

Broadband Technical Assistance (BTA) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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[General Information](#)

[Federal Award Information](#)

[Applicant and Project Eligibility Information](#)

[Evaluation Criteria](#)

[Key Priorities](#)

[Substantial Involvement Requirements](#)

[How to Submit an Application](#)

[Definitions](#)

[Award procedures](#)

[Other Questions](#)

[General Information](#)

1. What is the purpose of BTA?

BTA provides financial assistance to eligible entities to receive or deliver broadband technical assistance and training.

2. Where do the funds come from?

This [NOFO](#) will use technical assistance funds appropriated under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) ([Pub. L. 117-58](#)).

[Federal Award Information](#)

1. How much funding is available?

\$25 million is estimated to be available for funding under the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). The maximum and minimum award amounts vary by funding category.

- Up to \$15 million is available for Technical Assistance Providers. The minimum award amount is \$100,000 and the maximum award amount is \$1,000,000.
- Up to \$10 million is available for Technical Assistance Recipients. The minimum award amount is \$50,000 and the maximum award amount is \$500,000.

2. Is there a matching requirement for BTA?

No, there are no cost sharing or matching requirements for this award.

3. What is the funding vehicle?

BTA provides financial assistance through cooperative agreements to eligible entities to receive or deliver broadband technical assistance and training and supports the development and expansion of broadband cooperatives. BTA does not have a cost share or matching requirement.

Applicant and Project Eligibility Information

1. What types of organizations are eligible to apply?

Only entities legally organized as one of the following are eligible for financial assistance:

- 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.

2. How may funds be used?

BTA funds must be used to support broadband technical assistance activities in rural areas. Broadband technical assistance refers to activities that support high-speed internet expansion into rural areas and may include, but are not limited to: project planning and community engagement, operations, financial sustainability, environmental compliance, construction planning, engineering, accessing federal resources, and data collection and reporting.

Examples of eligible projects include, but are not limited to:

- Assisting entities in identifying and planning for delivering broadband service to eligible rural areas;
- Identifying resources to finance broadband facilities from public and private sources;
- Preparing feasibility studies, financial forecasts, market surveys, environmental studies, and technical design information to support broadband services;
- Preparing reports and surveys necessary to support the need for broadband services, the price range, and to request financial assistance; or
- Analyzing and improving operations related to the management of broadband facilities (i.e., implement automation, adopt new software, conduct training, etc.) and to the efficiency of the entity.

Proposed projects must include a component that allows for active participation and substantial involvement by the USDA Rural Development.

3. Are applicants required to develop a written proposal?

Yes. The written proposal should be assembled into one or more pdf file(s) and should conform to the order in which the **evaluation criteria** are presented in **Section E** of the NOFO. The completed pdf file(s) should be uploaded into *Grants.gov* as an attachment to the application. The maximum limit for the written narrative section is 25 pages. Information exceeding 25 pages for the written narrative may not be considered for evaluation by the scoring panel. **Note:** The length of the Grants.gov SF-424 forms, worksheets, or maps do not count towards the 25 page limit.

The **Application Guide** can be found on the program's website, tinyurl.com/2p95jduf, and it provides specific, detailed instructions for each item in a complete application. The Rural Utilities Service emphasizes the importance of including every item and strongly encourages applicants to follow the instructions carefully, using the examples and illustrations in the Application Guide.

4. What documents are required to complete the application?

A fully completed application is required to be considered eligible for funding. For an application to be considered complete, the applicant must complete and submit all forms, information, and supporting documentation in addition to a written narrative proposal. Applicants must complete and submit the following information to apply:

- Written Narrative Proposal
- Standard Form 424, "Application for Federal Assistance—Non-construction."
- Standard Form 424B, "Assurances—Non-Construction Programs."

RUS reserves the right to request additional information from the applicant.

All applicants should carefully review and prepare their applications according to instructions in the FY 2024 Broadband Technical Assistance Application Guide and NOFO. The Application Guide can be found on the program's website, tinyurl.com/2p95jduf.

5. Is the applicant the entity that will receive technical assistance or is the applicant the technical assistance provider?

BTA is open to both technical assistance providers and technical assistance recipients and either may be the applicant. Please note: All applicants must demonstrate the capacity to deliver or support broadband technical assistance activities.

6. Can I use funding from this award for construction of broadband in addition to technical support?

No. BTA Funds are only used to provide technical assistance to promote the expansion of broadband into eligible rural areas.

In addition to costs identified as unallowable by 2 CFR parts 200, <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200>, or 400, <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/CFR-2015-title2-vol1/CFR-2015-title2-vol1-part400/summary>, award funds cannot be used to pay for the following types of expenses (this is not a comprehensive list of unallowable costs, see 2 CFR part 200).

- Construction (in any form).
- Activities serving non-rural communities or those with existing access to broadband
- Duplicative project costs such as pre-application expenses that have been funded by another award.
- Indirect Costs.

7. Can costs from previous projects (or previous program applications) be refunded with BTA funding?

BTA funding is for approved project efforts that occur after an application is selected for a funding.

8. Communities with existing broadband access are ineligible to be served under the BTA Program. How is existing broadband access defined?

Existing broadband access is wired or licensed terrestrial fixed wireless service providing 100 Mbps download, 20 Mbps upload (100/20 Mbps). For a community to be eligible for funding, at least 50 percent of households in the community must lack existing broadband access.

9. Where can applicants learn about existing broadband access in their communities?

To learn about existing broadband access, applicants can use the BTA Map located on the BTA website. Applicants can also review the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Broadband Funding Map and the National Broadband Map. See the **Availability of Existing Broadband Service** section of the **Application Guide** for more information.

10. Are applicants required to name communities we would serve, or can we be awarded for a project and then find communities?

Applicants must list all rural communities that will benefit from the proposed BTA project. Applicants are strongly encouraged to use the Communities Worksheet that has been made available on the BTA website under the ["To Apply" tab](#).

11. Can digital inclusion activities be included in my BTA program application, and what role do they play in the project?

Yes, digital inclusion activities can be part of a BTA program project proposal. However, BTA projects must support the expansion of broadband service. Projects that do not support broadband expansion, such as digital literacy-only projects, will be deemed ineligible.

12. How can I ensure my project doesn't duplicate existing federal broadband projects?

Applicants are encouraged to conduct research into ongoing federal projects within their project areas before submitting their BTA application. This will help avoid proposing duplicative project costs funded by another federal award, which may render it ineligible.

To learn more about other broadband efforts, please review the BTA map (available at this link: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz), the FCC's Broadband Funding map (available at this link: www.fcc.gov/economics-analytics/funding-map), and prior year BTA awardees (available at this link: tinyurl.com/4kzkvw8z). Finally, applicants are also encouraged to reach out to their State Broadband Office. If you are aware of a federal broadband project in your project area, documenting in your application how your project complements, rather than duplicates, these efforts is encouraged. See the **Existing Broadband Projects** section in the **Communities Worksheet User Guide** for more information.

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

Evaluation Criteria

1. How does RUS evaluate my completed application?

If an application is determined to be eligible and complete, RUS will further evaluate it based on BTA evaluation criteria. All applications will be competitively scored and ranked according to the following criteria outlined in the BTA NOFO:

- **Work Plan (up to 30 points)** The applicant can receive up to 30 points for soundness of the proposed broadband technical assistance approach outlined in their workplan. The scoring criterion will be based on the following:
 - Work Plan Approach – The work plan should identify and detail project objectives, rural communities to be served, project key goals, partnerships developed or to be developed, and 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 factors.
 - 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 tasks, involvement of key personnel, time period of tasks, substantial involvement from Rural Development staff, and expected deliverables.
 - Budget to 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 (see Key Priorities section in the FAQs). 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 (up to 20 points)** All applicants must demonstrate the capacity to deliver or support broadband technical assistance activities. The applicant can receive up to 20 points based on organizational capacity and qualifications. 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 in which they've provided broadband technical assistance, detail their experience in providing broadband technical assistance to rural communities, identify types of rural communities they've previously served, and detail their experience in performance evaluation.
- **Rurality (up to 20 points)** Points will be awarded for serving the least dense rural areas as measured by the population of the communities served.
- **Economic Need (up to 20 points)** Economic need is based on the county poverty percentage of the communities proposed to be served in the application. The percentages must be determined by utilizing the United States Census Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) Program. 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.
- **Creating More and Better Markets (10 points):** 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 can be found on the BTA website under the "To Apply" tab available at: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz. A GIS layer identifying Distressed Communities can also be found using the BTA mapping tool available at: tinyurl.com/4kfzwnp3.
- **Projects advancing Racial Justice, Place-Based Equity, and Opportunity (10 points):** Projects that meet one of the criteria below will receive 10 points.
 - 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. For the purposes of this NOFO, Puerto Rico, Guam, America 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 considered Socially Vulnerable Communities. A GIS layer identifying the Socially Vulnerable Communities can be found using the BTA mapping tool available at: tinyurl.com/4kfzwnp3.
 - Projects proposed by a federally recognized Tribe, including Tribal instrumentalities and entities that are wholly owned by Tribes.
 - Projects that promote the expansion of broadband service on Tribal Lands. Tribal Lands will be identified in GIS layers included in the BTA mapping tool available at: tinyurl.com/4kfzwnp3

- Projects from or benefiting at least one Rural Partners Network (RPN) community network. A GIS layer identifying RPN community networks can be found using the BTA mapping tool. Currently, there are 36 RPN [community networks](#) spanning 10 states and Puerto Rico.
- **Performance Measures (up to 10 points)** 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. Indicators to be used should be specific and quantifiable.

2. Are funds awarded on any other basis besides the scoring criteria?

Applications will be ranked by the final score of the evaluation criteria. RUS will select applications based on those rankings, subject to the availability of funds. RUS has the authority to limit the number of applications selected in any one state or for any one project during a fiscal year. Additionally, an application receiving fewer points can be selected over a higher scoring application if there are insufficient funds available to cover the costs of the higher scoring application.

3. Can a project proposal cover multiple communities, and how can this be documented?

Yes, a project can cover multiple communities. Applicants should clearly document each community they plan to serve in their application. RUS also encourages you to document these communities using the sample Community Worksheet on the BTA website under the "To Apply" tab. If the project spans several areas, consider including maps or shapefiles to clearly delineate the project areas.

Note: To help applicants streamline their communities list, RUS created a Sample Communities Worksheet User Guide for Fiscal Year 2024. This resource provides additional guidance for completing the sample communities worksheet, defining rural communities served, and including maps as needed. The Sample Communities Worksheet User Guide and Sample Communities Worksheet can be found on the BTA website under the "To Apply" tab at: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz.

Key Priorities

1. What are the key priorities that RUS would like incorporated in the project?

RUS encourages applicants to consider projects that will advance the following key priorities (more details available at www.rd.usda.gov/priority-points):

- Assisting rural communities recover economically through more and better market opportunities and through improved infrastructure.
- Ensuring all rural residents have equitable access to RUS programs and benefits from RUS funded projects.
- Reducing climate pollution and increasing resilience to the impacts of climate change through economic support to rural communities.

Substantial Involvement Requirements

- 1. The project requires active participation by RUS. Do I need to know which staff will be involved in the workplan and do I need letters from RUS saying they support my workplan with their involvement?**

No, specific RUS staff do not need to be identified in the proposal nor does the proposal need to include letters of support or commitment from RUS.

Within your workplan, you should describe how you envision involving RUS staff and how you would work cooperatively in involving them in your broadband technical assistance project. If selected for award, the Agency will assign a point of contact to the award recipient that is tasked with meeting the need for active participation and substantial involvement. If tasks are not identified where RUS can actively participate and provide substantial involvement, the application will not be eligible for funding.

- 2. Once the application is approved and criteria met, is there continued involvement from USDA?**

The award is through a Cooperative Agreement and the nature of a cooperative agreement requires continued collaboration between the awardee and USDA RUS staff through the life of the project. Examples of measurable substantial involvement include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Joint convenings of community members, partners, and stakeholders.
- Joint delivery of training for RUS programs.
- The development of training sessions and outreach materials.

- 3. Can the applicant propose that federal agencies other than RD be partners in the cooperative agreement?**

While an applicant may propose to partner with other federal agencies, they are not required to do so. However, the application must clearly detail substantial involvement of USDA RD staff.

How to Submit an Application

1. How can applicants register on [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov/) ?

To register in the Grants.gov system, go to <https://www.grants.gov/>, click “Applicants,” then click “Get Registered.” We recommend you review the registration instructions **at least two weeks** before you plan to submit.

NOTE: 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 with 2 CFR part 25 (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-I/part-25>). Applicants must also ensure they complete the Financial Assistance General Representations and Certifications in SAM.

2. How can applicants apply online?

Follow Grants.gov system registration requirements (information is available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJ7gF>) to register to be able to submit your application. We recommend you review the registration instructions **at least two weeks** before you plan to submit. You will find the BTA application by entering Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number 10.752 in the CFDA drop-down under “Basic Search Criteria,” located at the top left of the Search Grants webpage, available at [grants.gov/search](https://www.grants.gov/search).

3. Can I submit more than one application?

No, applicants should not submit more than one application. 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.

4. How can applicants make sure all required documents are included in the application prior to submission?

All checklists, application materials, and standard forms necessary for submission are noted in the program’s Application Guide, which can be found on the program’s website (<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/telecommunications-programs/broadband-technical-assistance-program>)

5. What is the application deadline?

Applications must be submitted through Grants.gov and received no later than August 20, 2024 to be eligible for funding under this opportunity. Late or incomplete applications

will not be eligible for funding.

6. Can applicants mail applications to USDA Rural Utilities Service if there is a technical issue with Grants.gov?

No. Applications must be submitted electronically using [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) by the deadline, and you must assume the risk of any delays in submitting your application. No other form of application will be accepted. If system errors or technical difficulties occur, use the customer support resources available at the Grants.gov website.

7. How do I upload or attach my project narrative and supporting documents to grants.gov?

Applicants are required to submit application documents, including the written narrative proposal and any supporting material, via Grants.gov for receipt by RUS. Attachments can be added using either SF-424 Block 15 or the Attachments Form. Applicants are advised to utilize one option for uploading their attachments. The **BTA Application Guide** includes additional guidance on adding attachments to the application.

Definitions

1. What does broadband technical assistance mean?

Broadband technical assistance refers to activities that support broadband expansion into rural areas and 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.

2. What does cooperative agreement mean?

Cooperative agreement is the instrument used to fund the support of RUS'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.

3. What defines a rural area?

Rural area refers to any area, as confirmed by the most recent decennial Census of the United States, which is not located within a city, town, or incorporated area that has a population of greater than 20,000 inhabitants; or an urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants; and which excludes certain populations pursuant to 7 U.S.C. 1991(a)(13)(H) and (I). For

purposes of the definition of rural area, an urbanized area means a densely populated territory as defined in the most recent decennial Census. **Note:** Nonrural areas can be identified on the BTA Map (available at this link: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz).

4. What does “existing broadband access” mean?

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 Mbps download, 20 Mbps upload (100/20 Mbps). For a community to be eligible for funding, at least 50 percent of households in the community must lack existing broadband access. Mobile/Cellular and satellite services, which include systems that use satellite backbone facilities to connect to the internet, are not considered in making the determination of existing broadband access.

5. What does “substantial involvement” mean as part of the cooperative agreement?

It is the intent of this project to engage RUS staff in broadband technical assistance activities, and it is the responsibility of the applicant to identify specific tasks where RUS staff can provide measurable, substantial involvement in the project. If such tasks are not identified, the application will not be eligible for funding.

Award Procedures

1. How will RUS notify the awardees selected to receive a grant?

RUS notifies applicants whose projects are selected for awards by mailing or emailing a copy of an award letter. The award letter will include an agreement that contains all the terms and conditions for the cooperative agreement. An applicant must execute and return the agreement, accompanied by any additional items required by the agreement, within the number of days specified in the selection notice letter.

2. When will awards be made?

Awards are estimated to be made by December 31, 2024. .

3. How does my organization receive funds after we have been awarded the grant and executed the required documents?

Awardees will receive a “Release of Funds” letter indicating when reimbursements may be requested. The awardee will use Form SF270, “Request for Advance or Reimbursement,” to request reimbursements along with the corresponding receipts for expenditures, and any other documentation to support the request for reimbursement.

4. Are there any reporting requirements after the award has been made?

Yes. The awardee is required to submit Annual Project Performance Activity Reports, Annual Audits, and a Final Performance Report. The final report may serve as the last annual report. The final report must include an evaluation of the success of the project in meeting BTA objectives. Please see the NOFO for more information on reporting requirements. For invoices from contractors, the invoice should have the name and address of the

Other Questions

- 1. Can RUS staff review an application or project proposal before it is submitted to determine if it is competitive?**

RUS staff are unable to review applications before their submission.

- 2. How do I know which funding category to select: Technical Assistance Recipient or Technical Assistance Provider?**

In the BTA program, technical assistance recipients are entities seeking out expertise and assistance to further their broadband efforts. Technical assistance providers, on the other hand, are entities that support broadband efforts by delivering expertise and assistance. Applicants must clearly identify their funding category selection in their application.

- 3. Where can I find information on previously awarded BTA projects?**

Previous BTA awardees and project descriptions can be on the BTA website under the "To Apply Tab".