



Broadband Technical Assistance (BTA) Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) Overview

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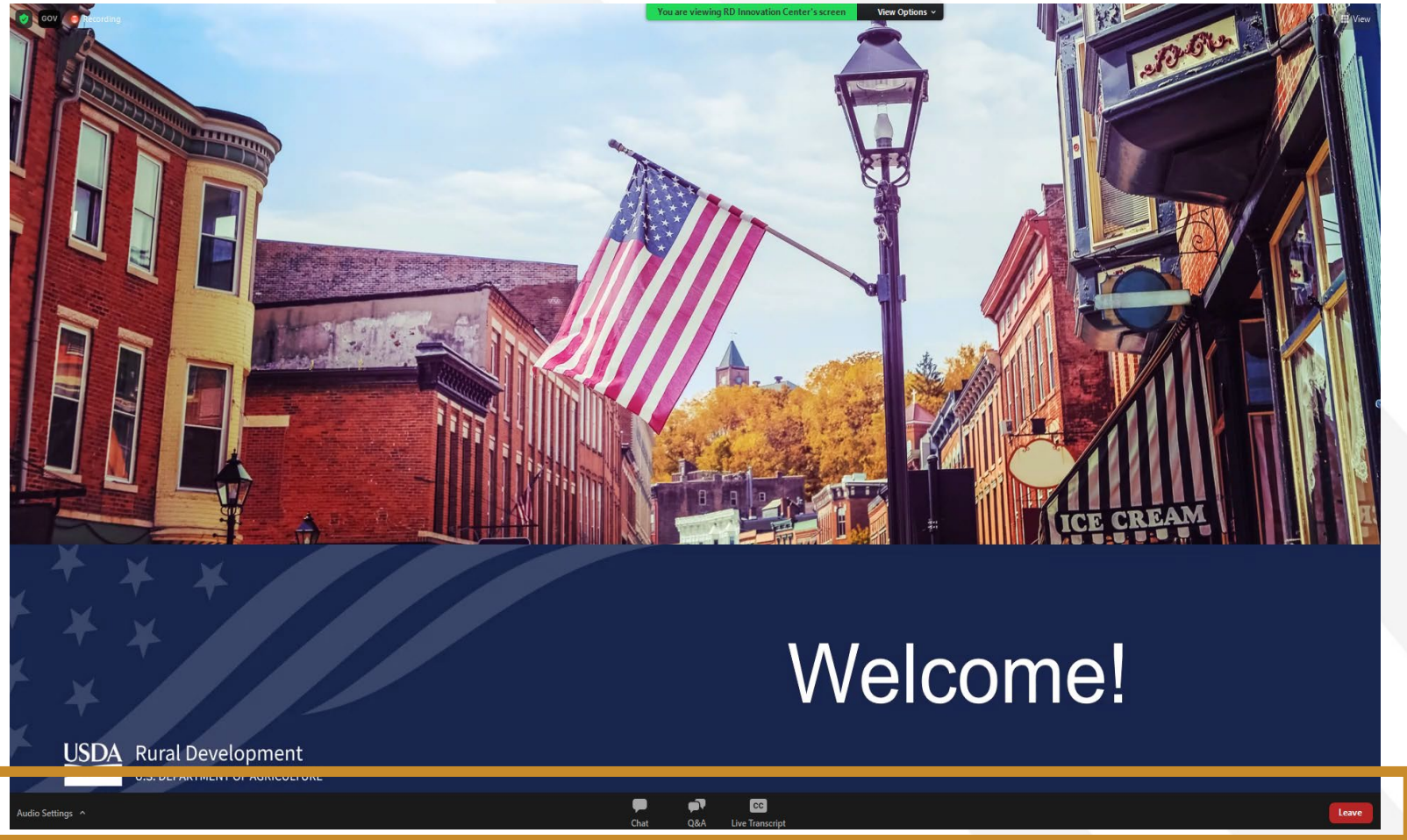
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Today's Presenters



Ken Wiseman



David Chancellor

BTA NOFO Overview

- BTA Overview
- Understanding BTA
- BTA Requirements and Scoring Criteria
- Live Demo: BTA Map
- BTA Application Submission and Reporting
- Additional Resources
- Q&A

BTA Overview



What is Broadband Technical Assistance?

- **Broadband technical assistance (BTA)** refers to activities that support broadband expansion into eligible rural areas and predevelopment planning activities, which may include, but are not limited to, project planning and community engagement, financial sustainability, environmental compliance, construction planning and engineering, accessing federal resources, and data collection and reporting.
- **Examples of BTA:**
 - Conducting Feasibility Studies
 - Completing Network Designs
 - Developing Broadband Financial Assistance Applications
 - Mapping
 -and more!

Broadband Technical Assistance Program Overview

- **What is the purpose of the BTA program?**
 - The BTA program provides funding for eligible entities to deliver or receive technical assistance and training that promotes the expansion of broadband into rural areas.
- **What is the difference between a Technical Assistance Provider project and a Technical Assistance Recipient project?**
 - **Technical Assistance Providers** deliver technical assistance to rural communities or Internet Service Providers (ISPs)
 - **Technical Assistance Recipients** (e.g., rural communities or ISPs) receive technical assistance from Technical Assistance Providers or other broadband experts

Highlighted FY 2024 Changes

- Updated funding categories
- Updated award amounts
- Scoring criteria changes



Understanding BTA



Who can apply for BTA Funding?

- Federally recognized Tribes and Tribal Entities.
- States or local governments, including any agency, subdivision, instrumentality, or political subdivision thereof.
- A territory or possession of the United States.
- An institution of higher education (including 1862 Land-Grant Institutions, 1890 Land-Grant Institutions, 1994 Land-Grant Institutions, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities).
- Non-profit organizations with 501(c)(3) IRS status.
- Cooperatives or mutual organizations.
- Corporations.
- Limited Liability Companies or Limited Liability Partnerships.
- **Note:** Individuals are not eligible for BTA funding.

Funding Vehicle

- **Cooperative Agreement** is the instrument used to fund the support of RD's goals of increasing rural economic growth. In a cooperative agreement, federal employees participate more closely in project activities, often working side-by-side with the cooperator.
- A cooperative agreement differs from a grant in that it allows the awarding agency to be *substantially involved* in carrying out activities.

Substantial Involvement

- The proposed project **must** include a component that allows for active participation and substantial involvement by RD in the applicant's project proposal.
- **Examples of substantial involvement include**, but are not limited to the following:
 - Development of training sessions and outreach materials
 - Joint convenings of community members, partners, and stakeholders
 - Joint delivery of training for RD programs
 - The development of training sessions and outreach materials



Eligible Project Costs

- Award funds must be used for pre-development planning activities that promote the expansion of broadband service into rural areas. **Note:** Broadband service means wired or licensed terrestrial fixed wireless service.
- **Examples:**
 - Preparing feasibility studies, financial forecasts, market surveys, environmental studies, and technical design information necessary to support broadband services
 - Identifying public and private resources to finance broadband facilities
 - Preparing reports and surveys necessary to document the need for broadband services, determine price ranges, and request financial assistance
 - Analyzing and improving broadband facilities management and operations, including implementing automation, adopting new software, conducting training, and determining efficiency
 - Preparing for broadband funding applications

Ineligible Project Costs

Award funds **cannot** be used to pay for the following:

- **Construction in any form**
- **Activities serving communities in a non-rural area or those with existing broadband access**
 - For a community to be eligible, at least 50 percent of households must lack existing broadband access. Existing broadband access is wired or licensed terrestrial fixed wireless service providing 100 Mbps download, 20 Mbps upload (100/20 Mbps).
- **Duplicative project costs funded by another federal award**
- **Indirect costs**
 - Indirect Costs are costs that are not readily identified with a particular grant, contract, project function or activity, but are necessary for the general operation of the organization and the conduct of activities it performs
- **Costs identified as unallowable by 2 CFR parts 200 or 400**

Note: Projects that do not support broadband expansion, such as digital literacy-only projects, will be deemed ineligible.

Funding Categories

- \$25 million is estimated to be available under this NOFO:
 - **Technical Assistance Providers:** Up to \$15 million is available. The minimum award amount is \$100,000 and the maximum award amount is \$1,000,000. Those applying under this funding category must propose to deliver broadband technical assistance that will benefit rural communities.
 - **Technical Assistance Recipients:** Up to \$10 million is available. The minimum award amount is \$50,000 and the maximum award amount is \$500,000. Those applying under this funding category must be beneficiaries of broadband technical assistance.
- Applicants may only apply for **one** type of funding category. The funding category must be clearly identified in the proposal.

BTA Requirements and Scoring Criteria



Defining BTA Communities

- BTA applicants **must** include a list of the rural communities they're proposing to serve
- Communities may be defined at various geographic scales including census-designated places, census blocks or tracts, towns, cities, and counties.
- Applications are scored and evaluated based on how communities are defined

Tips:

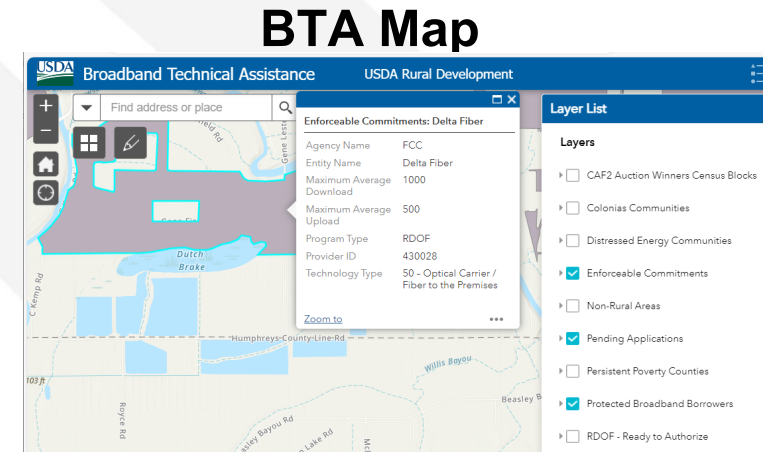
- Utilize the **Sample Communities Worksheet** to provide a structured community list
- Describe communities consistently across the application
- Include maps as needed
- Review the BTA Map for overlap with eligibility and evaluation layers
- **NEW!** See the **Sample Communities Worksheet User Guide** for additional information

Availability of Existing Broadband Access

- Activities supporting communities with existing broadband access are ineligible for BTA funding.
 - Existing broadband access is wired or licensed terrestrial fixed wireless service providing 100/20 Mbps.
 - At least 50 percent of households in the community must lack existing broadband access.

Tips

- Review the [BTA Map](#) (Enforceable Commitment, Protected Broadband Borrowers, and Pending Application layers)
- Review the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) [Broadband Funding Map](#) and the [National Broadband Map](#).
- See the **Application Guide** for additional details.



Scoring Criteria

BTA applications will be competitively reviewed according to the criteria outlined below

- **Project Work Plan:** Up to 30 points possible
 - **Organizational Capacity:** Up to 20 points possible
 - **Rurality:** Up to 20 points possible
 - **Economic Need:** Up to 20 points possible
 - **Creating More and Better Markets:** 10 points possible
 - **Projects advancing Racial Justice, Place-Based Equity, and Opportunity:** 10 points possible
 - **Performance Measures:** Up to 10 points possible
-
- **A maximum of 120 points is possible.**

Project Work Plan

- A maximum of 30 points will be awarded for the Project Work Plan
- Contains three major sections:
 - **1) Work Plan Approach** – The work plan approach should identify and detail:
 - Project objectives
 - Rural communities to be served
 - Project key goals
 - Partnerships developed or to be developed
 - Anticipated deliverables of the project
 - Applicants must list all rural communities that will benefit from the broadband technical assistance project and describe characteristics of the communities being served including information such as population size, population density, poverty rate, and other economic indicators.

Project Work Plan (cont.)

- **2) Work Plan Implementation** – Applicants should include details on how the technical assistance will be provided and how it will lead to expanded broadband service in rural areas.
- Applicants should detail:
 - Major task(s)
 - Involvement of key personnel
 - Time period of task(s)
 - Substantial involvement of RD staff
 - Expected deliverables.

Project Work Plan (cont.)

- **3) Budget and Work Plan Alignment** – A detailed budget and budget justification must be provided.
 - The budget justification should align with the tasks detailed in the workplan.
 - Discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed activities discussed in the project key tasks.
 - The format of the budget's narrative can be in a chart, spreadsheet, table, etc., but it should be readable on letter-size, printable pages.
 - The information needs to be presented in such a way that the reviewers can readily understand what expenses are incurred to support the project.
 - Statement(s) of work for any subcontractors and consultants must be included as part of the application.

Organizational Capacity

- All applicants must demonstrate the capacity to deliver and/or support broadband technical assistance activities.
- The maximum 20 points for this criterion will be based on the following:
 - The applicant's proposal should demonstrate that the applicant has identified appropriate key personnel, both in terms of number of personnel and qualifications of personnel and should provide specific detail of qualifications of key personnel relating to broadband technical assistance. Capacity of personnel to access data for needs assessments and access to planners and other technical experts will be evaluated.
 - Applicants that are technical assistance providers should specify the number of years of providing broadband technical assistance, detail experience in providing broadband technical assistance to rural communities, identify types of rural communities previously served, and detail experience in performance evaluation.

Rurality

- Up to 20 points will be awarded and points will be awarded for serving the least dense rural areas as measured by the population of the communities served.
 - Exceptionally Rural: Areas with populations of 5,000 or fewer will receive 20 points.
 - Rural: Areas with populations of 5,001 – 10,000 will receive 15 points.
 - Mid-rural: Areas with populations of 10,001 – 20,000 will receive 10 points.
 - Urban: Areas with populations of greater than 20,000 are ineligible.
- To receive rurality points in any of the above categories, an area **cannot be** adjacent or contiguous to a city or town having a population in excess of 50,000.

Economic Need

- Up to 20 points will be awarded for economic need.
- Economic need is based on the average county poverty percentage of the communities proposed to be served in the application.
- The percentages must be determined by utilizing the U.S. Census Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) Program.
 - Note: Communities located in geographic areas, for which no SAIPE data exist, will be determined to have an average SAIPE poverty percentage of 30 percent.
- SAIPE data can be found on the BTA website in a file labeled "SAIPE Poverty Data" Poverty Percent is provided in column H highlighted

SAIPE County Poverty Percentage

2022 Poverty and Median Household Income Estimates - Counties, States, and National									
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) Program									
Release date: December 2023									
Geographic Information				All Ages					
State FIPS Code	County FIPS Code	Postal Code	Name	Poverty Estimate, All Ages	90% CI Lower Bound	90% CI Upper Bound	Poverty Percent, All Ages	90% CI Lower Bound	90% CI Upper Bound
00	000	US	United States	40,951,625	40,691,315	41,211,935	12.6	12.5	12.5
01	000	AL	Alabama	798,469	780,933	816,005	16.2	15.8	15.8
01	001	AL	Autauga County	6,988	5,522	8,454	11.8	9.3	9.3
01	003	AL	Baldwin County	30,195	28,604	33,786	12.4	10.9	10.9
01	005	AL	Barbour County	5,860	4,715	7,005	26.7	21.5	21.5
01	007	AL	Biwab County	3,979	3,190	4,768	20.0	16.0	16.0
01	009	AL	Blount County	8,022	6,474	9,570	13.6	11.0	11.0
01	011	AL	Bullock County	2,670	1,990	3,350	31.5	23.5	23.5

Creating More and Better Markets

- Up to 10 points will be awarded for projects Creating More and Better Markets
- Projects located in or serving a rural community whose economic well-being ranks in the most distressed tier of the Distressed Communities Index are eligible for 10 points. The most distressed tier of the index are those communities with a score over 80.
- A list of Distressed Communities by zip code can be found on the BTA website under the “To Apply” tab
- A GIS layer identifying Distressed Communities can also be found using the BTA mapping tool available on the [BTA Map](#)
- 10 points will be awarded for projects serving **at least one** Distressed Community

Projects advancing Racial Justice, Place-Based Equity, and Opportunity

Projects that meet one of the criteria below will receive 10 points.

1. Projects proposing to serve at least one rural community with a Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) with a score of 0.75 or higher are eligible.

Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Hawaiian Census Tribal areas are also considered SVI communities

2. Projects proposed by a federally recognized Tribe, including Tribal instrumentalities and entities that are wholly owned by Tribes

3. Projects that promote the expansion of broadband service on Tribal Lands.

Tribal certification requirement: A certification from the appropriate Tribal official is required if a project is being proposed by a non-tribal applicant over or on Tribal Lands. The appropriate Tribal official is the Tribal Council of the Tribal Government with jurisdiction over the Tribal Lands at issue.

4. Projects from or benefiting at least one Rural Partners Network (RPN) community network.

Note: SVI, Tribal, and RPN community network layers are available on the BTA Map (available at: tinyurl.com/4kfzwnp3). See the Application Guide for additional details.

Performance Measures

- The applicant can receive up to 10 points based on the proposed performance measures to evaluate the progress and impact of the proposed project.
- Performance measures should be based on the applicant's proposal and must include a description for how the results of the technical assistance will be measured and the benchmarks to be used for measuring effectiveness.

Additional Information

- There are **no cost sharing or matching requirements** associated with this funding opportunity.
- Applications are ranked by the final score and awardees will be selected based on those scores, subject to the availability of funds.
- RUS will approve no more than one application per applicant.
 - If an applicant submits more than one application for different projects, then the Agency will only consider the application with the highest score.
 - If an applicant submits more than one application for the same project, then the Agency will only consider the latest submission.

Additional Information (cont.)

- At the time of application, each applicant must have an active registration in the System for Award Management (SAM) before submitting its application in accordance.
- In order to register in SAM, entities will be required to create a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). Instructions for obtaining the UEI are available at <https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration>.
 - Applicant must maintain an active SAM registration, with current, accurate and complete information, at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application under consideration by a Federal awarding agency.
- Applicant must ensure they complete the Financial Assistance General Representations and Certifications in SAM.

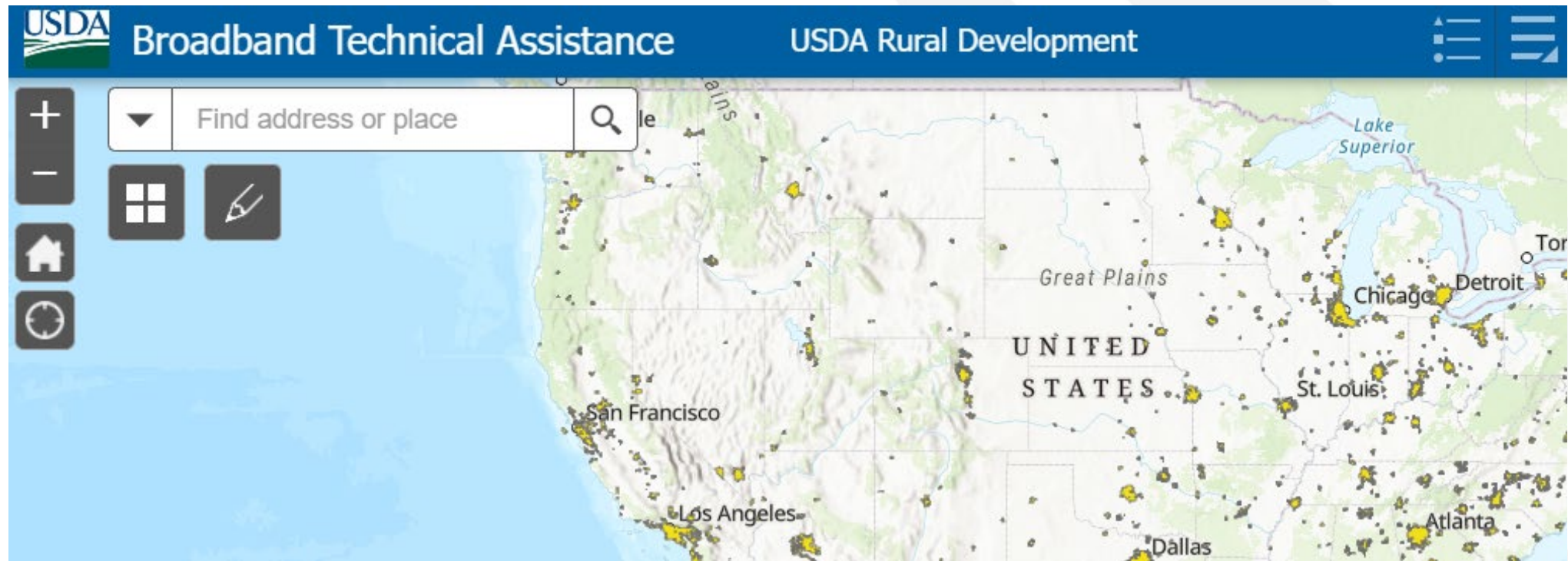
Live Demo: BTA Map



The BTA Map

- BTA applicants must include a list of the rural communities they're proposing to serve
- The [BTA Map](#) helps applicants compare their communities for overlap against eligibility and evaluation criteria
- In addition to listing viewing the communities you intend to serve, the BTA map includes a draw tool can be used to draw your proposed communities in a map
 - Download a shapefile of the communities drawn
 - Upload your shapefile(s) as part of your application via Grants.gov
 - Applicants are not required to include maps of their communities, but doing so can help enhance the clarity of an application

Navigating the BTA Map



Navigating the BTA Map Layers

The screenshot displays the USDA Broadband Technical Assistance (BTA) map interface. The top navigation bar includes the USDA logo, the text "Broadband Technical Assistance", and "USDA Rural Development". On the right side of the bar are icons for a list, layers, and information.

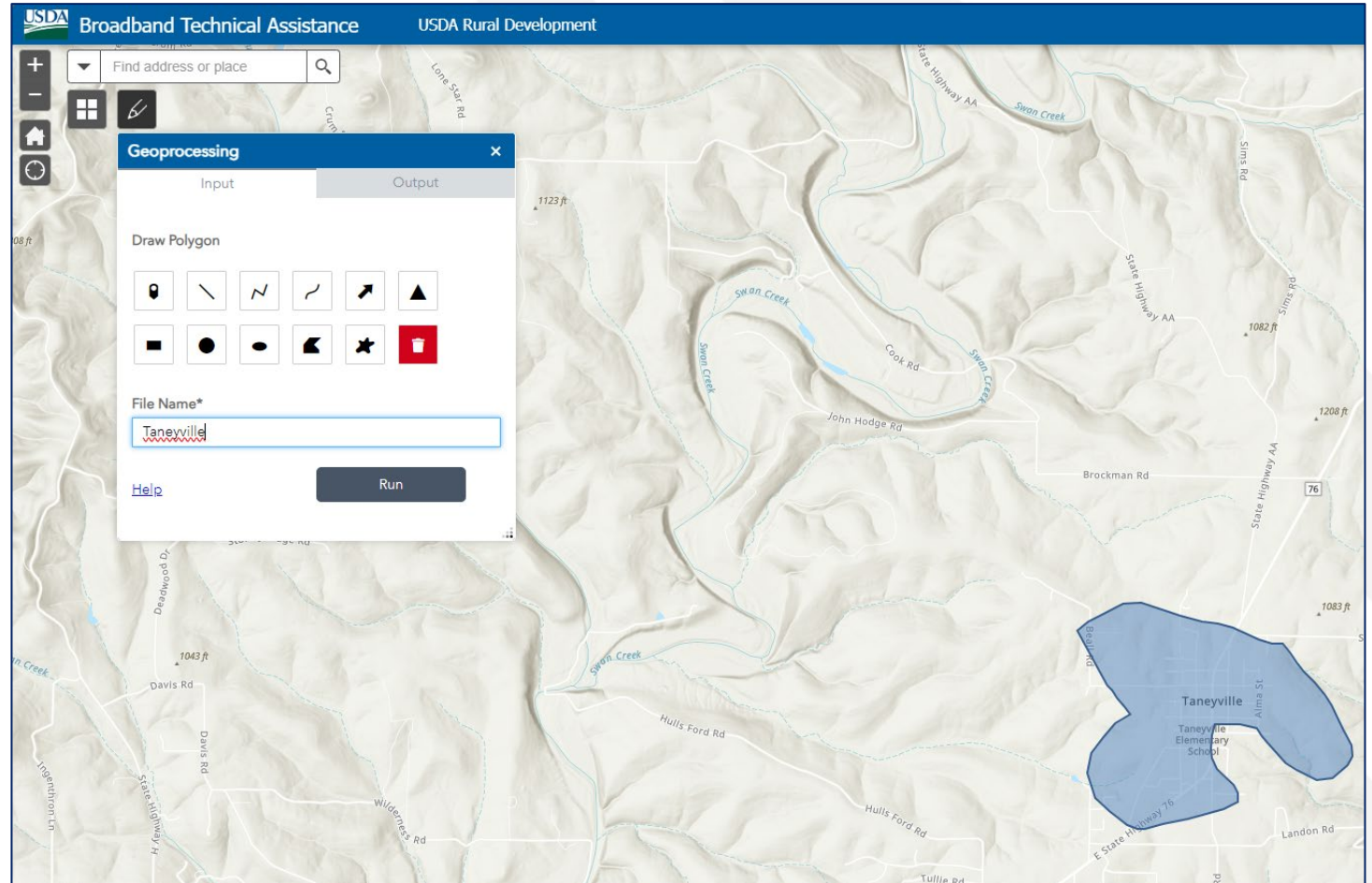
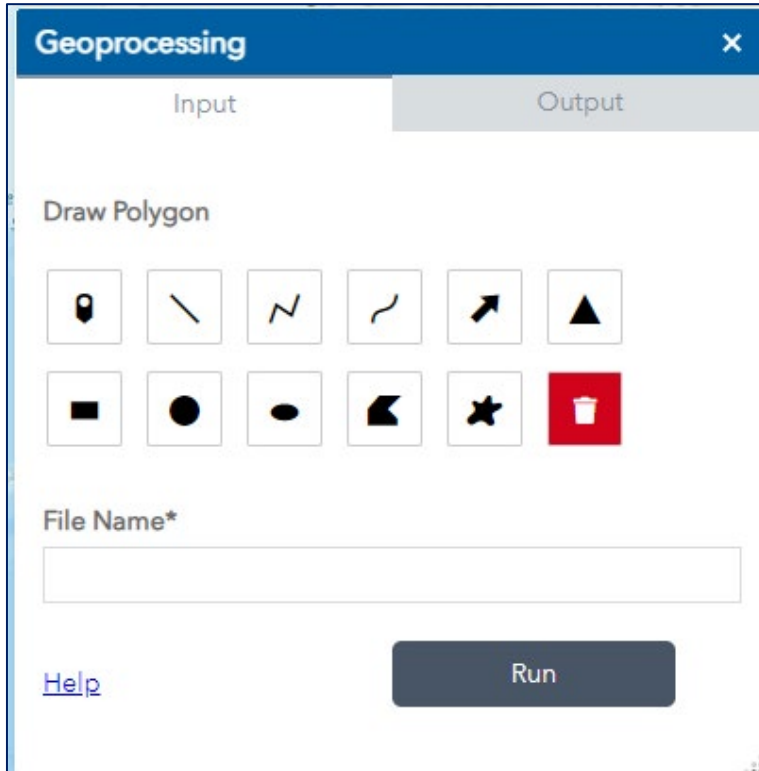
The main map area shows the United States with various colored overlays representing different map layers. Major cities and geographical features are labeled, including Vancouver, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Dallas, Houston, Monterrey, Miami, Havana, St. Louis, Chicago, Detroit, Toronto, Ottawa, Boston, New York, Washington, and Atlanta. The map also shows the Rocky Mountains, Great Plains, and Lake Superior.

On the left side of the map, there is a search bar with the text "Find address or place" and a search icon. Below the search bar are several navigation icons: a plus sign for zoom in, a minus sign for zoom out, a home icon, a refresh icon, and a full-screen icon.

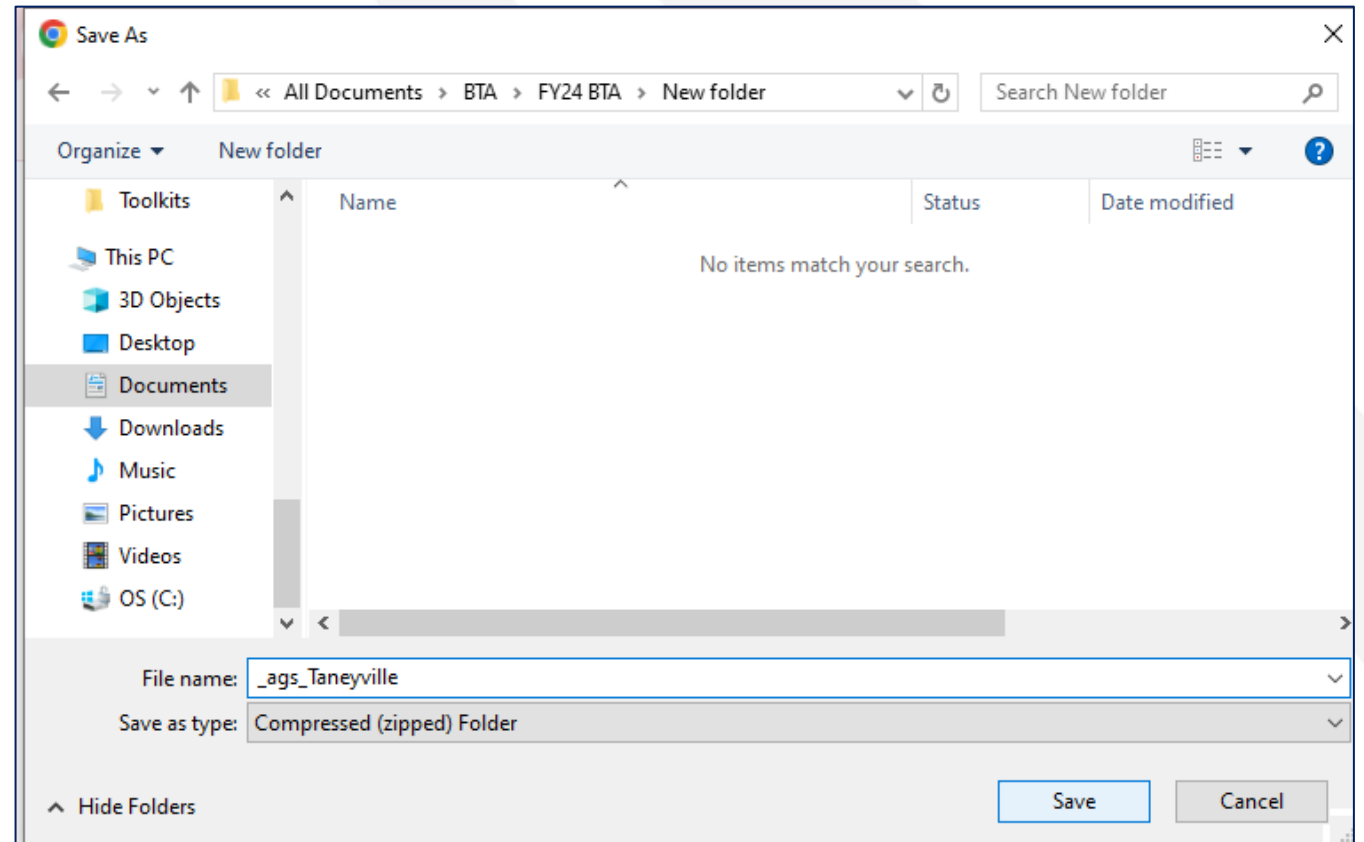
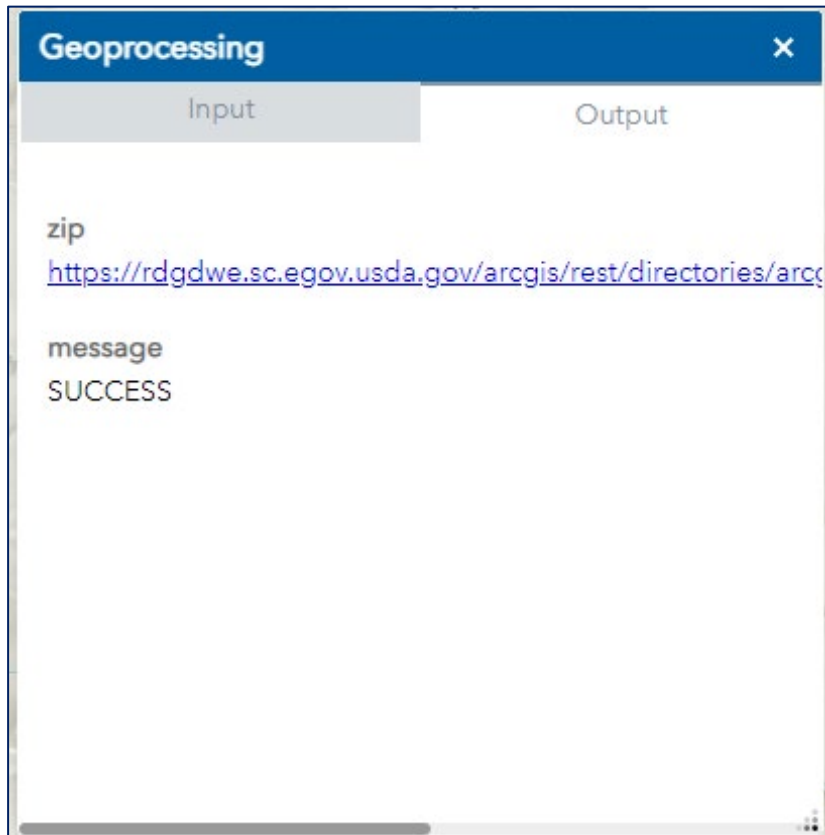
On the right side, there is a "Layer List" panel. It has a search icon and a close icon. The panel lists the following layers, all of which are checked:

- Distressed Communities
- Enforceable Commitments
- Non-Rural Areas
- Pending Applications
- Protected Broadband Borrowers
- RPN Community Networks
- Socially Vulnerable Communities
- Tribal Area in Alaska (Census)
- Tribal Area (BIA LAR)
- Tribal Statistical Area (BIA)
- Tribal Supplemental Area (BIA LAR)

Using the Draw Tool



Creating and Downloading a Shapefile



Application Submission and Reporting



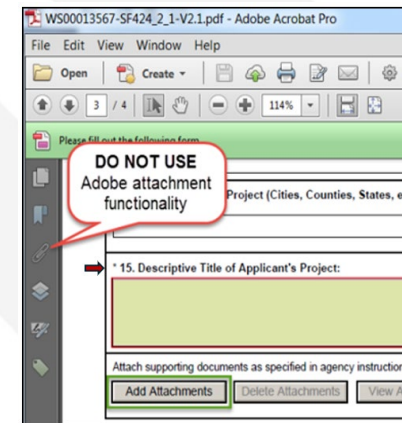
Application Submission

- All applications are submitted through Grants.gov.
- The deadline for applications to be submitted is **11:59pm Eastern on August 20, 2024.**
- Grants.gov requires some credentialing and online authentication procedures that may take several business days to complete.
- If system errors or technical difficulties occur, use the customer support resources available at the Grants.gov website. RUS cannot provide technical assistance for this site.

Attachments

- Applicants are required to submit application documents, including the written narrative proposal and any supporting materials, via Grants.gov for receipt by RUS.
- **IMPORTANT:** Attachments must be added using either the SF-424 Block 15 or the optional Attachments Form. Multiple attachments can be added.
- Both forms are available on Grants.gov.
- See the Attachments section in the Application Guide for additional guidance

Form SF-424 Block 15



Attachments Form

ATTACHMENTS FORM			
<small>Instructions: On this form, you will attach the various files that make up your grant application. Please consult with the appropriate Agency Guidelines for more information about each needed file. Please remember that any files you attach must be in the document format and named as specified in the Guidelines.</small>			
<small>Important: Please attach your files in the proper sequence. See the appropriate Agency Guidelines for details.</small>			
1) Please attach Attachment 1	<input type="text"/>	<input type="button" value="Add Attachment"/>	<input type="button" value="Delete Attachment"/> <input type="button" value="View Attachment"/>
2) Please attach Attachment 2	<input type="text"/>	<input type="button" value="Add Attachment"/>	<input type="button" value="Delete Attachment"/> <input type="button" value="View Attachment"/>
3) Please attach Attachment 3	<input type="text"/>	<input type="button" value="Add Attachment"/>	<input type="button" value="Delete Attachment"/> <input type="button" value="View Attachment"/>
4) Please attach Attachment 4	<input type="text"/>	<input type="button" value="Add Attachment"/>	<input type="button" value="Delete Attachment"/> <input type="button" value="View Attachment"/>
5) Please attach Attachment 5	<input type="text"/>	<input type="button" value="Add Attachment"/>	<input type="button" value="Delete Attachment"/> <input type="button" value="View Attachment"/>
6) Please attach Attachment 6	<input type="text"/>	<input type="button" value="Add Attachment"/>	<input type="button" value="Delete Attachment"/> <input type="button" value="View Attachment"/>
7) Please attach Attachment 7	<input type="text"/>	<input type="button" value="Add Attachment"/>	<input type="button" value="Delete Attachment"/> <input type="button" value="View Attachment"/>

Reporting Requirements

- Reporting is comprised of three parts, including performance reporting, recipient and sub-recipient reporting, and record keeping and accounting.
- Performance reporting includes providing annual performance activity reports to RUS until the project is complete and the funds are expended.
- Project performance reports should include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Comparisons of actual accomplishments to objectives established for the period.
 - Issues which have occurred, or are anticipated, that may affect the attainment of overall project objectives, prevent meeting schedules or objectives, or preclude the attainment of particular project work elements during established time periods and shall be accompanied by a statement of the action taken or planned to resolve the situation.
 - Objectives and timetable established for the next reporting period.
 - Activities demonstrating coordination with the State Broadband Office

Additional Resources



Coordination

Coordination is key!

- USDA Telecom Program
 - [General Field Representatives \(GFRs\)](#)
 - [BTA Map](#) - Enforceable Commitment, Protected Broadband Borrowers, and Pending Application layers
 - [Funded BTA Projects](#)
 - [RUS Coordination Webpage](#)
- State Broadband Offices and [State Broadband Leaders Network](#)
 - BEAD Coordination
- National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)
 - [Federal Program Officers \(FPOs\)](#)
- Department of Treasury
 - CapitalProjectsFund@treasury.gov
- Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
 - [Broadband Funding Map](#) – Federally funded broadband projects

Other USDA RUS Telecommunications Programs

1. [ReConnect Program](#)
2. [Community Connect Grant Program](#)
3. [Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grant Program](#)
4. [Telecommunications Infrastructure Loan Program](#)
5. [Rural Broadband Program](#)

Award funds can be used to prepare to apply for RUS Telecom Programs

Key Tips for FY 2024 Applicants

- Review all important documentation to ensure a **complete** and **accurate** application is submitted
 - [FY 2024 NOFO](#)
 - [BTA Map](#)
 - [FY 2024 Application Guide](#)
 - [Application Checklist](#)
 - [Sample Worksheets](#)
- Research federally funded broadband projects and existing broadband access within project areas before applying.
- Don't forget to consider substantial involvement by RUS! Substantial involvement by RUS is a required component for BTA projects to be considered eligible.

Highlighted Resources

Below are useful links to help you apply for FY 24 Broadband Technical Assistance:

Resource	URL/Link
Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)	https://federalregister.gov/d/2024-13691
BTA Webpage ¹	https://tinyurl.com/m6daw24c
Webinar/Events Page	https://tinyurl.com/4yrzrdej
BTA Map	https://tinyurl.com/4kfzwnp3
Contact Us Help Desk	https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/contact-us
General Field Representatives (GFRs)	https://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/telecom-gfr
Funded BTA Project Descriptions	https://tinyurl.com/4kzkvw8z

1. Includes Grants.gov link, Application Guide, Community Worksheet Guide, Worksheets, Checklist, and more!





Rural Development

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE