United States Department of Agriculture

Rural Development Innovation Center

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TO: All RD Employees

FROM: James Barham
Assistant Chief Data Officer

JAMES BARHAM
Digitally signed by JAMES BARHAM
Date: 2026.06.17 11:43:25 -04'00'

SUBJECT: Data Request Protocol Implementation

Purpose

This unnumbered letter clarifies and institutionalizes the process used to track and respond to customary and "priority" data requests received by USDA Rural Development (RD) Program Areas and the RD Innovation Center (IC).

Discussion

On December 19, 2024, the Rural Development Data Governance Board, whose membership includes leadership from Program Areas and Offices across RD, approved the implementation of a Data Request Protocol to facilitate coordination between the Program Areas and the IC when data requests are received. Rural Development Program Areas and the IC receive hundreds of internal and external requests for data related to Program activities and investments each year. Requests from parties external to USDA originate from a broad and diverse cross section of federal, state and local stakeholders. Apart from requests received from rural and community members, they include inquiries from the White House, Congress, federal agencies, private industry, research centers, commercial lenders, non-profit, and other organizations.

The protocol builds upon practices used to manage request-related communications that have long been established on an informal basis within RD. It was reviewed in advance of the Governance Board's approval by Program Area specialists to promote the following objectives without significantly increasing the Program Areas' current operational burden:

- More efficient handling and reduced response times
- Consistent use of most trusted data sources
- Improved request tracking of priority requests
- No duplication of efforts
- Expanded awareness of response-related analytical methods and findings

EXPIRATION DATE:
June 30, 2028

FILING INSTRUCTIONS:
Administrative/Other Programs

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

The Protocol Process Flow and Notes illustrate and explain:

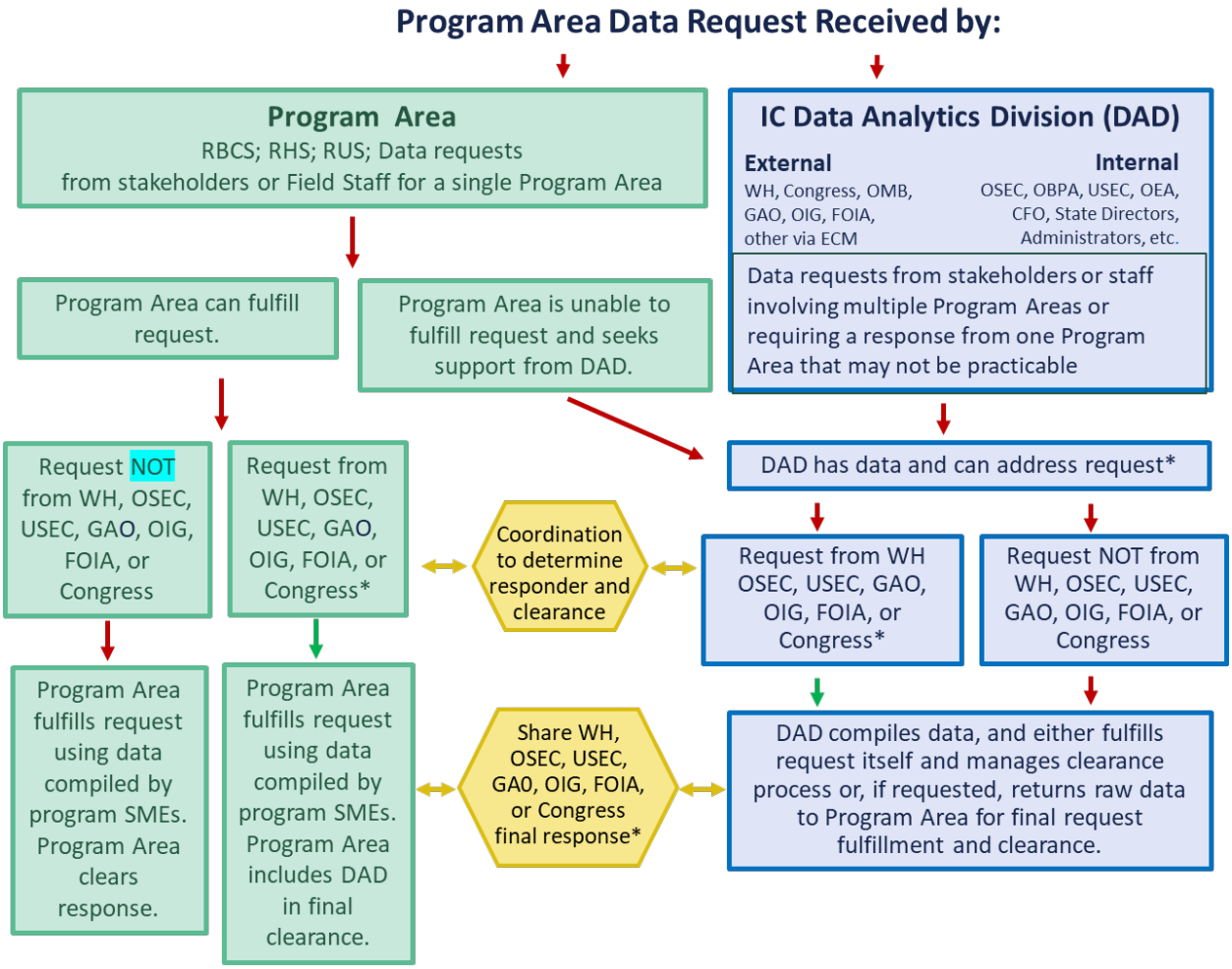
- The application of the protocol to "priority requests", i.e., requests from the **White House (WH), Congress, Office of Management and Budget (OMB), General Accountability Office (GAO), Office of the Inspector General (OIG), USDA Secretary (OSEC) and Under Secretary Offices (USEC),** and **Freedom of Information Act Office (FOIA)**
- Communication that occurs between the Program Area and the IC at two points in time: when a request is received, and when a response has been finalized and cleared by the responding party within RD
- The Program Area's continuing responsibility for routine requests they have typically handled from both priority and non-priority sources, as well as those requiring specific information unavailable to the Innovation Center's Data Analytics Team

To facilitate the necessary communication between the IC and Program Areas receiving a request, points of contact have been established to provide coordination when a request is received and a finalized response is submitted, as follows:

Agency	Program Areas	Points of Contact
Innovation Center	Data Analytics Division	James Barham, Karl Leckrone, Kasey Martin
Finance Office	All Programs	Stephanie Nahm, Brett Daniels
Servicing Office	All Loans	Richard Kane, Ryan Loewe
Rural Business-Cooperative Service	All Business Programs	Lisa Noty, Shekhar Mistry
Rural Housing Service	Community Facilities	Kimberly McCay
	Multifamily Housing	Shalawnda McVey
	Single Family Housing Direct	Chris Cokenour, Elizabeth Lewis, Scott Nista
	Single Family Housing Guaranteed	Dean Daetwyler, Scott Nista, Josh Rice
Rural Utilities Service	Electric	Amy McWilliams, Emily Flanigan
	Telecom	Jordan Barringer, Ariana Kelly, Kristin Lough
	Waste and Environmental	James Fritz, Megan Gernentz, Desirae Willms

If you have any questions about guidance discussed above, please contact Kasey Martin (kasey.martin@usda.gov).

RD Data Request Protocol
Program Area Process Flow and Notes



Program Area Process Flow Notes:

Two-touchpoint Coordination: When a team volunteers to undertake the response, it indicates that intention through an advisory email to the request originator, and the email distribution will include the other party to the protocol. For example, if the Program Area is taking responsibility for the data response, it would include the established Innovation Center (IC) Points of Contact in the distribution of its email alerting the request originator. Similarly, if the IC responds, it will include Program Area Points of Contact in its email distribution. When a final response to the data request goes through clearance, it would similarly be shared with the other party to the protocol (again through cc to the established Points of Contact).

Requests Historically Addressed by the Program Areas: The protocol does **not** apply to requests historically addressed by the Program Areas. If Program Areas have routinely addressed a request and require no assistance, then they will continue to follow current procedures to complete the data request and store the results.

IC Data Analysts Division (DAD) Lacks Access to Data or Background Information Needed for Response: When the data request is received by the IC and the Program Area has pertinent data unavailable to the IC or is aware of operational or policy-related sensitivities that would affect the presentation of data within the response, then the Program Area will respond to the request and simply include the IC in the two-touchpoint coordination process discussed above, unless additional assistance is needed.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Requests: FOIA requests vary widely both in terms of topic and scope. To manage these requests effectively, FOIA will ask parties requesting **investment** data to use the Rural Data Gateway. If the requestor needs additional assistance with an investment-related request, the FOIA Office will forward the request to the IC, which may seek additional support from the Program Areas. The FOIA Office will also forward an activity report to the IC on a monthly basis. If a request pertains to Program policy, operations, or other topic unrelated to investment, the FOIA Office will forward the request to the Program Area.
The FOIA Office will determine if IC and Program Area response submissions meet FOIA requirements. All submissions will be accompanied by a Documentation of FOIA Search form.

Data Requests Involving Multiple Program Areas: If a data request involves multiple program areas, the IC will play a larger role in coordinating the response to ensure greater consistency in the presentation of results.