Preparing to Apply:
Broadband Technical Assistance (BTA) Program
Fiscal Year 2024

USDA Rural Development
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agenda

- BTA Program Background and Overview

- Coordinating with Rural Partners Network (RPN)

- Preparing for FY 2024

- Mapping Demo

- Resources

- Q&A

BTA Overview

USDA Rural Development
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

What is Broadband Technical Assistance?

- ***Broadband technical assistance*** 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 Broadband Technical Assistance programs 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 or other broadband experts **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

Broadband Technical Assistance Program Overview (continued)

- What is the funding vehicle for BTA?
  - The BTA program provides funding in the form of cooperative agreements. This allows for the USDA Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to be substantially involved in the project.

- Who is eligible for BTA?
  - Federally recognized Tribes and Tribal entities
  - States or local governments
  - A territory or possession of the U.S.
  - An institution of higher education
  - Nonprofit organizations with a 501(c)(3) status
  - Cooperatives or mutual organizations
  - Corporations
  - LLCs or LLPs

BTA FY 2023 Award Summary

- 38 active BTA awards

- Awards by Funding Category:
  - Projects Supporting Cooperatives: 4
  - Technical Assistance Providers: 16
  - Technical Assistance Recipients: 18

- Funded project descriptions can be found BTA website.

FY2023 Projects Served by State	
State	**Projects**
Alaska	7
California	4
Mississippi	3
Idaho	3
Kentucky	3
All Other States	*20*

Example of Funded BTA Project – TA Provider

Kansas Department of Commerce

- Promoting broadband expansion in six rural counties in Kansas

- The project will utilize funding to:
  - Facilitate pre-engineering design and cost studies to determine:
    - Broadband buildout costs
    - Current barriers to broadband deployment
  - Partner with RUS and local governments to understand and analyze results of the studies, develop mitigation strategies, and identify next steps for broadband deployment (including accessing federal and state funding)

Example of Funded BTA Project – TA Provider

Shaping Our Appalachian Region, Inc. (SOAR)

- Promoting broadband expansion in 14 rural communities within Pike County, Kentucky

- The project will utilize funding to:
  - Provide expertise and resources to assist the community in accessing funding to bring high-speed broadband to areas identified through the project
  - Conduct community engagement and education
  - Collaborate with the State Broadband Development Office

Example of Funded BTA Project – TA Recipient

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

- Promoting broadband expansion in 60 rural communities within Southeastern Oklahoma

- The project will utilize funding to:
  - Prepare a comprehensive feasibility study
  - Plan and design future delivery of broadband services
  - Determine fiber optic routes and equipment specifications needed for high-speed internet connectivity
  - Provide community deployment strategies to expand coverage areas for future growth

Example of Funded BTA Project – TA Recipient

HarvestBeam, Inc.

- Promoting broadband expansion in 13 communities across seven counties in North Carolina.

- The project will utilize funding to:
  - Plan for construction of new fixed wireless broadband facilities
  - Collaborate with USDA, RPN and other federal agencies
  - Conduct community surveys
  - Mapping

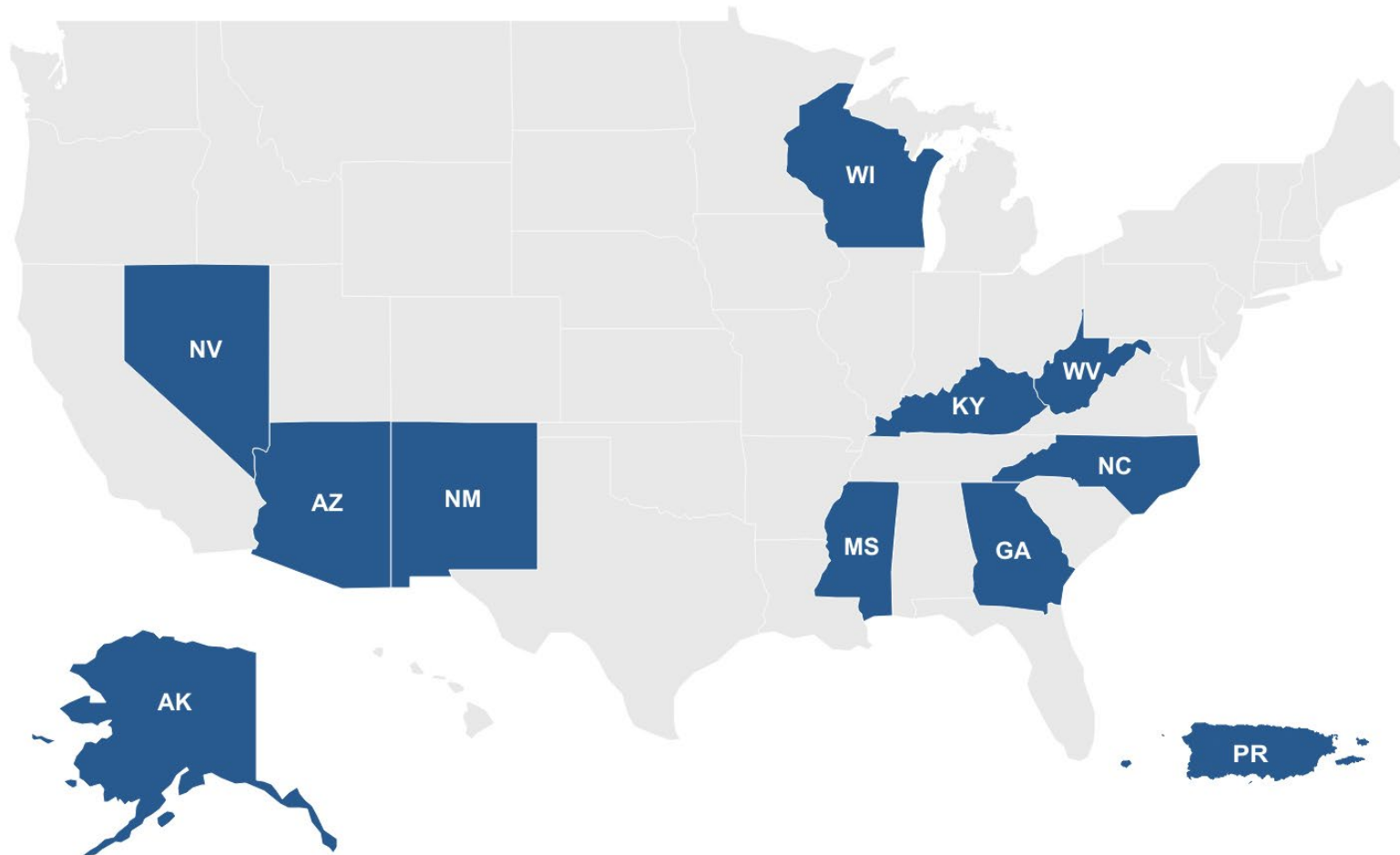# Coordinating with Rural Partners Network (RPN)

Rural Partners Network

Advancing equitable rural prosperity through local job creation, infrastructure development, and community improvement.

Rural Partners Network

Cohort One States:
Georgia, Kentucky New Mexico, Mississippi and Three Tribes in Arizona

Cohort Two States and Territory:
Alaska, Nevada, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, Wisconsin, and West Virginia.

Forging Innovative Solutions

Broad Federal Agency Rural Commitment

- Inter and intra-agency coordination on rural development

- Dedicated staff and better engagement with rural communities

- Rural focused website (rural.gov) for all federal resources and opportunities

Rural Partners Network: Interagency Partners

Investments- Nearly $3 billion across the federal government in direct investments including over $300 million USDA funds directly leveraged by RPN field staff.

Place-Based Support for Identified Communities

- 3-4 staff per state focused on all of government perspective
- Technical and capacity building support
- Learning and feedback to federal partners

Community Liaisons and National and regional TA providers

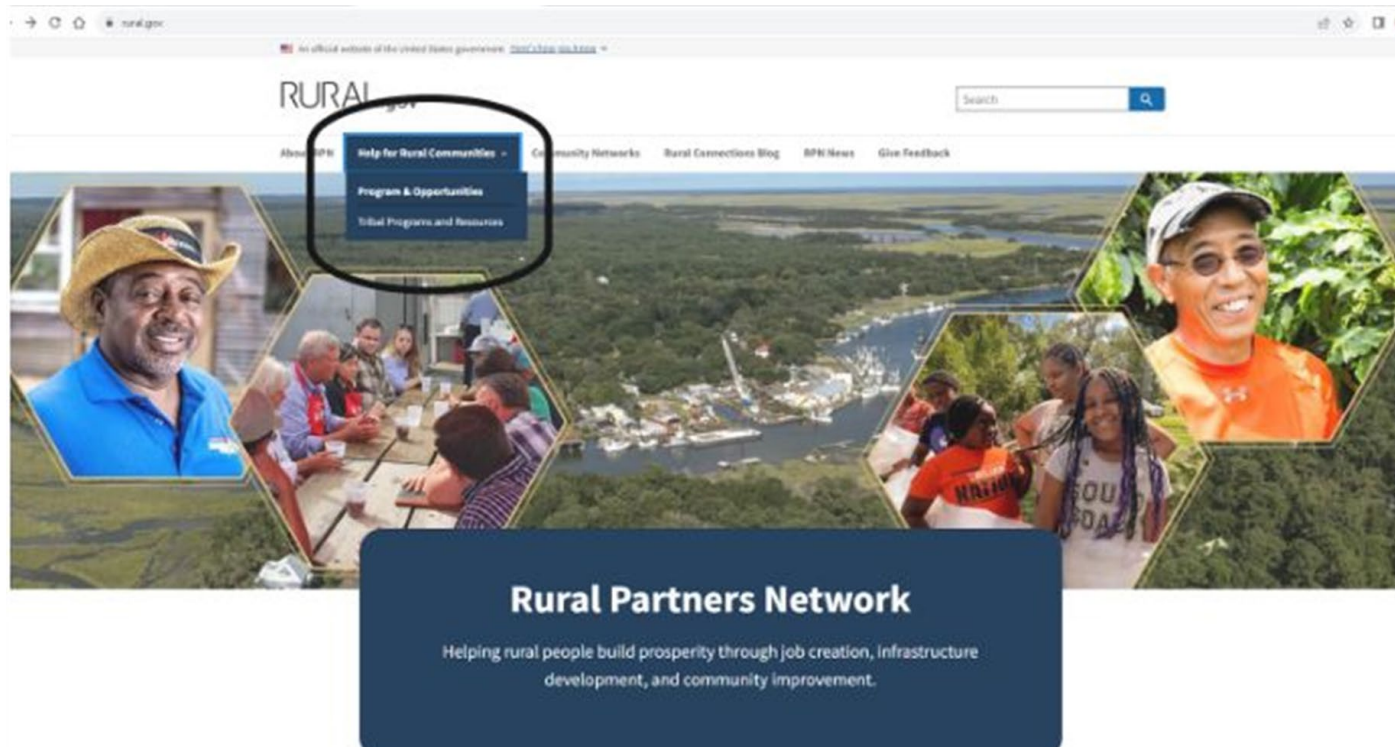**Advocate for rural community needs; addressing barriers and equitable access**

Matchmake between community needs and agency resources and staff
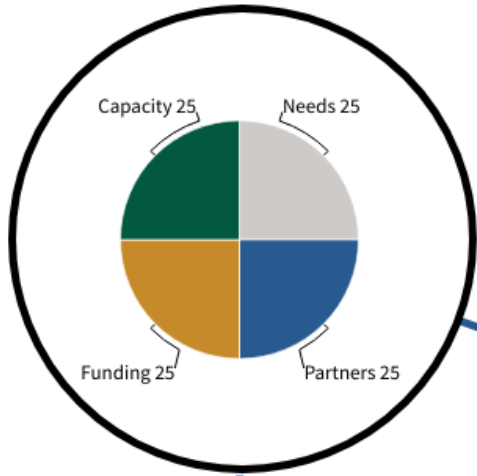
Convene Partners: Federal, Tribal, state, and local governments, non-profits, and other private stakeholders

Provide technical assistance and capacity building support

Rural.gov

Rural.gov is the official website for Rural Partners Network. Community Network pages, searchable program data base and news and events. This page is a good place to send community members to learn more about Rural Partners Network

Capacity 25   Needs 25

Funding 25   Partners 25

Drives engagement and technical assistance for Community Driven Projects that have immediate needs

Activates the Federal Interagency Partners to affect change for underserved rural communities

Rural
Issues
Challenges
Policies and Programs

Impact
Collaboration
Innovation

Builds momentum within the Community Networks and empowers collaboration, innovation and broad place-based impact

Rural Partners Network in Action

Thank you

- Questions? Email: RuralPartnersNetwork@USDA.gov
- Website: Rural.gov →
- Community Liaison Contacts
- Twitter-"X": @ruralgov
- 2023 Annual Report: Linked

Preparing to Apply

What You Can Do Now

- All applicants must
  - Have an **active and current** registration in SAM.gov
  - Have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) (https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration)
  - Complete the Financial Assistance General Representations and Certifications in SAM.gov

- It can take **12-15 business days** for a SAM.gov account to be active in SAM.gov

- Applications are submitted on Grants.gov, which requires some credentialing before submitting an application.
  - Credentialing can take several business days to complete.
  - Avoid delays by creating your account now and complete all credentialing.
  - Visit grants.gov for instructions.

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 Sample Worksheets

- Don't forget to consider substantial involvement by RUS!
  - BTA projects are funded via cooperative agreements.
  - Substantial involvement by RUS is a required component for BTA projects to be considered eligible.

Tips for FY 2024 Applicants (continued)

- Begin planning today!

  - Define key project goals/objectives and set clear timelines.

  - Reach out to communities and/or partner organizations.

  - Clearly identify the communities to be served by your project.

  - Consider using the draw tool on the BTA Map to draw and download shapefiles and submit them as part of your application.

  - Review the BTA map to identify high-needs areas and areas that may have existing or planned broadband service.

- Reach out to RUS with any questions **early** in the application process.

Coordination

Coordination is key!

- USDA Telecom Program
    - [General Field Representatives (GFRs)](#)

- State Broadband Offices and [State Broadband Leaders Network](#)
    - BEAD Coordination

- National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)
    - [Federal Program Officers (FPOs)](#)

- Federal Communications Commission
    - [Broadband Funding Map](#) – Federally funded broadband projects
    - [National Broadband Map](#) – Internet services available to individual locations

- Department of Treasury
    - CapitalProjectsFund@treasury.gov

- And more!
    - More information can be found on the [RUS Coordination Webpage](#).

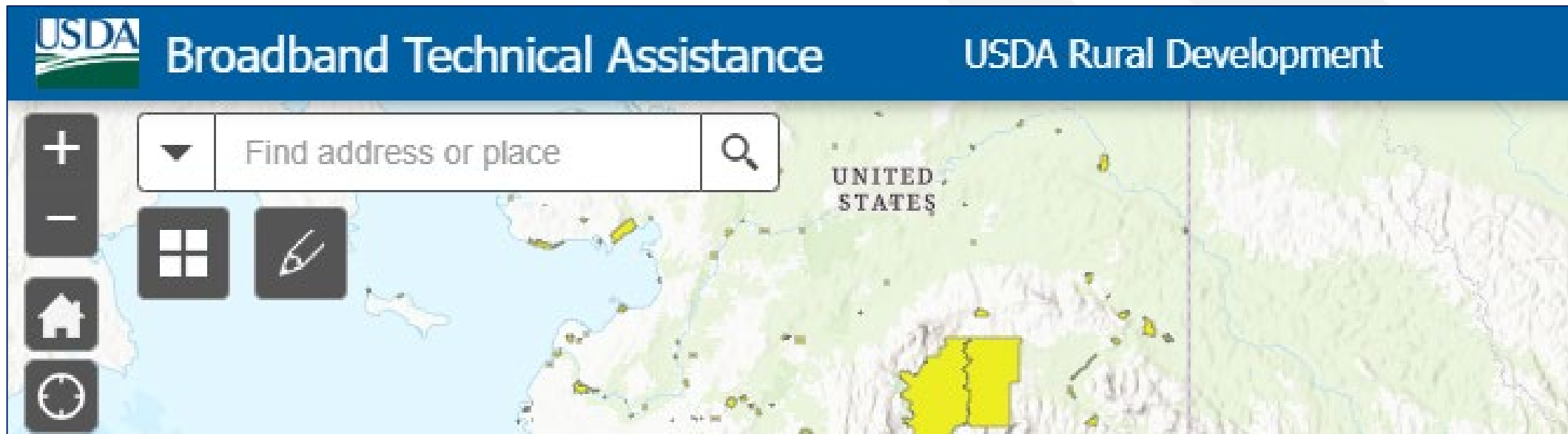USDA Rural Development
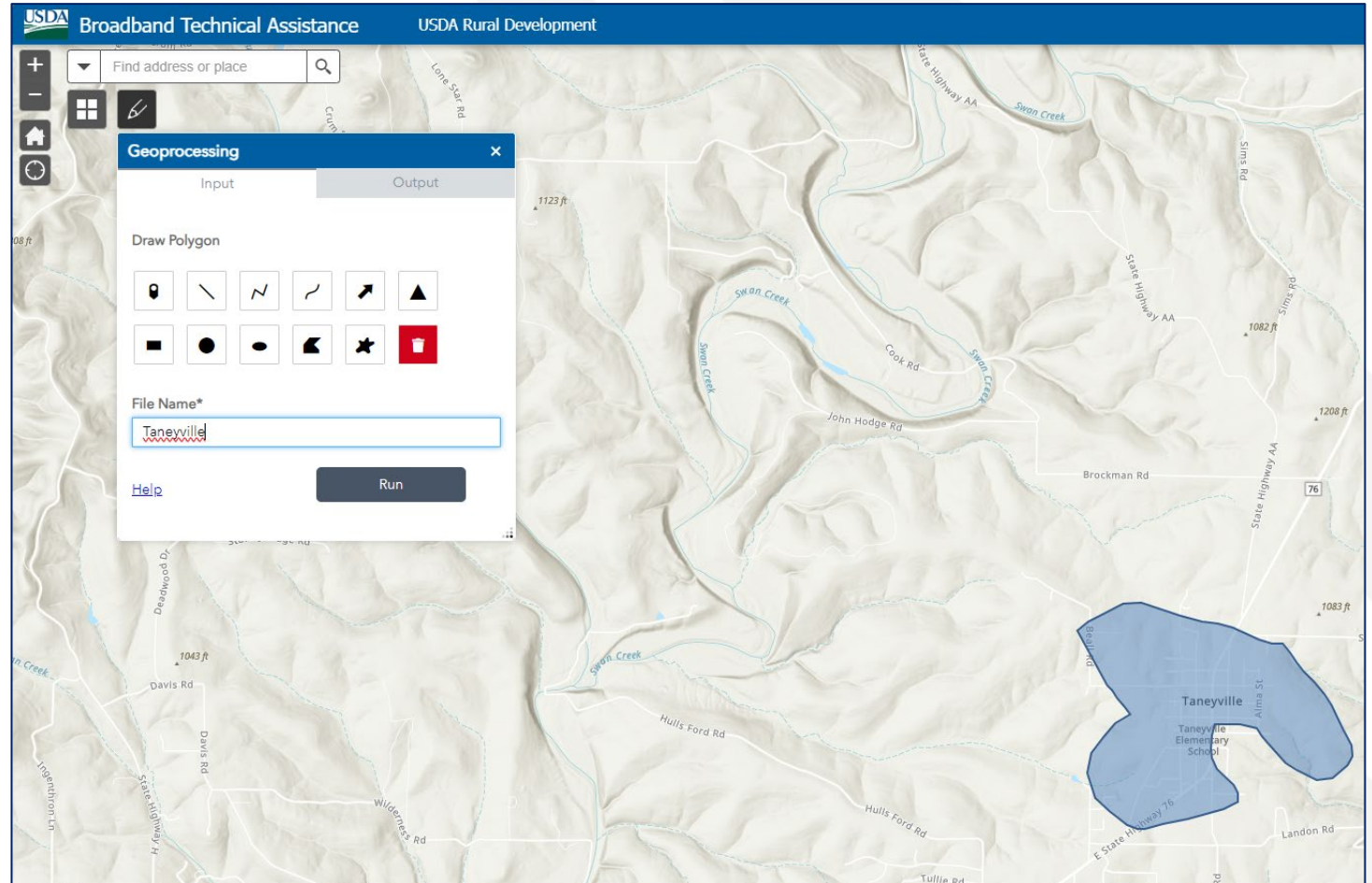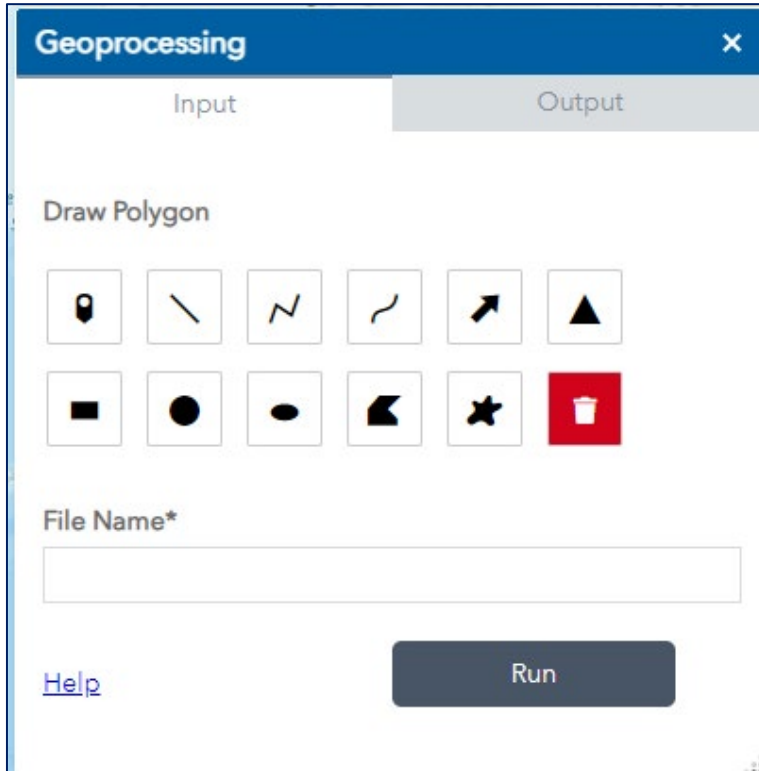U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Live Demo: BTA Map

Using the Draw Tool on the BTA Map

- BTA applicants must include a list of the rural communities they're proposing to serve

- In addition to listing the communities you intend to serve, the BTA map draw tool can be used to draw your proposed communities
  - Download a shapefile of the communities drawn
  - Upload your shapefile(s) as part of your application

- Applicants are not required to use the tool to submit communities, but doing so can help with the application review process.
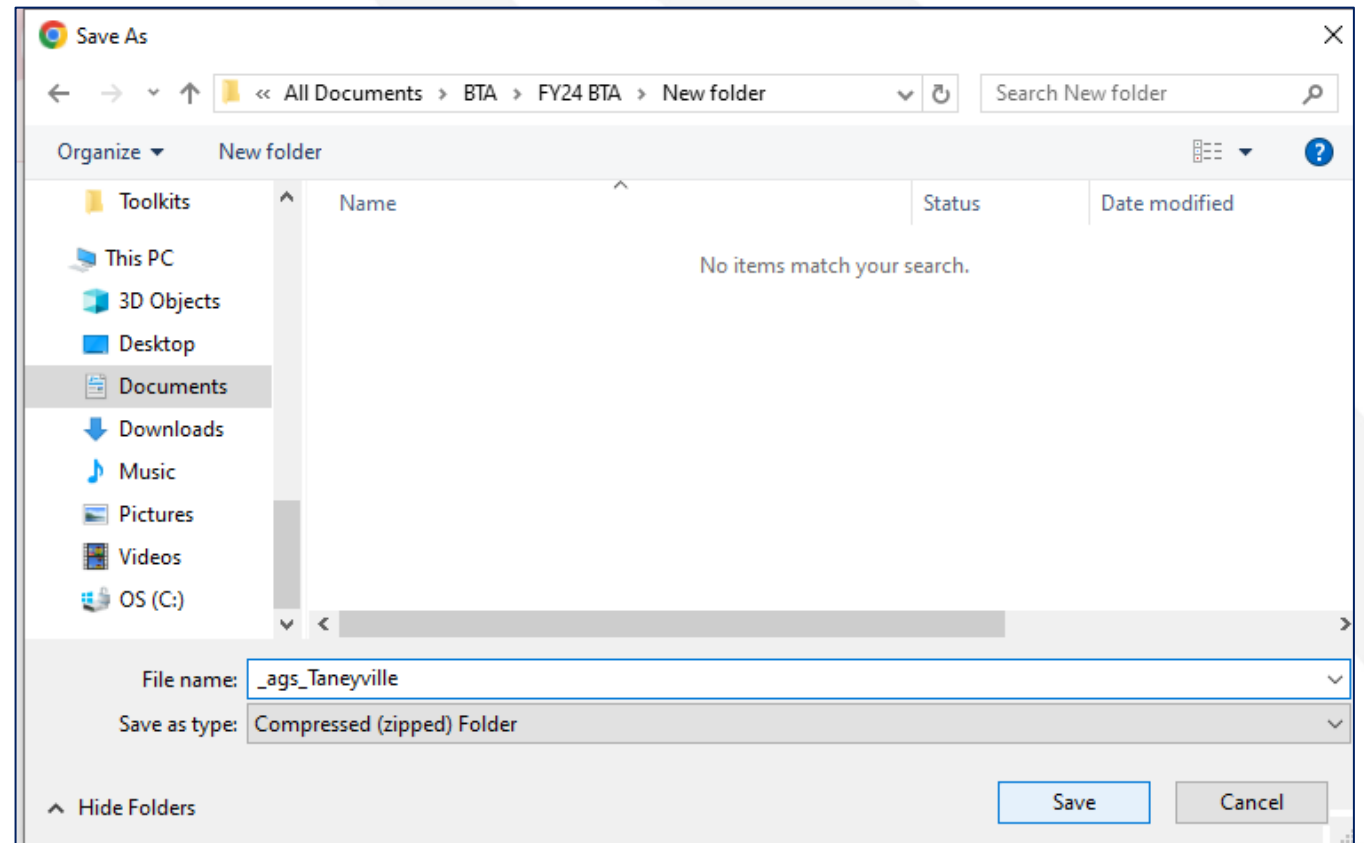
Navigating the BTA Map

Using the Draw Tool

Creating and Downloading a Shapefile

Considerations

- Name your shapefile consistently with the community(ies) listed on your Communities Worksheet

- Save separate shapefiles for different communities when creating them on the BTA map.

- Check for overlap with eligibility and evaluation criteria layers

- Draw your community as accurately as possible and provide additional relevant information on the Communities Worksheet and within your application

Resources

Resources for Application Assistance

- Contact Us: https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/contact-us

- BTA Website: https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/telecommunications-programs/broadband-technical-assistance-program
  - FY 24 NOFO – Coming soon!
  - Mapping Tool
  - Sample Worksheets
  - FY 24 Application Guide – Coming soon!

- Register for other upcoming events: https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/telecommunications-programs/broadband-technical-assistance-program#events

- Applications must be submitted in Grants.gov and RUS cannot provide technical assistance for this site. Reach out to Grants.gov with any technical issues.

Q&A

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