

News Briefs

Community Connect Broadband

USDA is soliciting applications for Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 for the Community Connect Grant Program. The program provides grants to establish broadband in rural communities where it is currently not available, and where it can have a tremendous positive impact on the quality of life for rural residents.

The minimum amount of grants awarded will be \$100,000; the maximum is \$3,000,000. The deadline for applications to be submitted is February 17, 2015. For additional details and information on how to apply, [See pages 75120-75124 of the December 17 Federal Register.](#)

Guaranteed Rural Rental Housing Program

Loan guarantees are available to construct, acquire and rehabilitate affordable rural rental housing. USDA will review responses submitted by eligible lenders, on the lender's letterhead, and signed by both the prospective borrower and lender.

Although a complete application is not required in response to this notice, eligible lenders may submit a complete application with a response. The response deadline is December 31, 2015. [Details are on page 29159 of the May 21, 2014 Federal Register.](#) Selected responses that develop into complete applications will normally be funded with the fiscal year funds available on the date the application is completed.

For more information, please contact Mary Traxler at mary.traxler@wa.usda.gov.

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Washington State



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Rural Developments

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Introducing Lisa Mensah as New Under Secretary

Last November, the U.S. Senate confirmed Lisa Mensah as USDA Rural Development's new Under Secretary. President Obama could not have appointed a more qualified individual.

An expert in using financial tools to improve the economic security of the working poor, Ms. Mensah has experience in the private financial sector and has worked extensively on small and micro business development, housing, financial and savings policy.

Prior to joining USDA, Ms. Mensah was the founding Executive Director of the Initiative on Financial Security at the Aspen Institute. In that role she led a national bi-partisan effort with leaders of financial institutions, non-profit executives and experts to promote solutions to the complex problems of helping more Americans save money, buy homes, and finance retirement.

In fact, Ms. Mensah began her career in commercial banking at Citibank before joining the Ford Foundation where she was responsible for the country's largest philanthropic grant and loan portfolio of investments in rural America.



State Director
Mario Villanueva



Under Secretary
Lisa Mensah

In her new position, Ms. Mensah provides leadership for three USDA agencies charged with improving the economic wellbeing of rural America: the Rural Housing Service, the Rural Utilities Service and the Rural Business-Cooperative Service. Together, these agencies provide critical infrastructure investments in the form of loans and grants for rural housing, high-speed broadband access, telephone, electric and water utilities, renewable energy generation and conservation, local and regional food systems, community facilities, and small business development in rural America.

Ms. Mensah holds an M.A. from the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of The Johns Hopkins University and a B.A. from Harvard University. She resides in Maryland with her husband and two children. Best of all, she is no stranger to the Pacific Northwest. She was born and raised in Beaverton, Oregon. Her dad is an immigrant from Ghana and her mom was raised on a farm in Iowa.

On behalf of the men and women of RD Washington, welcome to the team, Under Secretary Mensah.

Mario Villanueva

Washington State Director

Rural Development Single Family Housing Program Update

As of February 2, 2015, the new eligibility maps in accordance with the Agricultural Act of 2014, Pub. L. 113-79 ("Farm Bill") are now in effect. Because of the continuing re-examination of the "rural in character" policy, RD will continue its current policy regarding "rural in character" for the purposes of determining eligible rural areas.

The changes will be those which are already published on the "Future Eligible Areas" maps posted on the Eligibility Website: <http://eligibility.sc.egov.usda.gov/eligibility/welcomeAction.do>.



Complete applications received in the SFH Direct and Guaranteed programs, prior to February 2, 2015, will not be subject to the new rural area designations/maps that become effective on February 2, 2015 (barring Congressional action that extends current eligi-

ble areas), but will remain subject to current eligibility maps.

In addition, the signing of this Act authorizes funding levels for the remainder of the Fiscal Year, so we anticipate receiving allocations for all SFH programs in the near future.

If you have questions, please call 360.704.7777 or email the Guaranteed Rural Housing Division: wa-grh@wa.usda.gov or the Single Family Housing Direct Division at wa-sfh@wa.usda.gov.

REAP Deadlines

The notice published in the Federal Register on Dec. 29, 2014, specifies the final rule incorporates grant and guaranteed loan application deadline dates that allow the USDA to meet statutory deadlines for funding the EA and REDA grants and RES and EEI grants of \$20,000 or less.

REAP Grants (Over \$20,000 and Combinations) are due by April 30, 2015.

REAP Grants (\$20,000 or less not competing for set aside funds, Over \$20,000 and Combinations) may be accepted between May 1, 2015 and June 30, 2015.*

REAP Grants (\$20,000 or less competing for set aside funds) are due by April 30, 2015.

REAP Guaranteed Loans are on a continuous application cycle.

EA/REDA Grants are due by February 12, 2015.*

* Applications received after this date will be considered for the next cycle.

For more information, please refer to the Federal Register.

National REAP Stakeholder Forum

USDA Rural Development will hold a National Stakeholder Forum for the Renewable Energy for America Program (REAP) on Friday, Feb. 6, beginning at 10 a.m. (PST) via Webinar: <https://www.webcaster4.com/Webcast/Page/694/7649>. Register at above link to view and participate in the webinar. Come and learn from the experts on how to participate in the REAP Program. Watch the webinar on your own computer or join us in the following locations:

Olympia USDA Office
1835 Black Lake Blvd, SE,
Olympia, WA

Yakima USDA Office
1606 Perry St, Yakima, WA

Staff will be on hand to answer questions.

Contact:
Eastern WA: Roni Baer (509) 454-5740 ext 134
Western WA: Carlotta Donisi (360) 704 7724

Renewable Energy For America Program (REAP)

REAP is poised to make a huge impact in rural America this year! With a dramatic increase in funding from the 2014 Farm Bill, new regulations and a new application form, even more rural small businesses and agricultural producers will be able to enjoy the benefits of renewable energy systems and the benefits of saving money off their power bills through energy efficiency improvements.

Established by the 2008 Farm Bill and reauthorized by the 2014 Farm Bill, the program provides financial assistance to agricultural producers and rural small businesses to purchase, install, or construct renewable energy systems and provide funds for energy efficiency improvements to existing structures.

Renewable Energy Systems include things like solar electric panels, solar hot water, wind turbines, micro-hydroelectric, anaerobic digesters and geo-thermal.



While energy efficiency includes such things as high efficiency windows, insulation, LED lighting, variable frequency drive pumps and high efficiency compressors.

REAP LOAN GUARANTEES

In addition to the grant funds, this year there are more than \$200 million available in loan guarantee funds for lenders to access, with loan guarantees as high as 85 percent.

These guaranteed loans can readily be sold on the secondary market and allow a lender to be more flexible

in the structuring of their loans and extend repayment terms, all with low guarantee fees.

REAP loan guarantees can be used to finance up to 75 percent of the total costs of the project. They can even be combined with REAP grants. Lenders, This is a great way to expand your lending portfolio!

To learn more about REAP Grant and Loan Guarantees, contact:

• **Eastern Washington-Roni Baer** (509) 454-5743 ext 134 or veronica.baer@wa.usda.gov

• **Western Washington-Carlotta Donisi** (360) 704-7724 or carlotta.donisi@wa.usda.gov

• **WA Energy Coordinator-Randy Baird** (509) 454-5743 or randy.baird@wa.usda.gov

Notice of Solicitation of Applications for RUS RFP Program

The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) announced its Revolving Fund Program (RFP) application window for Fiscal Year (FY) 2015. Under the RFP, qualified private, non profit organizations may receive RFP grant funds to establish a lending program for eligible entities to obtain a loan, loan guarantee, or grant from the RUS Water, Waste Disposal and Wastewater loan and grant programs.

This year administrative discretion points may be awarded for work plans that target the smallest communities with the lowest incomes



emphasizing areas where according to the American Community Survey data by census tracts show that at least 20 percent of the population is living in poverty.

This emphasis will support Rural Development's goal of providing

20 percent of its funding by 2016 to these areas of need.

Funding is not available at this time, but this notice is being sent in anticipating of future funding.

For more information about the program, please contact Joyce M. Taylor, Community Programs Specialist, Water Programs Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Utilities Service, STOP 1570, Room 2233-S, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-1570; Telephone: (202) 720-0499; Fax: (202) 690-0649.

USDA Seeks Applications for Water Well System Grant Program

The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) announced that it is seeking applications for its Household Water Well System Grant Program (HWWS) from private non-profit organizations to establish lending programs for homeowners to construct or repair household water wells for an existing home.

The HWWS Grant Program helps individuals with low to moderate incomes finance the costs of

household water wells that they own or will own. The individuals, as loan recipients, may use the loans to construct, refurbish, and service their household well systems.

A loan may not exceed \$11,000 and will have a term up to 20 years at a one percent annual interest rate.

Funding is not available at this

time, but this notice is being sent in anticipating of future funding.

For more information about the program, please contact Joyce M. Taylor, Community Programs Specialist, Water Programs Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Utilities Service, STOP 1570, Room 2233-S, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-1570; Telephone: (202) 720-0499; Fax: (202) 690-0649.

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