Broadband Technical Assistance Program Sample Communities Worksheet User Guide for Fiscal Year 2024

Rural Utilities Service (RUS) Telecommunications Program

June 10, 2024

Please Note: The formatting of this document does not take into consideration accessibility concerns if the document were to be printed and viewed in a hard copy format.

Executive Summary

This user guide is intended to help you complete the FY 2024 Sample Communities Worksheet (CW). This resource provides guidance for utilizing the CW, defining rural communities served, and including maps. By following this guide, you can help streamline the BTA application process, ensuring clarity and precision in identifying the communities in your application.

This guide is a supplement to the other important resources provided for the Broadband Technical Assistance (BTA) Program. The BTA website provides additional program information: tinyurl.com/m6daw24c. Reference the BTA Application Guide for a detailed explanation of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Utilities Service's (RUS) policies and procedures for submitting an application for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024.

Table of Contents

Version	Change	Date
V1	Initial publication	June 10, 2024

1   Defining Communities for BTA Applications

When preparing an application for the BTA program, one important step is to accurately define the rural communities the project will serve. Communities may be defined at various geographic scales including, but not limited to, census-designated places, census blocks or tracts, towns, cities, and counties. It is important to carefully consider the scale at which project communities are defined as this can impact both the evaluation and eligibility of an application.

BTA applicants must include a list of the rural communities they're proposing to serve. Ensure this information is consistent with and detailed in the project narrative and across the application to aid in the review process. It is strongly recommended that you utilize the FY24 Sample Communities Worksheet (CW) to provide a structured community list to help enhance the clarity of the application.

1.1   Community-Level Scoring

Projects are reviewed based on how communities are defined in the application. For example, if the application includes communities defined at the town geographic scale, the population of each town listed in the application will be used for eligibility and evaluation. Defining communities accurately and precisely helps ensure that the application will be evaluated as you intend.

A well-defined community list enhances the clarity and effectiveness of an application, demonstrating a clear understanding of the areas the project will serve. The CW not only aids in structuring a community list but can serve as a key document for aligning project goals with the eligibility and evaluation criteria of the BTA program.

1.2   Defining Communities at the County-Level

When presenting the inclusion of an entire county in the community list, ensure that the project intends to actually serve the entire county, as rurality points and eligibility are based on the population of the community listed. If the project only covers a portion of a county, consider defining your communities in smaller divisions to reflect your project areas more accurately.

As a reminder, communities may be defined at various geographic scales. Even if the project intends to serve an entire county, you can define your project in terms of smaller divisions within the county. Rurality points will be calculated using the average score of each community listed in the CW.

Tip: If your application proposes to serve a community that includes nonrural areas, applicants should specify in the application that the project will avoid the ineligible nonrural locations. Failure to do so can render the entire application ineligible.

1.3 Existing Broadband Projects

You are encouraged to conduct research into ongoing federal projects within your communities list before submitting an application. This will help you to avoid proposing duplicative project costs funded by another federal award. To learn more about other broadband efforts, we encourage you to review the BTA map, the FCC's Broadband Funding map, and prior year BTA awardees. You are also encouraged to reach out to you state broadband office (available at this link: broadbandusa.ntia.gov/resources/states).

BTA Map: The BTA map (available at this link: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz) contains layers that show federally funded broadband projects and pending RUS Telecom applications. See below for more information on these layers:

- **Enforceable Commitment**: Enforceable commitment refers to a legally binding obligation made by any federal, state, or local agency, which uses Federal Funds, to deliver broadband service at minimum speeds of 100 megabits per second (Mbps) downstream and 20 Mbps upstream. This dataset filters out areas that are receiving service via satellite, mobile, and/or unlicensed wireless facilities only. Areas are removed from this dataset as USDA is alerted by cooperating agencies that an award is in default or is no longer being serviced by another federal program. The current dataset includes areas awarded by the following agencies and programs:
    - Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
        - Bringing Puerto Rico Together
        - Connect America Fund Phase II (CAF Auction 903)
        - Connect US Virgin Islands
        - Enhanced Alternative Connect America Cost Model (E-ACAM)
        - Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF)
    - US Treasury
        - Capital Projects Fund (CPF)
        - State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF)

- **Protected Broadband Borrowers**: This dataset includes the service areas of entities that received a USDA Telecommunications Infrastructure loan, Farm Bill Broadband loan, Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP) award, or ReConnect Program grant, loan, or combination award during, or after, Fiscal Year (FY) 2000. This dataset also includes Community Connect projects that are still under construction. Service areas of projects that were approved but were subsequently de-obligated are not protected and have been omitted from this layer.

- **Pending Applications:** This dataset includes all Community Connect, Rural Telecommunications Infrastructure, and ReConnect Program loan, loan/grant combination, and grant applications that have been submitted to the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) for consideration. The layer will be updated when the status of an application changes. Approved applications will remain protected under the Protected

Broadband Borrower Service Areas layer. For applications that are no longer considered by RUS, the applicant's Proposed Funded Service Area will no longer appear as part of this layer. The current dataset is dated as of April 24, 2024, and includes recently submitted Telecommunications Infrastructure Loan applications and ReConnect 100% Loan applications.

You are encouraged to review these layers to help understand the broadband infrastructure plans in the project area. This will help ensure that the project does not duplicate federal efforts.

Note: The layers described in this section typically represent broadband infrastructure deployment projects; overlapping geographically with your project does not necessarily imply duplicative funding. **If a proposed BTA project overlaps an existing federal broadband project, applicants may include information in the BTA application demonstrating how your project complements, rather than duplicates, existing initiatives**.

FCC Broadband Funding Map: The FCC collects and publishes information on broadband infrastructure deployment projects funded by the Federal government, available here: www.fcc.gov/economics-analytics/funding-map. Information such as enforceable commitments may be found on this map.

Prior Year BTA Awardees: FY 2024 of the BTA program is the second funding round of the program. To learn more about previous BTA awardees and their projects please visit tinyurl.com/4kzkvw8z.

By carefully researching and planning projects in the context of existing broadband expansion efforts, you not only help ensure the eligibility for you BTA application, but also contribute to the cohesive and comprehensive advancement of broadband expansion in their project area.

2 Using the Sample Communities Worksheet (CW) to Organize Your Community List:

To aid in organizing and presenting your community list effectively, the BTA program provides a Community Worksheet, or "CW."

The use of the CW is strongly encouraged. The CW was created to help applicants provide necessary details about their project area. Applicants should submit only one CW with their application. The CW is available on the BTA website at this link: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz

The CW is designed to help applicants:

- **List and Define Communities**: The CW is an opportunity to list each community the application aims to serve and note the specific geographic scale for each (e.g., town, census block).

- **Evaluate Eligibility and Scoring**: The worksheet allows applicants to align each listed community with the program's scoring and eligibility criteria, such as rurality scores. The worksheet will help you identify:
  - The rurality of your communities
  - The Distressed Communities served, if any
  - Tribal Lands, Socially Vulnerable Communities, and RPN community Networks served in each area, if any

  Organize Information: Use the worksheet to keep your community data organized and accessible, which is essential for both the application process and subsequent project implementation.

2.1 CW Instructions

The CW is an excel workbook with several columns as depicted in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Screenshot of the CW

Community to be served (city/town/county)	State	Projects serving Distressed Communities	Zip Code(s) of the Distressed Communities (if Yes in the previous column)	Projects serving Socially Vulnerable Communities, Tribal Lands, or RPN Community Networks	Census Population (from 2020 Census data)	Is the community contiguous and adjacent to a city or town with a population greater than 50,000 (a nonrural area)?	Name of Adjacent City or Town (if Yes in previous column)	Additional Descriptive Community Information (Optional)

FY 2024 BTA Program Sample Communities Worksheet (CW)
Name of Applicant:

See below for guidance on each section of the worksheet.

1. **Applicant Name**: Enter the applicant's name at the top of the worksheet.
2. **State**: Enter the State where the community listed in Column A is located.

3. **Communities Served**: Enter the city, town, or county you are proposing to serve on each row as necessary. You may add as many rows as needed. Note: Ensure the communities you listed are consistent with the project narrative and across the application.

4. **Distressed Communities** For estimating points for Creating More and Better Markets:

   a. A list of **Distressed Communities** (available at this link: tinyurl.com/hhterj7m) can help you determine if the community you propose to serve overlaps a Distressed Community. A GIS layer identifying Distressed Communities can also be found using the BTA mapping tool available at: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz.

   b. Select "Yes" or "No" from the dropdown menu if the community overlaps with a Dirstressed Community. **Note**: If your project's community only partially overlaps a Distressed Community, you may still select "Yes."

   c. Review the **Scoring Criteria section** of the **BTA Application Guide** and in the NOFO for more information on **Creating More and Better Communities** points.

5. **Distressed Communities Zip Codes**: If the community listed is a Distressed Community, list its zip codes. Applicants can locate a list of Distressed Communities at this link: tinyurl.com/hhterj7m. Zip codes for Distressed Communities can also be found on the GIS layer identifying Distressed Communities available at: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz.

   a. Figure 2 illustrates a completed entry for two example communities located in Arkansas.

Figure 2: Two Example Communities and their Distressed Communities Column Entries.

Community to be served (city/town/county)	State	Projects serving Distressed Communities	Zip Code(s) of the Distressed Communities (if Yes in the previous column)
Emerson	Ak	Yes	71740
Rison	AK	No	

6. **Tribal Lands, Socially Vulnerable Communities, or RPN Community Networks Served**: For estimating points for projects advancing Racial Justice, Place-Based Equity, and Opportunity:

   a. Tribal Lands, Socially Vulnerable Communities, or RPN community network layers on the BTA map are available at this link: tinyurl.com/4kfzwnp3.

   b. Review the BTA map to determine if your proposed project overlaps Tribal Lands, Socially Vulnerable Communities, or RPN community networks.

   c. If your proposed project overlaps any these areas, use the dropdown menu to mark them on the worksheet.

   d. Review the **Scoring Criteria section** of the **BTA Application Guide** and in the NOFO for more information.

7. **Census Population**: Enter the community's U.S. Census population.

   a. Review the **Determining Rurality section** in the **BTA Application Guide** for detailed instructions on how to find the population using the U.S. Census website.

8. **Is the community adjacent to a city or town with a population greater than 50,000 (nonrural area)?** (Select "Yes" or "No" from the dropdown menu.):

   a. You can use the map available on the BTA website webpage to determine if the community identified in Column A is adjacent to a city or town with a population greater than 50,000 (a nonrural area).

   b. Review the Determining Rurality section the BTA Application Guide for detailed instructions on how to determine if your community falls within a nonrural area.

9. **Name of Adjacent City or Town**: If the community listed in Column A is determined to be adjacent to a city or town with a population greater than 50,000, list the name of the adjacent city or town in this column.

Attaching a CW to the Application: To include a CW with a Grants.gov application submission, you should add the document as an attachment utilizing the "Add Attachments" button under Block 15 on Standard Form 424 or the Attachments Form. Please see the FY24 BTA Application Guide for additional guidance on uploading attachments to your application.

3   Maps

Although not required, the inclusion of maps in your application is encouraged. Maps provide a visual representation of the project area, aiding in the evaluation and project planning process. The geographic definition of your project area may be enhanced by the inclusion of maps for several reasons:

- Maps aid in assessing the project's eligibility and alignment with the BTA program's focus on rural communities.

- The inclusion of a map facilitates a more accurate evaluation process by providing clear evidence of the communities to be served by the proposed project.

- It enables reviewers to visualize the potential impact and scope of your project, which aids in the application evaluation process.

Tip: For projects serving specific communities or areas not clearly defined by traditional geographic boundaries (e.g., census rural areas), maps become particularly useful. They offer a visual confirmation of the project's intended focus and reach.

3.1   Mapping Recommendations

Maps can be submitted in PDF, shapefile, or KMZ formats. This flexibility ensures that applicants can choose the format that best represents their project while allowing for detailed geographic analysis and visualization. See below for information on each map format.

- PDF (Portable Document Format): Ensures wide accessibility and preserves the layout of your maps. PDFs are ideal for detailed maps that include legends, labels, and annotations explaining the project area.
- Shapefile: A widely used, versatile format for Geographic Information System (GIS) software. Shapefiles are suitable for dynamic mapping needs, allowing for detailed analysis and overlay with other geographic data.
- KMZ (Keyhole Markup Language Zipped): KMZ is compatible with Google Earth and other geospatial software. This format is useful for sharing interactive maps that stakeholders can explore.

Provided maps should clearly delineate the project area, including the boundaries of your project's communities. Applicants should reference maps in the application narrative and the CW where relevant. Maps may be included in the application as attachments or embedded in the application narrative as a screenshot.

3.2   Shapefile Specifications

Shapefiles allow for detailed analysis and overlay with other geographic data. Shapefiles may be submitted as part of the application to assist the review team in determining where the proposed communities are located. Additional shapefile specifications are as follows:
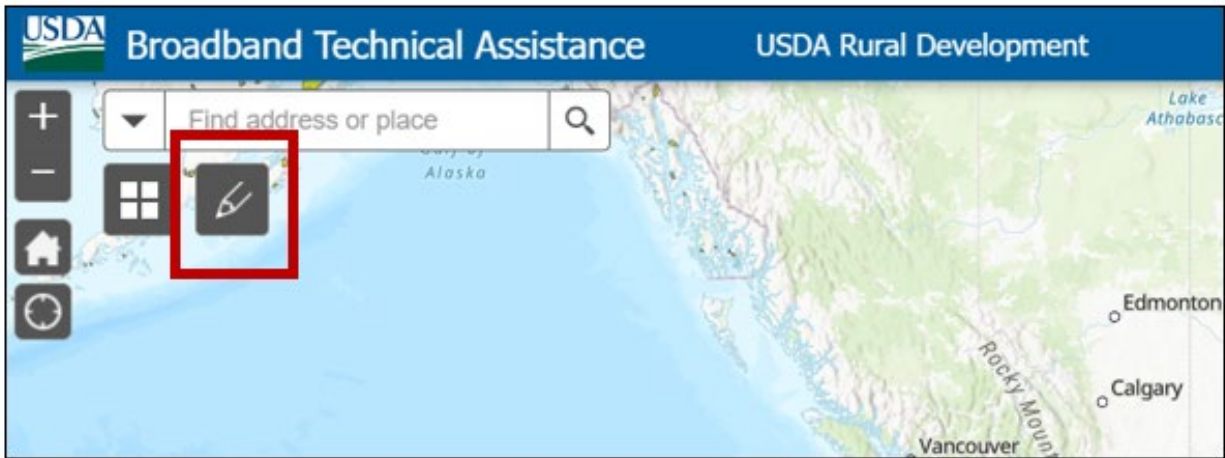
- All map areas must be closed, non-overlapping polygons
- The Shapefile must have an assigned projection with an accompanying .prj file.
- The Shapefile must use an unprojected (geographic) WGS84 geographic coordinate system.
- The Shapefile must be submitted as a *zip file. This can be done with WinZip or in Windows by selecting the files associated with a Shapefile, right clicking the files, then clicking Send to Compressed (zipped) folder.

Note: If the applicant plans to serve multiple communities in your project, we recommend you include a shapefile for each one separately, and name them according to the community referenced in your CW.
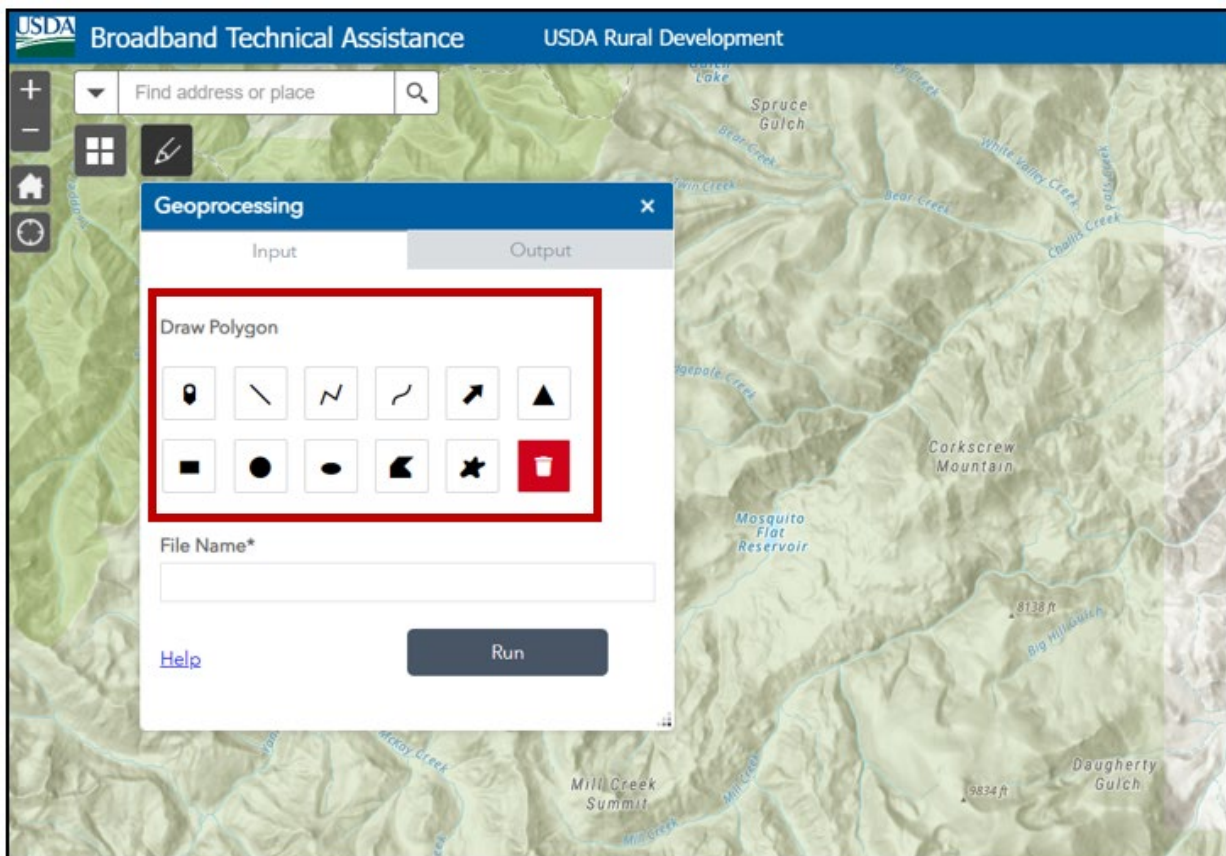
3.3   Drawing a Shapefile on the BTA Map

A mapping tool is available that provides you with the ability to draw communities to be served directly upon the map and download a shapefile of the area. You may access the mapping tool by navigating to the BTA website and selecting the "To Apply" tab. The mapping tool may also be accessed here: https://tinyurl.com/yckdtabz. For your convenience, we have included screenshots of the shapefile-drawing process below:
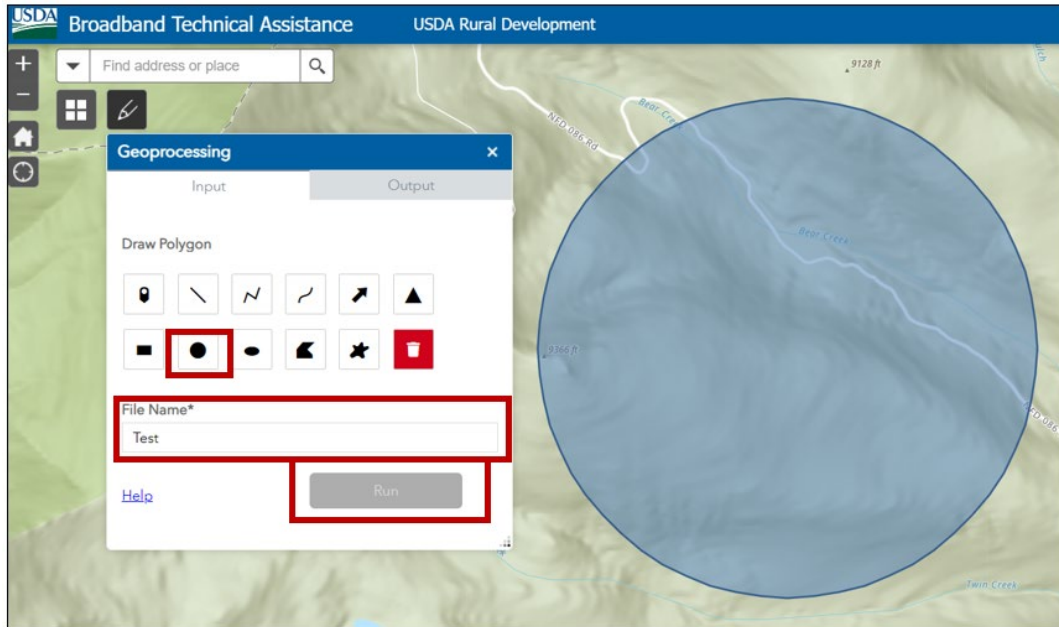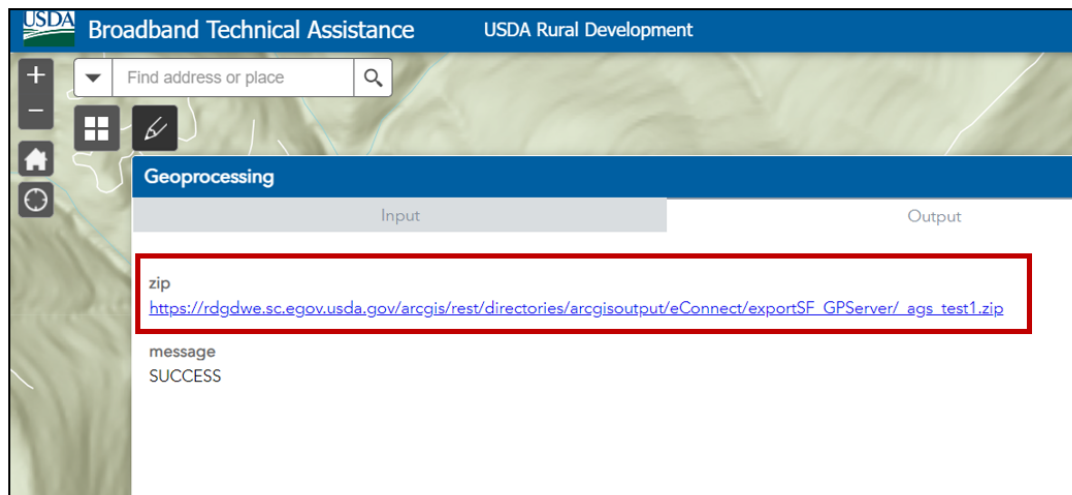
Figure 3: Location of the draw tool.

Figure 4: The "Input" tab of the shapefile draw tool offers several polygonal options to choose from to articulate the project's area and proposed boundaries.

Figure 5: Example demonstrating the creation of a circular shapefile named "Test". When finished drawing your project area, select "Run" and your shapefile will be created. **Note**: If an error was made in drawing an area, applicants may delete the area by selecting the trashcan icon.

Figure 6: Once the "Run" command has been selected, the shapefile will be produced for download on the "Output" tab of the shapefile draw tool. This will be a zip file with the correct shapefile specifications and may be included in your application as an attachment to your Grants.gov application.

4 Acronyms

Table 1: Acronyms

Abbreviation	Definition
BTA	Broadband Technical Assistance
CPF	Capital Projects Fund
CW	FY 24 Sample Communities Worksheet
GIS	Geographic Information System
E-ACAM	Enhanced Alternative Connect America Cost Model
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
KMZ	Keyhole Markup Language Zipped
MBPS	Megabits per second
NOFO	Notice of Funding Opportunity
PDF	Portable Document Format
RDOF	Rural Digital Opportunity Fund
RPN	Rural Partners Network
RUS	Rural Utilities Service
SLFRF	State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture