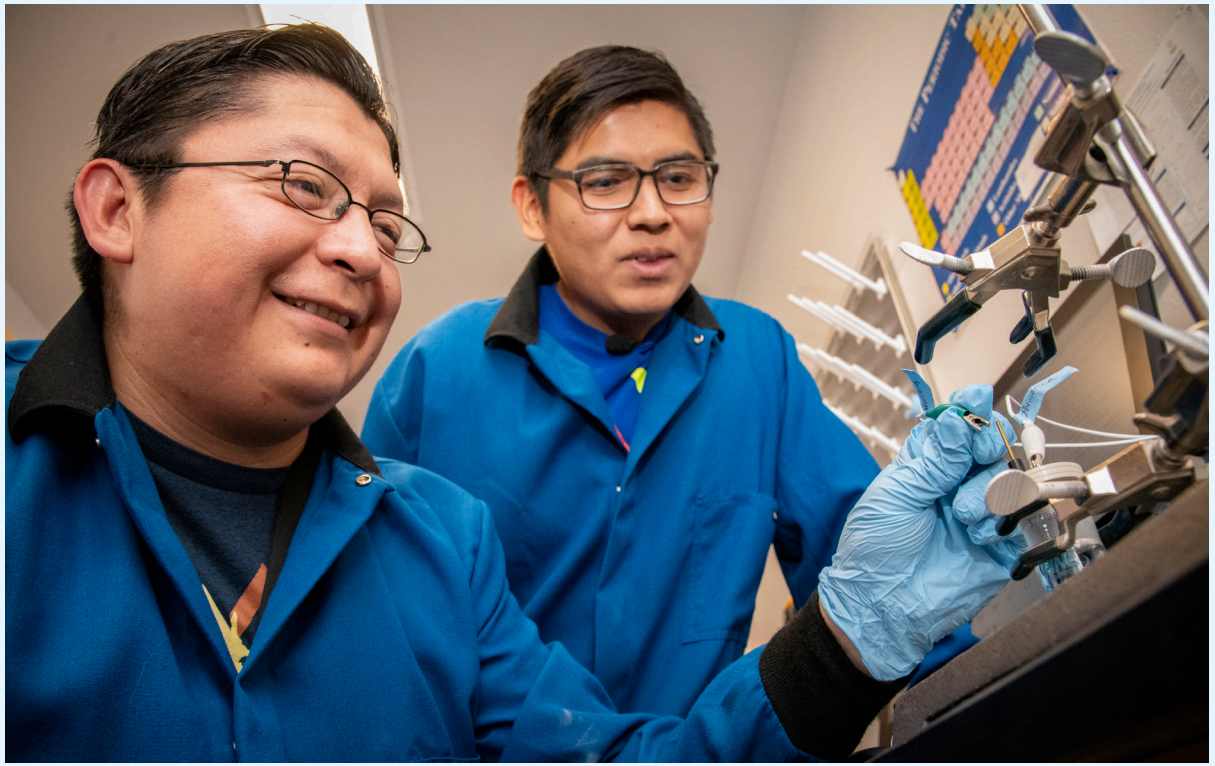
USDA Rural Development
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

USDA Rural Development Institutions of Higher Education Funding and Resource Guide

Together, America Prospers



NOTE:

Because information changes, always consult official program instructions or contact your local Rural Development office for help.
A list is available at this link:
https://go.usa.gov/xJHPE.

You will find additional resources, forms, and program information at **https://rd.usda.gov**.

A note about website links: For ease of reference, this guide provides links to relevant, useful information hosted outside the USDA domain. Federal endorsement of non-USDA programs or activities is neither intended nor implied. Please be aware that, when you access information through a link provided in this document, you are subject to the copyright and licensing restrictions of those sites. All links in this document were active as of February 2023.

Introduction

American Institutions of Higher Education are essential to vitality, sustainability, and progress in our communities. These schools – which include Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Minority-Serving Institutions, community colleges, institutes of technology, and vocational-technical schools – understand their local communities' needs. Most are located close to where their students live and work, and many are in rural areas. This presents USDA Rural Development a unique opportunity to partner with – and support – these valuable institutions.

Finding – and understanding how to apply for and use – federal resources can be challenging. This guide is designed to help rural Institutions of Higher Education find low-interest financing and grants to build or improve their facilities, infrastructure, equipment, and educational programs.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Program name and link	Overview	Who can apply?	How to apply
Community Facilities Direct Loans and Grants Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzDvz** **Community Facilities Loan Guarantees** Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzDw7**	These programs help finance construction of – or improvements to – essential community facilities such as hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, certain schools, child care centers, libraries, and town halls, among others. Funds also can be used to purchase necessary equipment and pay for related project expenses. Although CF program funds cannot support private, commercial, or business undertakings, in some instances, loans and grants can be combined with commercial financing to support a project.	Eligible applicants include government organizations, community-based nonprofit corporations, and federally-recognized Tribes. Direct loans and grants are available in rural areas with populations of **20,000 or fewer**. Loan guarantees are available in rural areas with populations of **50,000 or fewer**.	Lenders interested in learning more about the loan guarantee program can contact the USDA Rural Development Community Programs director in the state in which the proposed project is located. You'll find a state-based list at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xShSz**. Applications are accepted year-round in our local offices.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Program name and link	Overview	Who can apply?	How to apply
Rural Community Development Initiative Grants Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzD7M**	This competitive program helps nonprofit housing and community development organizations, lower-income rural communities, and federally-recognized Tribes support housing, essential community facilities, and economic development in rural areas. Examples of things grant funds can cover include training sub-grantees to conduct homeownership or minority business entrepreneur education, providing technical assistance to sub-grantees on strategic plan development, researching and identifying alternative funding sources, preparing boards of directors, and creating training tools such as videos, workbooks or reference guides. Grants range from $50,000 - $250,000, and there is a matching fund requirement equal to the amount of the grant award.	Eligible applicants include government organizations, nonprofit organizations, and certain private, for-profit organizations in rural areas. For the purposes of this program, "rural area" is defined as any area other than a city or town with a population greater than 50,000, and the urbanized area neighboring it.	Applications are accepted annually through a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) published in the ***Federal Register*** (available at this link: **https://www.federalregister.gov/**). Contact your local USDA Rural Development Community Programs team for more information. You'll find a state-based list at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xShSz**.
Tribal College Initiative Grants Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzD7S**	This program provides funding to 1994 Land Grant Institutions (Tribal Colleges – information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xhczq**) to make capital improvements to educational facilities. Funds can be used for infrastructure development or upgrades, along with equipment purchases for schools, libraries, and dormitories. Funding also can support educational and cultural projects.	TCIGs are open only to Tribal Colleges listed in Section 7402 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzDAK** - PDF) Grants of up to $250,000 for each Tribal land grant institution are available, and funds can be used to pay up to 95 percent of project costs. A five percent match is required, and partnerships with other federal, state, local, private, and nonprofit organizations are encouraged.	Applications are accepted year-round in your local USDA Rural Development office. You'll find a state-based list at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xShSz**.

RURAL BUSINESS-COOPERATIVE SERVICE PROGRAMS

Program name and link	Overview	Who can apply?	How to apply
Advanced Biofuel Payment Program Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzDUX**	The ABPP increases production of advanced biofuels through quarterly payments to eligible producers. This program helps increase American energy independence and the private-sector supply of renewable energy.	The program is open to advanced biofuels producers and sellers, including individuals, corporations, companies, foundations, associations, governments, and schools, among others. Buyers and sellers must act independently, and have no relationship to each other. Eligible advanced biofuels must be: • A liquid, gas, or solid • Derived from renewable biomass, other than corn kernel starch • A final (finished) product • Produced in the United States **NOTE**: A producer that combines advanced biofuels into a blended biofuel is not considered an advanced biofuel producer under this program. You'll find the formal definition of "advanced biofuel" at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xh3ND**.	Applications are accepted annually. For more information, contact your state's USDA Rural Development Energy Coordinator. A list of coordinators can be found at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xtBaj**.

RURAL BUSINESS-COOPERATIVE SERVICE PROGRAMS

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Agriculture Innovation Center Program Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzDXm**	The AICP awards technical assistance grants to eligible agriculture innovation centers to help develop and market value-added agricultural products. Funds can be used for: • Agriculture Innovation Center operations • Business development, such as creating feasibility studies and business plans • Marketing plans and branding • Financial advisory services and preparing financial statements • Process development, engineering services, scale production assessments, and systems development • Organizational assistance, and legal and technical advisory services • Connecting agricultural producers to a distribution system, processing facility, or commercial kitchen • Product development such as concept testing, feasibility and cost analysis, product taste-testing, consumer and production analysis, or evaluation of packaging and labeling options	This program is open to government organizations, federally-recognized Tribes, institutions of higher education, and non- or for-profit organizations and corporations. There are no population or location restrictions.	To learn more or to apply, contact the USDA Rural Development office in the state in which your project or program is located. You'll find a state-based list at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xShSz**.

RURAL BUSINESS-COOPERATIVE SERVICE PROGRAMS

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Biorefinery, Renewable Chemical, and Biobased Product Manufacturing Assistance (Section 9003) Program Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzDUw**	This program provides loan guarantees up to $250 million to develop, build, or retrofit facilities to support new and emerging technologies, and produce advanced biofuels, renewable chemicals, and biobased products. Projects must be in a U.S. state or territory. The maximum federal participation (encompassing all federal loans or grants) is 80 percent of all eligible project costs. The borrower and other involved principals must make a significant cash equity contribution investment.	The program is open to individuals, federally-recognized Tribes, state and local governments, farm cooperatives, associations of agricultural producers, national laboratories, institutions of higher education, rural electric co-ops, public power organizations, credit unions examined or supervised by a state agency or the National Credit Union Administration, or combined groups of any of the above.	Applications are accepted bi-annually. To learn more, email **EnergyPrograms@rd.usda.gov** and mention the Section 9003 Program in your subject line.
Intermediary Relending Program Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzDXs**	This program provides 1 percent loans to local lenders ("intermediaries") that then re-lend to businesses to improve economic conditions and create jobs in rural communities. Funds can be used to finance rural businesses and community development projects. The maximum loan to borrowers is $400,000.	This program is open to government organizations, nonprofit corporations, federally-recognized Tribes, and cooperatives located in rural areas with populations of 50,000 or fewer.	Applications are accepted quarterly in our local offices. You'll find a state-based list at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xShSz**.
Rural Business Development Grants Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzDXt**	These grants fund public economic development activities to help small and emerging private businesses and nonprofits in rural communities start or expand. Among other things, funds can be used to purchase or develop land, buildings, and equipment; to cover costs for feasibility studies and business plans and provide other technical assistance; to improve rural transportation, establish revolving loan funds, and support rural distance learning programs that provide educational or job training.	This program is open to towns, communities, state agencies, nonprofits, institutions of higher education, federally-recognized Tribes and rural cooperatives, among others. Rural Business Development Grant money must be used for projects that benefit rural areas **outside** of cities with populations of 50,000 or more. You can check to see if your area is eligible at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xz7kz**.	Applications are accepted annually through USDA Rural Development's local or state offices. You'll find a state-based list at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xShSz**.

RURAL BUSINESS-COOPERATIVE SERVICE PROGRAMS

Program name and link	Overview	Who can apply?	How to apply
Rural Cooperative Development Grants Information is available at this link: **https://tinyurl.com/5dy55j35**	This program helps establish and operate cooperative development centers. Among other things, cooperative development centers provide technical assistance, conduct feasibility studies, develop business plans, provide training, and facilitate strategic planning.	Centers can be in any area, as long as they serve areas with populations of 50,000 or fewer.	Applications are accepted annually at grants.gov (available at this link: **https://www.grants.gov**).
Rural Energy for America Program Energy Audits and Renewable Energy Development Grants Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzDwc**	REAP provides technical and renewable energy assistance to rural small businesses and agricultural producers. Grants of up to $100,000 can be used for energy audits and renewable energy development. This program helps strengthen American energy independence by increasing the private-sector supply of renewable energy. Over time, these investments can also help lower energy costs for small businesses and agricultural producers. Our energy grants help heat homes, power cars, and run businesses with renewable energy from wind, solar, and biofuels.	The program is open to state and local governments, federally-recognized Tribes, land-grant universities and other institutions of higher education, rural electric cooperatives, public power entities, and resource conservation and development councils. Businesses must be in rural areas with populations fewer than 50,000. You can check to see if your area is eligible at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xz7kz**. **NOTE:** Population restrictions do not apply to agricultural producers.	Applications are accepted year-round at our local offices. You'll find a state-based list at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xShSz**.
Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) Grants Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzD5b**	RISE Grants help create and augment high-wage jobs and accelerate the formation of new businesses. They also support industry clusters and maximize the use of local assets in eligible, lower-income rural areas. Grants can be used to build or support a business incubator facility, provide training, and improve opportunities for workers to get high-wage jobs in new or existing local industries. Grants range from $500,000 - $2 million with a four-year-term.	This program is open to rural jobs accelerator partnerships with expertise delivering economic and job training programs. To qualify, you must be a government organization, nonprofit organization, state, Tribe, or institution of higher education that serves a rural region small enough to allow close collaboration among partners. Your RISE project also must include important elements of your region's prioritized industry cluster (concentrations of related industries).	Applications are accepted annually at grants.gov (available at this link: **https://www.grants.gov**).

RURAL BUSINESS-COOPERATIVE SERVICE PROGRAMS

Program name and link	Overview	Who can apply?	How to apply
Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzD5Z**	The RMAP helps establish revolving microloans for small, rural businesses. Funds can be used to start and grow microenterprises, and to provide training and technical assistance to microloan borrowers and microentrepreneurs. Loan uses include working capital, debt refinancing, equipment and supplies, and real estate improvements.	This program is open to nonprofits, federally-recognized Tribes, and institutions of higher education in rural areas except cities with populations greater than 50,000, and their neighboring urbanized areas.	Applications are accepted year-round in our local offices. You'll find a state-based list at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xShSz**.
Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge Program Information is available at this link: **https://tinyurl.com/mr2h6xs6**	This initiative provides planning support, technical assistance, and training to encourage placemaking activities in rural communities. Funds can be used to help build capacity for broadband access, preserve cultural and historic structures, and support the development of housing, transportation, and recreational spaces. Up to $4 million in RPIC funding is available, with a maximum grant award of $250,000.	This program is open to federally-recognized Tribes and Tribal organizations, institutions of higher learning such as Land-Grant Colleges and Universities (1862, 1890, and 1994), Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Hispanic-Serving Institutions, among others. Nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and small, private businesses that meet size standards established by the U.S. Small Business Administration also are eligible to apply. Planning must directly benefit cities or towns with populations of 50,000 or fewer.	You must use grants.gov to apply. You can find the RPIC application by entering Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CDFA) number 10.890 in the CDFA drop-down menu under "Basic Search Criteria" located at the top left of the grants.gov webpage, available at **https://go.usa.gov/xJf9j**. For more information, email **RD.RPIC@usda.gov**.

RURAL UTILITIES SERVICE PROGRAMS

Program name and link	Overview	Who can apply?	How to apply
Community Connect Grants Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzWYZ**	This program offers financial assistance to eligible applicants to provide broadband service in economically-challenged rural areas where service does not exist. Funds can be used to build broadband infrastructure to serve residential and business customers in a proposed funded service area (PFSA), and to establish a community center to provide free public broadband access for at least two years.	Eligible applicants include incorporated organizations, federally-recognized Tribes, state and local governments, cooperatives, private corporations, and for- or nonprofit, limited liability companies in rural areas without broadband speeds of at least 10 Megabits per second (Mbps) downstream, and 1 Mbps upstream.	Application windows for this program are announced on a periodic basis. To learn more, email **community.connect@usda.gov**.

RURAL UTILITIES SERVICE PROGRAMS

Program name and link	Overview	Who can apply?	How to apply
Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzWYU**	This competitive program helps rural communities use advanced telecommunications technology to connect to each other – and the world – overcoming the effects of remoteness and low population density. Funds can be used to buy end-user equipment (such as interactive video or audio hardware, computer hardware, network components, and software, or similar infrastructure) used to deliver distance learning and telemedicine services in eligible areas. Funds also can pay for certain types of instructional programming or technical assistance and training. You will find a map of recently-funded DLT projects at this link: **https://tinyurl.com/buw48ajt**.	Eligible applicants include most state and local government organizations, federally-recognized Tribes, for-profit businesses, and nonprofit organizations. Groups of eligible organizations also can apply together. DLT grants require a minimum 15 percent match that can't come from other federal sources.	Applications are accepted on grants.gov during an announced application window. To learn more, email **dltinfo@usda.gov** or contact the Telecommunications General Field Representative in the state in which your proposed project is located. A state-based list is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xhrux**.

RURAL UTILITIES SERVICE PROGRAMS

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ReConnect Loans and Grants Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzW4Y**	This program offers loans, grants, and loan-grant combinations to eligible recipients to get fixed, terrestrial broadband to areas of rural America that currently lack sufficient access. Funds can be used to build, improve, or acquire existing broadband and terrestrial satellite broadband facilities and equipment. Reasonable pre-application expenses also can be covered. Loan funding (100 percent loan requests, only) also can support the acquisition of an existing system that provides insufficient broadband access. The minimum request for funding across all ReConnect categories is $100,000. A 100 percent grant requires a 25 percent cash match. The 50-50 loan and grant combination interest rate is set by the U.S. Treasury at the time of each advance of funds. A 100 percent loan has a fixed interest rate of 2 percent. A 100 percent grant for Tribal governments and socially-vulnerable communities does not require a cash match.	Eligible applicants include corporations, limited liability companies and limited liability partnerships, cooperatives or mutual associations, state or local government organizations, territories or possessions of the U.S., and federally-recognized Tribes. For a geographic area to be eligible, it must be rural, and 90 percent of the households in the area must lack sufficient access to broadband service.	Applications are accepted only through USDA Rural Development's online application system. Forms and other application resources are available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xhYc8**. For questions, use the fillable "contact us" tab available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xhYcU**. Or, you can contact the Telecommunications General Field Representative in the state in which your proposed project is located. A state-based list is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xhrux**.

RURAL UTILITIES SERVICE PROGRAMS

Program name and link	Overview	Who can apply?	How to apply
Solid Waste Management Grants Information is available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzBE7**	This program helps reduce or eliminate water pollution by providing funding to eligible organizations that provide technical assistance and training to improve the planning and management of solid waste sites. Funds can be used to evaluate current landfill conditions to identify threats to water resources, and provide technical assistance and training on the operation, maintenance, closure and future use of landfills.	This program is open to government organizations, private organizations, nonprofit organizations, federally-recognized Tribes, and academic institutions that serve rural areas with populations of 10,000 or fewer. Check to see if your area is eligible at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xz7kz**. Special consideration is given to projects serving areas with fewer than 5,500 or 2,500 residents; to regional, multistate, or national areas, and to lower-income populations.	Applications are accepted annually at grants.gov (available at this link: **https://www.grants.gov**).

Additional Resources

Sustainable Management Tools (A collaboration between USDA and the U.S. EPA)

Information is available at this link: **https://tinyurl.com/2nh9f2be**
This webpage offers "Workshop in a Box" resources for rural and small utility systems to develop or improve system management.

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To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, available at this link: **https://go.usa.gov/xzzfW**, and at any USDA office. Or, write a letter addressed to USDA and provide all of the information requested in the form. Call (866) 632-9992 to request a copy of the complaint form. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) postal mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 (2) fax: (202) 690-7442, or (3) email: **program.intake@usda.gov**.

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