



U.S. Department of Agriculture  
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# News Release

## USDA Launches New Program to Create High-Speed Internet e-Connectivity in Rural America

### Release & Contact Info

#### Press Release

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**WASHINGTON, Dec. 13, 2018** – Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue today announced that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is offering up to \$600 million in loans and grants to help build broadband infrastructure in rural America. Telecommunications companies, rural electric cooperatives and utilities, internet service providers and municipalities may apply for funding through USDA's new ReConnect Program to connect rural areas that currently have insufficient broadband service. Answering the Administration's call to action for rural prosperity, Congress appropriated funds in the fiscal year 2018 budget for this broadband pilot program. USDA Rural Development is the primary agency delivering the program, with assistance from other federal partners.

"High-speed internet e-Connectivity is a necessity, not an amenity, vital for quality of life and economic opportunity, so we hope that today rural communities kick off their rural broadband project planning," Secretary Perdue said. "Under the leadership of President Trump, USDA has worked to understand the true needs of rural communities facing this challenge so we can be strong partners to create high-speed, reliable broadband e-Connectivity."

USDA will make available approximately \$200 million for grants (applications due to USDA by April 29), as well as \$200 million for loan and grant combinations (applications due May 29), and \$200 million for low-interest loans (applications due by June 28).

Projects funded through this initiative must serve communities with fewer than 20,000 people with no broadband service or where service is slower than 10 megabits per second (mbps) download and 1 mbps upload.

Approved projects must create access speeds of at least 25 mbps upload and 3 mbps download. Priority will be awarded for projects that propose to deliver higher-capacity connections to rural homes, businesses and farms. USDA seeks to stretch these funds as far as possible by leveraging existing networks and systems without overbuilding existing services greater than 10/1 mbps.

Evaluation criteria include connecting agricultural production and marketing, e-Commerce, health care and education facilities. Previous research by USDA has demonstrated that high-capacity broadband is critical to all aspects of rural prosperity, including the ability to grow and attract businesses, retain and develop talent, and maintain rural quality of life.

To help customers with the application process, USDA is holding a series of online webinars and regional in-person workshops. The full list of upcoming public webinars and workshops can be found at the ReConnect Program's resource portal at [reconnect.usda.gov](http://reconnect.usda.gov). This website is best viewed using Chrome, Firefox, Safari, or Microsoft Edge.

In April 2017, President Donald J. Trump established the Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity to identify legislative, regulatory and policy changes that could promote agriculture and prosperity in rural communities. In January 2018, Secretary Perdue presented the Task Force's findings to President Trump. These findings included 31 recommendations to align the federal government with state, local and tribal governments to take advantage of opportunities that exist in rural America. Increasing investments in rural infrastructure is a key recommendation of the task force.

To view the report in its entirety, please view the [Report to the President of the United States from the Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity](#) (PDF, 5.4 MB). In addition, to view the categories of the recommendations, please view the [Rural Prosperity infographic](#) (PDF, 190 KB).

USDA Rural Development provides loans and grants to help expand economic opportunities and create jobs in rural areas. This assistance supports infrastructure improvements; business development; housing; community facilities such as schools, public safety and health care; and high-speed internet access in rural areas. For more information, visit [www.rd.usda.gov](http://www.rd.usda.gov).

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