

Frequently Asked Questions

The ReConnect program is a new opportunity for rural communities with fewer than 20,000 residents that are lacking in high-speed Internet connectivity. Ultimately, the goal is to connect rural communities to support agriculture production and marketing, e-Commerce, health care, and education.

New questions have been added to the top of the document in the “New Questions” section. Previously existing questions with updated, new information are marked as “Updated” throughout the document.

Updated on May 21, 2019

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Note: Open bookmarks in Adobe Acrobat or Adobe Reader to view side panel navigation.

New Questions

Q: Is an applicant required to provide information about its parent(s), subsidiary(ies), and/or affiliate(s) even if those entities are not involved in the project?

A: The applicant is required to answer questions related to its parent(s), subsidiary(ies), and/or affiliate(s) under Account Information. Depending on the answers to these questions, the system will require additional questions to be answered and for documents to be submitted as required uploads. If any of the required uploads are not available, the applicant should upload a document identifying which documents are not available and why.

Q: If an electric cooperative is the applicant and is only proposing to provide broadband service in a part of their electric service area, do they need to draw Non-Funded Service Areas in the mapping tool for the areas not receiving broadband service?

A: No, an electric cooperative does not need to draw NFSAs for the parts of their electric service area that will not be receiving broadband service. However, please note that these areas do have revenues and expenses associated with them that do need to be accounted for the financial statements.

Q: Can applicants begin working on the application before the ARR is approved?

A: No, applicants cannot begin working on an application until the ARR is approved. ARR approval takes approximately two business days.

USDA recommends using the Application Guide to prepare as much information as possible for entry once an applicant is allowed to access the system.

Q: Why is the system asking me to fill out my ARR information again? I already submitted my ARR and am waiting on approval.

A: Once applicants submit the ARR, they will see a confirmation screen. If applicants log back into the system before the ARR is approved, the portal will show the ARR screen again. Applicants should not resubmit ARR as this will create problems with approval and delay access to the application system. Key contacts identified on the ARR will receive an email notification when the ARR is approved.

Q: Can I start an application if I do not have my SAM registration or DUNS number yet?

A: Applicants can start an application by submitting an Authorized Representative Request (ARR) without the SAM or DUNS number. ARRs take approximately two business days to approve. Applicants will not be able to go further into the application until the Account information is added. SAM and DUNS numbers are required for the Account information. USDA recommends using the Application Guide to prepare as much information as possible for entry once an applicant is allowed to access the system.

Q: How do I know which organizational documents I will need to submit?

A: The application system will auto populate the required documents based on the legal entity type chosen. The Application Guide details which documents are required for which entity type in Table 2: Account Documents by Entity Type beginning on page 74.

Q: My organization uses Internet Explorer and I am having problems accessing the application system. What can I do to improve my user experience?

A: Internet Explorer and Safari are not recommended browsers for using the application system. Applicants should download and use Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, or Microsoft Edge to successfully complete the application.

Q: My application timed out and I lost the information entered into the system. Can USDA recover this information?

A: USDA recommends saving applications at every chance available. Some sections have a save button on every page, but other sections can only save once the applicant completes the section. The system will time out after 15 minutes, and the applicant will receive a warning message at approximately 14 minutes and 30 seconds. If an application times out without being saved, the applicant will lose all information entered since the last save. USDA cannot recover any information lost from not saving the application.

Q: Does an applicant need to hear back from USDA about EA or EIS before submission?

A: Yes. If you indicate “Yes” for either the EA or EIS questions, the system will require an upload as proof that you contacted USDA.

Q: What state agency or official will be handling the certification of state maps to confirm there is no state funding in the PFSA?

A: The applicant must provide a letter from the appropriate state office such as the Governor's office or a state broadband office if the state has one, that addresses whether state broadband funding was provided for the proposed service area.

Q: How can I ensure that my project receives the maximum points possible under the State Broadband Activity section?

A: The following actions should be taken to ensure that the maximum possible points are derived from the State Broadband Activity section:

- To receive the 10 points under the state broadband plan, please ensure that the certification letter signed by the Governor in the appropriate State(s) indicates that the broadband plan identified in the letter has been adopted or recognized by the State government as the official State Broadband plan, that the plan has been updated or information has been added to the plan in the last five years from the date of the publication of the Funding Opportunity Announcement, and provides the web site (URL) where the plan is being made publicly available.
- To receive the additional 5 points that will be awarded to projects located in states that do not restrict utilities, please ensure that the certification letter signed by the Governor in the appropriate State(s) states that there are no restrictions on utilities participating in the provision of broadband service in the State. Documentation for this item can include examples of laws, regulations, or similar legal documents which indicate that utilities can engage in the provision of broadband service.
- To receive the addition 5 points for projects located in States that expedite right-of-way and environmental requirements, please ensure that the certification letter signed by the Governor in the appropriate State(s) states that there are procedures in place for expediting administrative activities for completing right-of-way and environmental permitting requirements that can be executed for the project if necessary, in order to meet the Agency's project build-out timelines. Documentation for this item can include examples of laws, regulations, procedures or other similar documents which indicate that there are procedures in place for expediting administrative activities for completing right-of-way and environmental permitting requirements.

Q: What is considered an affiliate company? What is the ownership threshold for considering a company an affiliate?

A: The ReConnect Legal documents provide the definition of an affiliate. Applicants should use the definition to determine affiliate relationships. The definition is as follows: "Affiliate" or "Affiliated Company" of any specified person or entity means any

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other person or entity directly or indirectly controlling of, controlled by, under direct or indirect common control with, or related to, such specified person or entity, or which exists for the sole purpose of providing any service to one company or exclusively to companies which otherwise meet the definition of affiliate. This definition includes Variable Interest Entities as described in Financial Accounting Standards Board Interpretation (FIN) No. 46(R), Consolidation of Variable Interest Entities. For the purpose of this definition, "control" means the possession directly or indirectly, of the power to direct or cause the direction of the management and policies of a company, whether such power is exercised through one or more intermediary companies, or alone, or in conjunction with, or pursuant to an agreement with, one or more other companies, and whether such power is established through a majority or minority ownership voting of securities, common directors, officers, or stockholders, voting trust, holding trusts (other than money exchanged) for property or services.

ReConnect Program Overview

Q: Why is this new rural broadband program being offered?

A: This program is being offered to build improved broadband e-Connectivity infrastructure for as many rural families, businesses, farms, schools and health care facilities as possible so that they can succeed in the 21st Century.

Q: What will USDA offer with this new rural broadband program?

A: The law allows USDA to offer applicants loans and grants to build infrastructure and install equipment that provides modern, reliable, high-speed Internet service in rural America. Project eligibility specifications are available at <https://reconnect.usda.gov/>.

Q: Is this program going to be offered annually?

A: The ReConnect Program funding was provided in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 and is a pilot program. The current FOA offers a portion of that funding. This means that there are plans for additional rounds of funding. In addition, appropriations for Fiscal Year 2019 included an additional \$550 million dollars for the program.

Q: Where will USDA's new rural broadband funds go?

A: The language in the budget law requires that funds be spent in rural areas with a population of less than 20,000 residents, where there is not sufficient access to broadband service. Sufficient access is defined as speeds of 10 megabits per second (Mbps) downstream and 1 Mbps upstream. The funding is technology neutral, as long

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as it funds infrastructure that reliably supplies retail service to customers at 25 Mbps downstream and 3 Mbps upstream.

Q: When will USDA begin disbursing the new rural broadband funds?

A: USDA announced the final rules and requirements on December 13, 2018. Application deadlines begin in May 2019 so that rural communities, cooperatives, and companies can begin to create the parameters of their rural broadband project. Application deadlines are:

- May 31, 2019 for grants;
- June 21, 2019 for the loan and grant combination; and,
- July 12, 2019 for loans.

Funding award maximums are \$25 million for a grant, \$50 million for a loan and grant combination, and \$50 million for a loan. Awards are anticipated to be disbursed starting in late 2019.

Q: How can I apply for the new funds?

A: After reviewing the rules for ReConnect at <https://reconnect.usda.gov>, begin creating the rural broadband project that your community, cooperative, or company wants to submit for federal funding from USDA. The online application portal has not yet opened, but you can develop all details of your rural broadband project and begin assembling all required information to apply. Information you will need includes the following:

- Geographic boundaries of the proposed service area that currently lacks 10/1 Mbps Internet speeds.
- Type of technologies that will be used to provide new rural broadband service of 25/3 Mbps or above (could be fiber, fixed wireless, and certain terrestrial components of satellite service).
- Number of rural premises you will be connecting, such as homes, schools, libraries, healthcare facilities, farms, ranches, and businesses.
- Business plan for how the service will be constructed and on what timeframe services will be available to customers.
- Information about the structure and financial well-being of the community, cooperative, or company that is submitting the application.
- System design for delivering 25/3 service including cost estimates of proposed facilities.
- How the project will satisfy NEPA, Section 106, and other environmental requirements.

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Q: Will there be at least one workshop in each State?

A: Unfortunately, USDA does not have enough time or the resources to do a workshop in each State. We will be hosting six regional workshops spread out across the country. All six workshops are confirmed and registration links are available on the ReConnect website at <https://reconnect.usda.gov> under Events.

- Washington, Pennsylvania: April 2-3, 2019
- Tucson, Arizona: April 9-10, 2019
- Junction City, Kansas: April 16-17, 2019
- Welches, Oregon: April 23-24, 2019
- Auburn, Alabama: May 8-9, 2019
- Alexandria, Minnesota: May 15-16, 2019

USDA may host some additional state focused workshops.

Q: Who can I reach out to for more information about USDA loan programs?

A: For any questions regarding the ReConnect Program, you should submit your questions through the Contact Form located at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/contact-us>. If you have interests in other loan programs outside of ReConnect, please visit the www.rd.usda.gov website which provides program information on all Rural Development programs.

Q: When will the application portal be live?

A: USDA is still finalizing the application portal and it will go live on April 23, 2019. Applicants will be able to access the application portal at <https://reconnect.usda.gov>.

Eligibility

Q: If an applicant is proposing to place fiber facilities through an ineligible area to get to an area eligible area, can the fiber facilities be used to provide service to the ineligible areas?

A: An applicant may propose fiber placement in an ineligible area in order to get to an eligible area if it is necessary to reach that eligible area; however, the applicant must fund with non-award funds the fiber used to provide service to the ineligible area. For example, if a 100-count fiber cable is being proposed to be constructed through ineligible and eligible areas and 30 fiber will be for the ineligible areas and the total cost of the fiber is \$1 million dollars, then 30% (\$300,000) of the total cost of the fiber facility (installation and materials) will need to be funded through non-ReConnect award funds.

Q: Will USDA protect Rural Broadband Access Loan and Loan Guarantee and Telecommunications Infrastructure Loan Program applicant's proposed service area if the application is submitted after the ReConnect application window opens on 4/23/2019?

A: If a Rural Broadband Access Loan or Telecommunications Infrastructure Loan application is received prior to a ReConnect application and it is approved for funding it will become a protected area. The Mapping Tool will identify these pending applications if there is no ReConnect application covering the service area. If a Reconnect application is submitted before a Rural Broadband Access Loan or Telecommunications Infrastructure Loan application, then the ReConnect applicant will get the preference for receiving an award.

Q: Is a WISP ineligible for ReConnect Funds, even if they show they have eligible service areas, but would not be providing fixed, terrestrial broadband service?

A: A company would not be considered ineligible simply because they are a WISP. In fact, a WISP would generally be considered an eligible entity, as long as they meet all of the eligibility requirements of the program. All applicants must propose to build a network that is capable of providing service to every premise in the proposed funded service area at a speed of 25/3 Mbps. Fixed wireless services are eligible and are considered terrestrial services.

Q: Who is eligible to receive the funds?

A: Rural telephone and broadband service providers, rural electric cooperatives, national and regional private companies, nonprofit organizations, tribal entities, and State and local government instrumentalities are likely to be awarded funds, but eligibility depends on State and local laws. An applicant must be able to supply retail broadband to customers. The only ineligible entities are sole proprietors and limited partnerships. Eligible entities are listed in the FOA released December 14, 2018.

Q: Are Utility/electric companies able to apply if they themselves can only provide wholesale broadband per State regulations and then have other unaffiliated parties provide the retail service?

A: Open Access Networks are eligible for funding. The applicant must provide firm commitments from the retail providers to purchase or lease sufficient services to demonstrate both the financial feasibility of the project and that service will be available to every premises in the Proposed Funded Service Area.

Q: Can Wireless Internet Service Providers apply for ReConnect funds?

A: Yes, fixed wireless providers may apply for ReConnect Program funding if they meet all of the eligibility requirements.

Q: How will USDA know where there are broadband services at 10/1 Mbps speeds currently provided?

A: When USDA receives applications for the ReConnect Program, we will use the best available tools and information to determine if the proposed new service area already has 10/1 Mbps speed connections at the household level. We will post a Public Notice Filing (PNF) of the proposed service area on the ReConnect webpage at <https://reconnect.usda.gov> and service providers in those areas can submit a Public Notice Response indicating if they are already providing 10/1 Mbps. There is subscription service on the ReConnect webpage that allows companies and individuals to subscribe to receive notification whenever a PNF is posted. Finally, USDA will send staff out to the proposed service area and conduct an on-site review to determine if 10/1 Mbps service is available.

Q: If a company applies for the 100% grant product and USDA finds one location with 10/1 service, will the entire application get thrown out or can the applicant remove that PFSA from the application?

A: The 100% grant product will be evaluated competitively. USDA will reject any PFSA if one household is found within the PFSA as having access to broadband service of 10/1 Mbps. If an application only has a single PFSA, the entire application will be rejected. No changes or alterations will be allowed for competitive grant products. This also applies if a PFSA is made up of more than one service area. If one service area is found to be ineligible, the entire application will be rejected.

Q: Would two entities owned by the same holding company be able to submit separate applications as separate entities proposing to serve different areas? Or only one application because both owned by the same holding company?

A: As long as each entity is organized as a standalone company, then each entity can submit separate applications. However, each company must independently have two years of audited financial statements and meet all other eligibility requirements.

Q: Who determines what areas meet the 90% without sufficient access to eligibility criteria?

A: It is the applicant's responsibility to use all available sources to determine if an eligible area does not have 10/1 service. The applicant then draws a map polygon on the USDA mapping tool for the PFSA. Once a map polygon is submitted, USDA will publish the

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map to solicit public comment regarding the area. USDA will also validate broadband speeds on project sites.

Q: Are all CAF II – Auction 903 Winners’ Census Block Group(s) off-limits to other applicants, regardless of the level and type of service that the CAF II Winner proposed to offer in those areas?

A: Yes, for areas within the boundaries of a CAF II Census Block Group, only the CAF II Winner is eligible to apply. In this scenario, the CAF II Winner may only request a 100 percent loan under the ReConnect Program. The CAF II service areas can be found in our mapping tool on the inform customer portal and on the FCC website.

Q: If a potential PFSA falls within the boundaries of both a Protected RUS Broadband Borrower’s Service Area and a CAF II – Auction 903 Winner’s Census Block Group, would that PFSA be eligible in either entity’s application for ReConnect funding?

A: If a PFSA is in an area where a Protected RUS Broadband Borrower’s Service Area overlaps with the area of a CAF II Winner, only the RUS Broadband Borrower is eligible to apply. As stated in the FOA, service areas of borrowers that have RUS broadband loans are ineligible for all other applicants. Only the applicable RUS broadband borrower is eligible to receive additional RUS funding for a previously funded service area.

Q: Who or what determines sufficient access to broadband?

A: Sufficient access to broadband means any rural area that has fixed, terrestrial broadband service delivering at least 10 megabits per second (Mbps) downstream and 1 Mbps upstream. Applicants make the initial determination and USDA will validate this determination via site visits and information collected from existing service providers through the Public Notice process.

Q: Will ReConnect fund middle-mile only projects?

A: Stand-alone middle-mile projects are not eligible under the program. Middle-mile facilities are eligible if they are needed to bring sufficient broadband service to all premises in the PFSA.

Q: If the applicant wants to construct common network facilities to upgrade or construct a broadband network to serve several non-contiguous areas that make up the PFSA as well as ineligible service areas, would the cost of the common network facilities be eligible under the ReConnect Program?

A: If the common network facilities are to be used to serve the non-contiguous service areas that make up the PFSA and the ineligible service areas, then the cost of the

common network facilities needs to be pro-rated based on the purpose of the facility. As an example, if the total cost of a shared common network facility consisting of a 24-fiber cable is \$100,000 and only 6 fibers will be used to serve the PFSA, then only \$25,000 can be allocated towards the Common Network Facilities (PFSA) cost and the remaining \$75,000 needs to be allocated towards the Common Network Facilities (NFSA) cost.

Q: Can a CAF II awardee also receive ReConnect funds?

A: Entities that received CAF II funding under the auction held in Fall 2018 are only eligible to receive a loan at a fixed interest rate of 2%. They are not eligible for a combo or 100% grant award.

Q: Can USDA define a current RUS borrower when it comes to ineligible areas? Does this include RUS broadband loan, telecommunication infrastructure loan, and RUS electric loans including smart grid funding?

A: For the ReConnect Program only, a Broadband Borrower means any entity that has received a Telecommunications Infrastructure loan, Farm Bill Broadband loan or Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP) loan any time after the beginning of Fiscal Year 2000. If a Broadband Borrower's service area is eligible for protection under the ReConnect Program, the company's entire service territory is protected, not only the service area(s) included in the approved loan application. The service areas of Community Connect grant recipients still under build-out are also protected. RUS electric loans are not included in this definition.

A map of certain ineligible areas can be found at <https://reconnect.usda.gov/>

Q: Can applicants form a consortium to submit an application that includes numerous counties and projects?

A: As long as the consortium is a legal consortium designating a fiscal agent, it is possible for that consortium to submit an application and be eligible. However, all requirements and guidelines established in the FOA must be followed. USDA has had challenges in the past when working with consortia. The application must include a management plan fully explaining how the consortium will operate. It is recommended that a core team be established outside the consortia membership to manage the operation.

Q: How can we successfully challenge FCC 477 data?

A: FCC 477 data is one source of information that USDA will consider. It is not used as a sole source of information to validate 10/1 service. To challenge FCC data, please contact the FCC. Please note that USDA will validate the existence of 10/1 service

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utilizing various sources of information including sending staff out to evaluate the area.

Q: Could an applicant submit unaudited financial statements by the application deadline and commit to submitting unqualified, audited financial statements by a specific date after the deadline?

A: Applicants must submit unqualified, audited financial statements for the two previous years from the date the application is submitted. Applicants that do not have two previous years of audited financials will not be considered for funding.

Q: If the applicant is a relatively new business, does it matter if the 2 years of audited financials don't have a lot of information? What financial information could a startup provide to meet this requirement?

A: At a minimum, audited financial statements must consist of a balance sheet, income statement, and cash flow statement. As long as the audited statements are unqualified, they could be acceptable. The only exception would be for startup operations formed from partnerships of existing utility providers, in which case, audited financial statements are required for the two previous years from each of the partners.

Q: If the applicant is a holding company (since 2 years of Audited Financials are available only at the holding company level) and it utilizes a subsidiary to construct and operate the network on its behalf, are there any requirements around transferability of the assets?

A: The project assets purchased with grant funds must remain held by the applicant. An applicant could enter into an operating agreement with the subsidiary, but the assets and award security arrangements must remain at the holding company level if the holding company is the applicant.

Q: Can an applicant apply for Community Connect and ReConnect for the same area?

A: USDA cannot stop an applicant from submitting applications to both programs; however, the applicant is taking a risk as they are only allowed funds from one or the other for the same area.

Q: Can an applicant apply for Community Connect and ReConnect funds for different areas?

A: Yes, an applicant can apply for funds from both programs if the project serves different broadband service areas. The PFSA's included in the application for the ReConnect program must meet eligibility requirements on a standalone basis.

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Q: Can States apply for ReConnect funding?

A: Yes, if a State can meet all eligibility requirements it can apply. USDA recommends that States set up separate entities to submit an application. If the State comes in as the applicant, security arrangements for the award may be an issue.

Q: Please explain the 10/1 Mbps versus 25/3 Mbps service requirements.

A: 10/1 Mbps service is the requirement to determine if an area is eligible for funding. If a proposed service area has 10/1 service available, the area is not eligible for funding. 25/3 Mbps is a construction requirement for ensuring that the facilities funded can provide 25/3 service to every premise in the PFSA.

Q: Must the proposed funded service area (PFSA) be contiguous?

A: No, a proposed funded service area does not need to be contiguous. However, if multiple service areas are proposed, each service must meet certain eligibility requirements on a stand-alone basis.

Q: Do all of the service areas have to fall within Census tracts?

A: Applicants under the program are expected to define a PFSA specific to their project and application. USDA does not require that a PFSA be a particular size or that it fall within a census tract.

Q: Can a competitive local exchange carrier (CLEC) apply for funding?

A: As long as the CLEC meets all the eligibility requirements, they can apply.

Q: Can one applicant request funding from all three sources?

A: One applicant cannot request funding from all three sources. An applicant must choose which funding source to apply for and can only submit one application.

Q: May an applicant submit multiple applications for different funding categories?

A: No, an applicant is only able to submit one application.

Q: If an applicant applies for but does not receive a 100% grant, may they then be considered for the 50/50 combination loan-grant category?

A: No, an applicant is only able to submit one application.

Q: Can applicants apply for more than one service area?

A: A single application may propose multiple service areas. Each PFSA will be evaluated separately for certain eligibility requirements.

Q: Would a PFSA defined by a large map polygon that contains “donut holes” to remove areas that already have sufficient broadband access be eligible?

A: Yes, a proposed funded service area can have “donut holes” as long as all areas included in the PFSA meet eligibility requirements.

Q: If there is a parent company with multiple subsidiaries, can each subsidiary apply?

A: Each subsidiary may apply on its own. However, each subsidiary must independently have two years of audited financial statements and meet all other eligibility requirements.

Q: Can a cooperative participate? What are the audit requirements?

A: Yes, cooperatives may participate as long as they have two years’ worth of unqualified audited financial statements and meet all other eligibility requirements.

Q: Are legal partnerships eligible?

A: No, legal partnerships and individuals are not eligible. Legal partnerships can be too easily dissolved, creating too high of a risk.

Q: Can an applicant partner with a larger broadband provider?

A: USDA encourages applicants to partner with other entities. In general, an applicant could partner with a larger service provider to bring broadband service to an eligible rural area. USDA would have to evaluate how the applicant and any partners are proposing to complete the project. The applicant must fully explain the relationship between all partners and any dependencies between partners.

Q: Is a public-private partnership required?

A: USDA strongly encourages public-private partnerships, but this is not an eligibility requirement.

Q: If an Indian Tribe owns 51% of tribal telecommunication company, can the tribe use C-LEC of a state telecommunication company? Or will the tribal company have to apply for their own C-LEC license?

A: The ReConnect program does not have specific requirements regarding this item. The program requires that the applicant can legally own and operate a telecommunication business. You will need to ask this question either to the FCC and/or the state regulatory body governing telecommunications in that state.

Q: Can any of the grant funds for the 100 percent grant or 50/50 loan-grant products be used for acquisition of an existing property?

A: Per the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), acquisitions can only be considered in the 100 percent loan category.

Application

Q: Will an application guide be available?

A: Yes, USDA is currently developing the application guide. It will be available on April 23, 2019 when the application system goes live. Additionally, the application system will include the capability to prompt the applicant with tool tips explaining parts of the application process.

Q: How does an applicant get a level II eAuthentication?

A: Applicants can get to the USDA eAuthentication (eAuth) website by going to <https://www.eauth.usda.gov/>. On this page, applicants should hit “Create an Account.” On the next page applicants can directly register for Level 2 eAuth by clicking “Register for Level 2 Account.”

The application portal will automatically direct applicants to the eAuth log-in before being able to access the application portal to verify credentials. If an applicant does not have a level II eAuth when the application goes live, they should click “Register.” Register will route the applicant to create an account. On this page, applicants should click “Register for a Level 2 Account.”

Q: How is population density calculated for application points?

A: Population density is measured by the population of the area per square mile, which means dividing the total population by the total proposed funded service area. If multiple service areas are proposed, the density calculation will be made on the combined areas as if they were a single area, and not the average densities. For population densities of 6 people or less, 25 points will be awarded. Areas with population densities with fewer people per square mile will receive the same number of points as areas with 6 people per square mile. No partial points will be awarded for other densities.

Q: Is the loan process on a first come first serve basis? If so, how does that work?

A: For the 100% loan category, applications will be accepted on a rolling basis through July 12, 2019. In the event two eligible loan applications are received for the same proposed funded service area, the application to arrive first will be considered first. In

general, applications that come in first will be evaluated first and if found to be acceptable will be funded until funds are exhausted in this category.

Q: Where can the CIW be downloaded?

A: The Capital Investment Workbook (CIW) will be populated by the applicant as part of the application portal. The CIW is not downloadable.

Q: Does USDA have sample language for the Authorized Representative Request (ARR)? To whom and to where should the ARR and Board resolution be submitted?

A: Applicants may obtain a copy of the ARR instructions and sample Board Resolution language on the ReConnect Program website under Forms and Resources labeled ARR Resolution Instructions and Samples. The materials can be found directly at https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/ARR%20Resolution_Instructions_Samples_Final.pdf.

When an applicant logs into the ReConnect Program application portal, the applicant will upload the completed ARR resolution to the application request. An Application Guide discusses how to create a Level II eAuthentication username and password, as well as how to complete and submit an Authorized Representative Request (ARR) to gain access to the Online Application System.

Q: For letters of support, who should they be addressed to?

A: Letters of support can be addressed to a number of different people. They can be addressed to the Secretary of Agriculture, the Assistant to the Secretary for Rural Development, the RUS Administrator or the Assistant Administrator for the Telecommunications Program.

Q: Can an applicant use their RD Apply or e-Auth login for access to ReConnect?

A: An applicant will have to go through the ReConnect login process. If an applicant has a level II e-Auth, they should be able to get into the application process and the application process will walk them through the process of registering for the ReConnect system.

Q: Are there any application fees required in the ReConnect application?

A: There are no application fees required to submit an application to USDA. Certain pre-application expenses are eligible if an award is approved; however, applicants are at risk for pre-application expenses if an award is not approved.

Q: Will consulting engineers have access to the online application site for clients?

A: Consulting engineers will not have direct access to the online application system until they have been granted access by the applicant. Consultants must **NOT** enter the portal until they receive an email indicating that the applicant has assigned them a consultant role in the system. Otherwise, these individuals risk being locked out of the portal. All individuals that log into the system must have a level 2 eAuth. If you are locked out of the portal, please contact the Helpdesk at 1-800-457-3642, select USDA Applications (press 2), then select Rural Development (press 2).

Q: What is the definition of a "State broadband plan" to be considered for application scoring?

A: There is no specific definition for a State broadband plan. A State broadband plan must be sanctioned by the Governor of the State and must have been updated within the last five years. Applicants must submit a letter from the Governor's office to be awarded State broadband plan points.

The letter from the governor must include the following as applicable:

- The State's broadband plan is up-to-date and published on the internet; web address or URL must be provided. (10 points)
- There are no restrictions on non-broadband utilities from providing broadband service in rural areas. (5 points)
- Procedures are in place to expedite administrative activities if necessary, for completing rights-of-way and environmental permitting requirements for the project, in order to meet the USDA's project build-out timelines. (5 points)

Q: What are the requirements for State broadband activity requirements?

A: Points are awarded as follows:

- 10 points for a project in a State with a State Broadband plan
- 5 points for projects in States that do not restrict utilities for providing broadband
- 5 points for States that expedite right of way and environmental requirements

Applicants claiming any points for State Broadband Activity will need to provide documentation from the State Governor's office that addresses these three factors to receive the points. If the project is in multiple states, each State Governor must respond. For projects located wholly in tribal areas, a letter from a tribal leader may be used to claim points.

Q: For purposes of the Reconnect Program application evaluation, are ranches and dairies considered farms or businesses?

A: Per the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), farm is defined as any establishment from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were sold or would normally be sold during the year. Business is defined as a commercial or mercantile activity engaged in as a means of livelihood. For purposes of the December 2018 FOA, farms will not be counted as businesses for scoring purposes. For farms and businesses served, applicants must have the head of the farm, or owner of the business, sign the presubscription form provided in the application system and submit them as part of their application. RUS will conduct its own due diligence to determine if the certifications are valid.

Mapping

Q: Must applicants use the USDA map interface to map networks or can applicants use their own programs?

A: Applicants may use their own programs to map their network and upload the data as shapefiles to the Mapping Tool. The service area map and the construction map can be uploaded as shapefiles.

- All map areas must be closed, non-overlapping polygons with a single, unique identifier.
- The shapefile must have an assigned projection with an accompanying .prj file.
- The shapefile must use an unprojected (geographic) WGS84 geographic coordinate system.
- The shapefile must be submitted as a .zip file. Be sure that your .zip file contains only one shapefile. Zipped shapefile size must not exceed 2GB.
- Most all shapefiles contain at least the .shp, .shx, .dbf, and .prj file components of the shapefile.

Q: If a Wireless Broadband provider has hundreds of non-contiguous service areas, does it need to submit separate service areas and the associated information for each one?

A: Yes, the wireless company will have to provide separate shape files for each non-contiguous service area and then complete the appropriate parts of the online application for each service area.

Q: Are the PFSA, NFSA, and UPLF polygons drawn on the application maps the same as Census blocks?

A: The polygons that applicants draw on the map interface within the application portal can be of any shape or size. They do not specifically have to be "census blocks."

Q: Does the RUS mapping tool show areas with sufficient access, or does it show areas in which 90-100% of households lack sufficient access?

A: The Agency does not have a mapping tool that will definitively indicate whether or not a proposed funded service area has sufficient access to broadband. However, a Mapping Tool is available at <https://reconnect.usda.gov> that very clearly displays certain areas that are ineligible for funding. A potential applicant must do their own due diligence in making the determination that households in the proposed funded service area do not have sufficient access to broadband. USDA will conduct an on-site evaluation of the area to make the final determination.

Q: How can applicants challenge the accuracy of mapping data?

A: There is no formal appeal process regarding the classification of ineligible areas. A potential applicant can submit the information that demonstrates an area that is designated as ineligible may actually be eligible through the Contact Us on the ReConnect website <https://reconnect.usda.gov/>. USDA will evaluate this information and make a final determination.

Q: Is data contained within the USDA mapping tool available to the public?

A: Eligible Area Map datasets are available to download as a zip file (including ESRI Shapefiles) on the ReConnect Program website at <https://usda.gov/reconnect/eligible-area-map-datasets>. These datasets include evaluation and eligibility criteria. Descriptions of each data set are available on the website.

Evaluation Criteria Datasets

- Critical Care Facilities
- Educational Facilities
- Healthcare Facilities
- Tribal Lands

Eligibility Criteria Datasets

- CAF II – Auction 903 Winners
- Non-Rural Areas
- Pending Applications

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- Protected Broadband Borrower Service Areas

USDA uses the Decennial Census Data for population, which includes the density calculation. The dataset is not included for download on the ReConnect website, but is publicly available through Census at <https://census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/data.html>

Q: Will the Service Areas Mapping Tool provide population, households, and businesses within the polygons we draw for the proposed service area?

A: The mapping tool will populate the household, housing units, square miles, population, healthcare centers, educational facilities and critical community facilities based on the proposed funded service area(s) mapped for the application. The Service Areas Mapping tool will not provide businesses.

Financial Requirements

Q: Can the consolidated financial statements of a parent company be used for a subsidiary company to satisfy the 2 previous years of unqualified, audited financial statements requirement?

A: Consolidated financial statements of a parent company can be used to satisfy the requirement for 2 previous years of unqualified, audited financial statements, if the consolidated financial statements break out the subsidiary activities separately. The consolidating schedules (Balance Sheets, Income Statements, and Statement of Cash Flow) must contain enough detail, including notes to the financial statements regarding subsidiary activities, to determine the creditworthiness of the subsidiary.

Q: Can all or some ReConnect loan funds be used to pay off current bank loans?

A: Per the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), award funds may not be used to refinance outstanding debt.

Q: For a CAF II awardee, can ReConnect funding be used to offset CAF Reserves in awarded area that meet ReConnect eligibility criteria for 100% loan products?

A: ReConnect funds cannot be used to offset CAF reserves. A company that received a CAF II Auction 903 awarded area is eligible to participate under the 100% loan option of the ReConnect Program, as long as all eligibility requirements are met. Per FOA Section IV, C., 5. b., ii., (E): (E) Connect America Fund Phase II Auction—Auction 903 (CAF II). Funding for service areas of CAF II recipients can only be requested by the entity that is receiving the CAF II support, and such funding is limited to a 100% loan. Eligible and ineligible costs are in Section V, D., 2. Eligible and Ineligible Costs. Eligible

costs include construction or improvement of facilities, reasonable pre-application expenses, acquisition of an existing system that does not currently provide sufficient access, and/or terrestrial-based facilities for satellite broadband service.

Q: What type of payment is required for the 25% match for the 100% grant product? Is there an option to pay in cash or in-kind?

A: Matching funds must be in cash and can only be used for eligible purposes. In-kind matches are not allowed. Match funds must be expended before grant funds and be available as part of the closing process for the award.

Q: Does the applicant include the non-PSFA area build-out and related revenues and costs in the forecast?

A: Yes, applicants must include their entire operation in the application including all associated revenues/expenses/construction as part of the application. Non-Funded Service Areas (NFSAs) must also be drawn in the mapping tool.

Q: How should an applicant handle historical financial data if they have been in business less than four years?

A: Pursuant to the FOA, if an entity has been operating for less than four years, they should submit financial statements for the period of time the entity has been operating. (FOA VI.C.1.I) In addition, applicants must have 2 years of historical unqualified, audited financial statements.

Q: Are estimates on construction costs sufficient for the application, or does an applicant need to first put out bids and have responses in hand?

A: Construction cost estimates are acceptable at the time the application is prepared and submitted. Actual quotes do not have to be submitted. All cost estimates must be reasonable when compared to the rest of the industry.

Q: Are ACAM recipients eligible to apply for funding under the ReConnect Program?

A: ACAM recipients may apply for funding under the ReConnect Program as long as they meet all of the eligibility requirements contained in the FOA.

Q: How often can a ReConnect grant awardee make reimbursement filings? Is there a set schedule?

A: Successful applicants will be allowed to submit funding requests after funding is awarded. For a 100% grant awardee, the entire 25% match must be expended before grant funds; for 50/50 loan-grant awardees, all loan funds must be expended before grant funds. Funding requests will be limited to one per month. Additional

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information is provided within the ReConnect Construction Procedures guide posted under Forms and Resources on the ReConnect website.

Q: Will eligible costs incurred from the time the application is submitted, but before the award is made, be eligible for funding?

A: Only eligible costs incurred after the Agency has extended an award offer will be allowed for funding under the project with the exception of eligible pre-application expenses incurred between the date of the publication date of this FOA (December 14, 2018) and the date funds are made available.

Q: Section 5.11 (d) on page 12 of the Loan Agreement document implies that Davis Bacon compliance is required. Davis Bacon is also mentioned in the same section of the other two funding type agreements. Is Davis Bacon compliance required?

A: Davis Bacon does not apply to the ReConnect Program. The legal documents currently posted on the webpage are only samples for general reference. Revised documents will be posted to the ReConnect website.

Q: Does the ReConnect Program permit multiple sources of federal funding for project financing?

A: Other federal funds cannot be used for matching funds unless there is specific statutory language in the other program that allows for this. Other federal funds can be used to support the overall project, but evidence must be included in the application that demonstrates that the funds have already been received and are allowed to be used for the project.

Q: Is the max \$25 million per applicant or per application?

A: \$25 million is the upper limit of a 100% grant product. For a 100% grant, the match must be 25% of the total project cost. \$50 million is the upper limit for 100% loan and 50/50 loan-grant combination products. For the combination product, the amounts awarded for loan and grant will always be equal. An applicant can only submit one application under this FOA.

Q: What are the terms for the loans?

A: An amortization period for a loan will be based on the composite economic life of facilities funded plus three years. A proposal leaning more towards electronic elements may have a shorter term of 12 to 13 years. An application that proposes more cable facilities will probably have a term closer to 18, 20, or 21 years. It depends on the facilities proposed for funding. Applicants will propose an amortization period for feasibility purposes and USDA will analyze the proposal to determine the

appropriate amortization period. Interest rates for the 100% loan will be set at a flat 2% and interest rates for the combination loan/grant will be set at the Treasury rate for comparable amortization periods at the time of each advance.

Q: Can USDA money and State money be combined to fund projects?

A: If an applicant wants to use a combination of State and Federal money, it is allowed as long as the State funds have been committed to the eligible costs and this commitment has been established in detail in the application. If an applicant wants to use State funds for the matching component that is allowable but please note that matching funds will be used before grant funds can be advanced.

Q: Can State Community Development Block Grant funds be used toward match?

A: State funds can be used for matching purposes as long as they are committed/approved for the proposed project at time of application submission. Please note that other sources of Federal funds cannot be used for matching purposes unless the other federal program has statutory authority to do so.

Q: Should the Pro Forma financial forecast include both existing and proposed operations?

A: The Pro Forma must include a complete financial picture of the entire operation of the applicant including existing and proposed operations.

Q: Is there an allocation by region or State in terms of funding?

A: Funds are not allocated by State or region.

Q: Is there a minimum number of customers served by a PFSA?

A: There is no specific minimum number of customers required in a PFSA. The number of customers will have an impact on potential revenue. A project will need sufficient subscribers to ensure financial feasibility. To be considered eligible, the project must be capable of delivering 25/3 Mbps service to every premise located in the PFSA even if they are not subscribers at the time of the buildout.

Q: Will applicants enter data and complete financial models inside the ReConnect Program application portal, or will applicants be expected to submit these models on a separate spreadsheet that is uploaded to the application portal?

A: Applicants will be required to input their financial Pro Forma within the ReConnect Program application portal. Applicants may be required to upload additional information supporting financial data within the application. All additional documents must be uploaded as PDF documents.

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- Q: Can the 50% Grant/50% Loan dollars be used on Labor for construction?**
A: Reasonable labor and engineering costs associated with the construction of the network may be funded with loan and/or grant dollars.

Engineering Requirements

- Q: Does "technology neutral" refer to terrestrial based systems only?**
A: No, terrestrial components of satellite systems are also eligible. Please note that if any type of satellite systems are proposed, the proposed system must be able to provide 25/3 Mbps service to every premise in the proposed funded service area at the same time.
- Q: Is an applicant ineligible if current network speeds are more than 10/1 Mbps, but less than 25/3 Mbps?**
A: 10/1 Mbps service for households is the minimum requirement to determine if an area has sufficient access to broadband. If an area has 10/1 Mbps service or greater, the PFSA is ineligible for ReConnect funds. 25/3 Mbps is a construction requirement that must be provided to every premise in the PFSA after buildout.
- Q: Does the application and subsequent network diagram need to provide service drops to every home the PFSA?**
A: Service drops do not have to be proposed for every premise in the PFSA. However, whether or not an applicant elects to request funding for drops to every premise, the network design must account for the ability to provide 25/3 Mbps service to every premise and be prepared to connect every premise in the PFSA.
- Q: Will USDA provide a list of telecom engineers?**
A: USDA does not maintain a list of telecom engineers. It is up to the applicant to find an acceptable engineer.
- Q: How long will the awardee have to complete buildout?**
A: The awardee will have five years to complete the buildout from the time funds are first made available to the awardee.
- Q: Can funds be used for backbone facilities and/or drops?**
A: Funds may be used for the construction or improvement of facilities, including buildings and land, required to provide broadband service. All costs must be reasonable, allocable, and necessary to the project. Operating expenses are not allowed.

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Q: What type of license must the licensed engineer have to certify the project?

A: The engineer must have a professional engineering license issued by at least one of the States where the project is proposed to be constructed.

Q: Does it matter what type of Professional Engineer (PE) certifies the Project?

A: Per the Funding Opportunity Announcement, all applicants will be required to submit a Network Design, Network Diagram, Project Costs, and Buildout Timeline and Milestones, all of which have to be certified by a PE who is licensed in at least one of the states where the project will be constructed. The selection of the PE does not require prior RUS approval; however, it is the responsibility of the applicant to hire PEs who are experienced in the design and construction of broadband networks.

Q: Does cellular service count as terrestrial internet service?

A: Per the FOA, mobile broadband service (cellular service) will not be considered for eligibility purposes and it is also not an eligible purpose for funding.

Q: Is fixed wireless an eligible technology?

A: Yes, fixed wireless service is an eligible technology under the program as long as the wireless service can deliver 25/3 Mbps service to all premises in the PFSA.

Q: Is satellite service considered broadband?

A: Certain satellite service can be considered broadband if it can deliver simultaneous 25/3 Mbps service to every premise in a service area. Satellite service does have some challenges, but it is eligible.

Q: Is a mix of technologies used in a single project (e.g., to address terrain challenges) considered an eligible project design?

A: Yes, a mix of technologies is allowed in a single project in alignment with the guidelines outlined in the FOA. Please note that all technologies must be capable of delivering 25/3 Mbps service to all of the premises in the proposed funded service area.

Q: Does the solution need to be fiber?

A: The program is technology neutral. As long as the minimum of 25/3 Mbps service is met the applicant can provide any mix of technology solutions or a single technology solution.

Q: Is there a minimum latency requirement?

A: There is no specific latency requirement; however, information needs to be provided via the application that demonstrates the applicant's ability to provide 25/3 Mbps service to every premise in the PFSA.

Q: Are data caps allowed?

A: Data caps are a business decision that applicants make in determining their marketing strategies; however, please note the proposed facilities must be capable of providing unrestricted access to data to all premises in the PFSA at a minimum of 25/3 service.

Environmental Requirements

Q: Can a previous environmental study be used in the application process if it covers 90% of the PFSA?

A: An applicant must provide an environmental analysis of all proposed funded service areas within an application to be eligible. A recent environmental study could be used to satisfy or support the environmental information requested; but additional information will be required for areas not supported by the existing study at the time of the application. You should also update any changes since the current study, so all current environmental information is represented within the application.

Q: What will be required for the environmental portion of the application? Are maps required of the planned routes if claiming categorical exclusions?

A: Applicants will be required to draw cable routes and other facility locations using the Construction Mapping tool in the ReConnect application system. The application system will also require that applicants provide specific information on the cable routes and facility locations including the completion of Environmental Questionnaires. The application guide will address the specific requirements for the environmental portion of the submittal and will be available when the application system goes live.

Q: If an area is predominantly National Forest, but people live there and an applicant wants to place a tower structure, does the applicant work with National Forest or just the private property owner?

A: If the map shows the area as Forest Service property, the applicant must work with Forest Service unless the applicant has proof of it as private property. The specifics of the property will need to be analyzed and it needs to be proven that the property is truly private and not Forest Service owned.

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Tribal

Q: Critical community, healthcare, and educational facilities for tribal areas are not adequately identified in the GIS mapping layer included as part of the ReConnect Mapping Tool. Due to this issue, how can an applicant receive Evaluation Criteria points for the facilities located in tribal areas?

A: An applicant may receive Evaluation Criteria points for these facilities by including a description in the application, in either the Executive Summary section or by uploading a separate document with a description, as a part of the application. Applicants must also obtain a certification from the Tribal leader of the associated lands that these facilities are being used for the purpose described in the application.

Q: How does an applicant get points for a "State broadband plan" if the project is in a tribal area?

A: If a project is wholly located in a tribal area, a tribal broadband plan may be substituted for a State broadband plan to gain points for competitive applications. To receive points for a tribal broadband plan, the applicant must submit a letter from a tribal leader certifying that the tribal broadband plan has been updated within five years of the date the ReConnect Funding Opportunity Announcement was published.

Q: What qualifies as a tribal area?

A: Applicants should refer to the Eligible Area Map at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/mapping-tool> to determine if their project falls within a tribal area. If the area shown is colored as "Special Evaluation Criteria: Tribal Lands" the area qualifies as a tribal area. This dataset came from Calendar Year 2017 U.S. Census data. The zipped file includes cartographic boundary spatial data for American Indian, Alaska Native Areas, and Hawaiian Home Lands.

Technical Assistance

Q: Who can I reach out to for more information about USDA loan programs?

A: Interested parties should reach out to their General Field Representatives (GFRs) and State offices to learn more about USDA loan programs that fit the needs of their project and community. A list of GFRs, areas they serve, and contact information can be found at <https://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/telecom-gfr/all>. Contact information for State offices can be found at <https://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/state-offices>.

Q: Is there a notification process set up so that newly posted information triggers an alert/email to people who have signed up? Or do interested parties have to manually check each day and try to see if anything is new?

A: Stakeholders can sign up for updates at the bottom of the ReConnect website at <https://reconnect.usda.gov>. This will send notifications for all formal announcements made through the website. It is also possible to sign up for notifications about Public Notice Filings (PNF) for States and territories through this function.

Q: Will ReConnect Program presentations be available for download?

A: Yes, selected presentations will be posted to the ReConnect website at <https://reconnect.usda.gov> and available for download.

Q: Where can I find technical assistance for completing an application?

A: USDA will hold technical assistance webinars that will be recorded and available for viewing on demand after their initial broadcast. Additionally, six regional in-person workshops will be held across the country. Webinar and workshop dates and times, and additional technical assistance is available through <https://reconnect.usda.gov>.

Q: Where can applicants find an explanation of application evaluation points?

A: The point system is laid out in the FOA that was published in December. The Evaluation Criteria can also be found at <https://reconnect.usda.gov> under Scoring Criteria. Additional explanations will be provided in the application guide that will be published prior to the start of accepting applications.

Q: Are there resources available to connect service, installation and construction firms with grant recipients?

A: A list of recipients will be made available on the ReConnect Program website once the awards have been made.

Q: Where can I find information about wireless broadband service in my area?

A: The ReConnect Program is an infrastructure program for building broadband networks in primarily unserved areas. You may locate wireless broadband providers by searching the FCC broadband map at the following website: <https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov/#/>.

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