

FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY NAME: United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Rural Utilities Service (RUS).

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY TITLE: Community Connect Grant Program.

ANNOUNCEMENT TYPE: Funding Opportunity Announcement.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER: RDRUS-CC-2021.

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE (CFDA) NUMBER: 10.863.

The Rural Utilities Service (RUS), an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), hereinafter referred to as RUS or the Agency, announces its Community Connect Grant Program application window for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021.

A nationally competitive program, the Community Connect Grant Program attracts hundreds of submissions during the 90-day application window. If program funding is available for the fiscal year, the Agency is often only able to finance a small fraction of the applications. To increase the range of applicants that will be successful in FY 2021, only ONE application per applicant is eligible for approval. If an applicant submits more than one application, then the Agency will only consider the application with the highest score.

APPLICATION DUE DATE: December 23, 2020

SUBMISSIONS: All applications under this Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) must be submitted electronically at: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/community-connect>.

Electronic submissions must be received *no later* than December 23, 2020 at 11:59 p.m.

Eastern Standard Time (EST) to be eligible for funding under this grant opportunity. Applicants will not be able to submit their applications after the deadline. Paper submissions of applications will not be accepted.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Questions about this announcement can be submitted electronically through the Contact Us, Contact Support Form available on the Community Connect website at: https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-connect-grants#blocktabs-program_page--45.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

A. Program Description

The Community Connect Grant Program provides financial assistance to eligible applicants that will provide service at or above the Broadband Grant Speed to all premises in rural, economically-challenged communities where broadband service does not exist. The Broadband Grant Speed for FY 2021 is defined in Section C of this announcement. The deployment of broadband services on a “community-oriented connectivity” basis stimulates economic development and provides enhanced educational and health care opportunities in rural areas. RUS will give priority to rural areas that demonstrate the greatest need for broadband services, based on the criteria contained herein.

The regulation for the Community Connect Grant Program can be found at 7 CFR part 1739.

All applicants should carefully review and prepare their applications according to instructions in the FY 2021 Community Connect Grant Program Application Guide

(Application Guide). The Application Guide, FOA, and additional resources can be found at <https://www.rd.usda.gov/community-connect>. Expenses incurred in developing applications will be at the applicant's own risk.

The Agency encourages applications that will help improve life in Rural America. See information on the Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity found at www.usda.gov/ruralprosperity. Applicants are encouraged to consider projects that provide measurable results in helping rural communities build robust and sustainable economies through strategic investments in infrastructure, partnerships and innovation. Key strategies include:

- Achieving e-Connectivity for Rural America
- Developing the Rural Economy
- Harnessing Technological Innovation
- Supporting a Rural Workforce
- Improving Quality of Life

B. Federal Award Information

1. *Maximum and Minimum Awards.* Pursuant to 7 CFR 1739.2, the Administrator has established that the minimum grant amount of \$100,000 and the maximum grant amount of \$3,000,000 will be applied to this grant opportunity.

2. *Award Documents.* The Agency will make awards, and the awardees will be required to execute the required grant documents before funding will be advanced. Award documents specify the term of each award. The standard grant agreement is

available at: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/community-connect>.

3. *Current Awards and New Projects*. While prior Community Connect grants cannot be renewed, existing Community Connect awardees can submit applications for new projects. The Agency will evaluate project proposals from existing awardees as new applications. Only one grant application per applicant is eligible for approval under this grant opportunity.

4. *Substantially Underserved Trust Areas (SUTA)*. Applicants seeking assistance may request consideration under the SUTA provisions in 7. U.S.C. 936f.

(a) If the Administrator determines that a community within “trust land” (as defined in 38 U.S.C. 3765) has a high need for the benefits of the Program, the Administrator may designate the community as a “substantially underserved trust area” (as defined in section 306F of the RE Act).

(b) To receive consideration under SUTA, the applicant must submit to the Agency a completed application that includes all information requested in 7 CFR part 1700, subpart D. In addition, the application must identify the discretionary authorities within subpart D that it seeks to have applied to its application.

C. Eligibility Information

1. *Eligible Applicants* (See 7 CFR 1739.10)

a. Only entities legally organized as one of the following are eligible for Community Connect Grant Program financial assistance:

- i. Incorporated organization;
- ii. Indian tribe or tribal organization, as defined in 25 U.S.C. 5304;

- iii. State government;
 - iv. Local unit government;
 - v. Any other legal entity, including a cooperative, private corporation, or limited liability company organized on a for-profit or not-for-profit basis.
- b. Applicants must have the legal capacity and authority to enter into contracts, to comply with applicable federal statutes and regulations, and to own and operate the broadband facilities as proposed in their application.
- c. Applicants must have a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and an active registration, with current information, in the System for Award Management (SAM) at <https://www.sam.gov>. Further information regarding DUNS number acquisition and SAM registration can be found in Sections D(3) and D(4) of this document.
- d. Corporations that have been convicted of a Federal felony within the past 24 months are not eligible. Any corporation that has been assessed to have any unpaid federal tax liability, for which all judicial and administrative remedies have been exhausted or have lapsed and is not being paid in a timely manner pursuant to an agreement with the authority responsible for collecting the tax liability, is not eligible for financial assistance.

2. Cost Sharing or Matching

The Community Connect Grant Program requires matching contributions. See 7 CFR 1739.14 and the Application Guide for information on required matching contributions.

a. Grant applicants must demonstrate matching contributions in cash of at least 15 percent of the requested grant amount. Matching contributions must be used solely for the project and must not include any financial assistance from federal sources unless there is a federal statutory exception specifically authorizing the federal financial assistance to be considered as such.

b. Applications that do not provide sufficient documentation of the required 15 percent match will be deemed ineligible.

3. *Funding Restrictions*

a. Eligible grant purposes. See 7 CFR 1739.12.

Grant funds may be used to finance the following:

i. The construction, acquisition, or leasing of facilities, including spectrum, land or buildings used to deploy service at the Broadband Grant Speed to all residential and business customers located within the Proposed Funded Service Area and all participating Essential Community Facilities, as defined in 7 C.F.R. 3570.53;

ii. The improvement, expansion, construction, or acquisition of a Community Center that furnishes free internet access at the Broadband Grant Speed and provides Computer Access Points. Grant funds for the Community Center must not exceed the lesser of 10 percent of the requested grant amount or \$150,000; and

iii. The cost of bandwidth necessary to provide service free of charge at the Broadband Grant Speed to each Essential Community Facility for the first

two years of operation.

- b. Ineligible grant purposes. See 7 CFR 1739.13.

Grant funds may not be used to finance:

- i. The duplication of lines, facilities, or systems providing Broadband Service.
- ii. Operating expenses not specifically permitted in 7 CFR 1739.12.

4. *Other*

Eligible projects must propose to fulfill the following requirements (see 7 CFR 1739.3 and 1739.11 for more information):

- a. Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA). The applicant must define a contiguous geographic area, located entirely within a rural area, in which Broadband Service does not exist and where the applicant proposes to offer service at the Broadband Grant Speed to all residential and business customers. The PFSA may consist of multiple municipalities and may be located in more than one state.

- i. 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. For purposes of the definition of Rural Area, an urbanized area means a densely populated territory as defined in the most recent decennial Census.

- ii. Broadband Service exists if the rate-of-data transmission in an area is at least 10 megabits per second (Mbps) downstream and 1 Mbps upstream for fixed

broadband service. RUS will validate that Broadband Service does not exist in areas that applicants describe as having no broadband access or access that is less than 10 Mbps downstream plus 1 Mbps upstream.

iii. The Broadband Grant Speed, which is the minimum bandwidth that an applicant must provide to every customer in the PFSA, is 25 Mbps downstream and 3 Mbps upstream for fixed or mobile service.

iv. A PFSA must not overlap with service areas of current RUS borrowers and grantees.

b. Essential Community Facilities. The applicant must propose to offer free service at the Broadband Grant Speed to all participating Essential Community Facilities located within the PFSA for at least two years.

c. Community Center. The applicant must provide a Community Center within the PFSA. Grant funds must be used to provide a minimum of 2, and up to 10, Computer Access Points at the Community Center. The Community Center must also provide wireless access at the Broadband Grant Speed, free of all charges, to all users for at least two years.

D. Application and Submission Information

The Application Guide provides specific, detailed instructions for each item in a complete application. The Agency 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. Prior to official submission of applications, applicants may request technical assistance or other application

guidance from the Agency, as long as such requests are made prior to the closing of the application window. Agency contact information can be found in Section G of this announcement.

The Agency will not solicit or consider new scoring or eligibility information that is submitted after the application deadline. The Agency reserves the right to contact applicants to seek clarification on materials contained in the submitted application. See the Application Guide for a full discussion of each item. For requirements of completed grant applications, refer to 7 CFR 1739.15.

For FY 2021, one proposal per applicant is eligible for approval. If an applicant submits more than one proposal, then the Agency will only consider the application with the highest score.

1. *Request Application Package.* Electronic copies of the Application Guide and copies of forms and resources are available at:

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/community-connect>.

2. *Content and Form of Application Submission.*

a. Carefully review the Application Guide and 7 CFR part 1739, which detail all relevant forms and worksheets. A table summarizing the components of a complete application can be found in this section.

b. *Submission of Application Items.* Given the high volume of program interest, applicants should submit the application items in the order indicated in the Application Guide. Applications that are not assembled and tabbed in the specified order prevent timely determination of eligibility.

c. Table of Application Items.

Application Item	Regulation	Comments
Application for Federal Assistance Form (SF-424 Standard Form)	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(a)</u>	Form provided in Application Guide
SAM Registration Information	<u>7 CFR 1739.10 and 1739.15(j)</u>	Worksheet provided in Application Guide
Executive Summary of the Project	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(b) and 1739.9</u>	Narrative, including a publicly releasable section that describes the population served
Scoring Criteria Documentation	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(c)</u>	Narrative & Documentation
System Design	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(d)</u>	Narrative & Documentation
Network Diagram	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(d)</u>	Documentation
Environmental Questionnaire	<u>7 CFR part 1970</u>	Narrative & Documentation
Service Area Map	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(e)</u>	Provided in the Proposed Funded Service Area Mapping Tool
Service Area Demographics	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(e)</u>	Documentation
Scope of Work	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(f)</u>	Narrative & Documentation
Construction Build-out and Project Milestones	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(f)</u>	Worksheet provided in Application Guide
Project Budget	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(f)</u>	Worksheet provided in Application Guide
Community-oriented Connectivity Plan	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(g)</u>	Narrative
Financial Information and Sustainability	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(h)</u>	Narrative & Documentation
Statement of Experience	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(i)</u>	Narrative
Additional Funding	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(k)</u>	Narrative & Documentation
Compliance with other Federal Statutes	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(m)</u>	Addressed by providing Financial Assistance Certifications and Representations in www.SAM.gov
Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(m)(1)</u>	Addressed by providing Financial Assistance Certifications and Representations in www.SAM.gov
Assurance Agreement	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(m)(1)</u>	Addressed by providing Financial Assistance Certifications and Representations in www.SAM.gov

Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970	<u>49 CFR part 24 and 7 CFR part 21</u>	Form provided in Application Guide
Debarment, Suspension, and Other Responsibility Matters	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(m)</u>	Addressed by providing Financial Assistance Certifications and Representations in www.SAM.gov
Lobbying for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(m)</u>	Addressed by providing Financial Assistance Certifications and Representations in www.SAM.gov
Drug-Free Workplace	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(m)</u>	Addressed by providing Financial Assistance General Certifications and Representations in www.SAM.gov
Architectural Barriers	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(m)</u>	Form provided in Application Guide
Flood Hazard Area Precautions	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(m)</u>	Form provided in Application Guide
Non-Duplication of Services	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(m)</u>	Form provided in Application Guide
Federal Collection Policies for Commercial Debt	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(m)</u>	Form provided in Application Guide
Assurance Regarding Felony Conviction or Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants	<u>7 CFR 1739.15(m)</u>	Addressed by providing Financial Assistance General Certifications and Representations in www.SAM.gov (corporate applicants-only)

3. *Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System (DUNS) Number.* The applicant must provide a DUNS number as part of the application. The applicant can obtain the DUNS number free of charge by calling Dun and Bradstreet. Go to: <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform> for more information on acquiring a DUNS number or for confirmation that a valid DUNS is in place.

4. *System for Award Management (SAM).* Prior to submitting an application, the applicant must register in SAM at <https://www.sam.gov>. Throughout the RUS application review and the active Federal grant funding period, SAM registration must be active with current data at all times. To maintain an active SAM registration, the

applicant must review and update the information in the SAM database annually from the date of initial registration or from the date of the last update. The applicant must ensure that the information in the database is current, accurate, and complete. In addition, the applicant must make the certifications and representations required of entities which are applying for or have received funding under any Federal financial assistance project or program.

5. *Buy American Requirement.* Awardees shall use in connection with the expenditure of grant funds only such unmanufactured articles, materials, and supplies, as have been mined or produced in the United States or in any eligible country, and only such manufactured articles, materials, and supplies as have been manufactured in the United States or in any eligible country, substantially all from articles, materials, or supplies mined, produced, or manufactured, as the case may be, in the United States or in any eligible country. For purposes of this section, an “eligible country” is any country that applies with respect to the United States an agreement ensuring reciprocal access for United States products and services and United States suppliers to the markets of that country, as determined by the United States Trade Representative. The Buy American regulations may be found at, and any requests for waiver must be submitted pursuant to, 7 CFR part 1787.

6. *Submission Dates and Times.* Electronic applications must be submitted no later than December 23, 2020 at 11:59 p.m. ET, to be eligible for funding under this grant opportunity. Incomplete applications are not eligible for funding under this grant opportunity.

- a. Applications will not be accepted via mail, fax or electronic mail.

b. Electronic applications for grants must be submitted through the Community Connect Portal. The Community Connect Portal can be found on the Community Connect website at: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/community-connect>.

c. The Community Connect Portal requires all users to obtain Level II eAuthentication accounts and for applicant users to submit an Authorized Representative Request (ARR) and a resolution in order to access the portal to submit an application. These procedures may take several business days to complete; therefore, the applicant should complete the registration, credentialing, and authorization procedures before submitting an application. Instructions on creating a Level II eAuthentication account are available at: <https://www.eauth.usda.gov/home/>.

d. If system errors or technical difficulties occur, use the Contact Us, Contact Support Form available on the Community Connect website and the Community Connect Portal.

E. Application Review Information

1. Criteria.

Grant applications are evaluated for financial and technical feasibility, in accordance with 7 CFR 1739.16. An application that contains flaws that would prevent the successful implementation, operation, or sustainability of the project will not be approved for an award.

In addition, grant applications are scored competitively. The Agency will consider the following criteria based on a scale of 100 possible points. Refer to 7 CFR

1739.17 and the Application Guide for more information on the scoring criteria.

a. Needs Category (up to 50 points). The Agency analyzes the challenges related to the following criteria and the ways in which the project proposes to address these issues:

- i. Economic characteristics.
- ii. Educational challenges.
- iii. Health care needs.
- iv. Public safety issues.

b. Stakeholder Involvement Category (up to 40 points). The Agency analyzes the extent of the project planning, development, and support from local residents, institutions, and Essential Community Facilities. Documentation must include evidence of community-wide involvement, as exemplified by community meetings, public forums, and surveys. In addition, applicants should provide evidence of local residents' participation in the project planning and development.

c. Experience Category (up to 10 points). The Agency analyzes the management team's level of experience and past success of broadband systems operation.

d. In making a final selection among and between applications with comparable rankings and geographic distribution, the Administrator may take into consideration the characteristics of the PFSA. Applicants should therefore specifically address the criteria identified in 7 CFR 1739.17(d).

2. *Ineligible Areas*

a. Non-Rural Areas. RUS will not fund projects located in an area that does not meet the definition of "rural area" found in 7 CFR 1739.3.

b. Pending Applications. RUS will not fund more than one project that proposes to provide broadband service in the same geographic area. If a project overlaps the PFSA of an application already submitted to the Rural eConnectivity Program (ReConnect Program), the Telecommunications Infrastructure Loan and Loan Guarantee Program, or the Rural Broadband Access Loan and Loan Guarantee Program, the project will not be considered until a determination is made on the previously submitted application.

c. Existing RUS Project Service Areas. RUS will not fund a project over current RUS borrowers and grantees of the ReConnect Program; the Telecommunications Infrastructure Loan and Loan Guarantee Program; the Rural Broadband Access Loan and Loan Guarantee Program; the Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP); or this Program. Additionally, with respect to current RUS borrowers, all of the service area(s) of the RUS borrower are protected, and therefore ineligible areas.

3. *Review and Selection Process.*

a. The Agency will publish a Public Notice of each application. The application must provide a summary of the information required for such public notice including the following:

- i. The identity of the applicant;
- ii. A map of the proposed funded service area showing the rural area boundaries and the areas without sufficient access to broadband using the Agency's

Public Notice Filing Mapping Tool;

- iii. The amount and type of support requested;
- iv. The estimated number of households without sufficient access to broadband in each service area exclusive of satellite and mobile broadband service; and
- v. A description of all the types of services that the applicant proposes to offer in the proposed funded service area.

b. Notification After the Application Has Been Received. The Agency will publish the public notice on an Agency web page after the application has been submitted through the online application system, which will remain on the web page for a period of 45 calendar days. The notice will ask existing fixed, terrestrial service providers to submit to the Agency, within this notice period, the following information:

- i. The number of residential and business customers within the applicant's service area currently purchasing broadband service, defined as a minimum speed of 10 Mbps downstream and 1 Mbps upstream, the rates of data transmission being offered, and the cost of each level of broadband service charged by the existing service provider;

- ii. The number of residential and business customers within the applicant's service area receiving voice and video services and the associated rates for these other services; and

- iii. A map showing where the existing service provider's services coincide with the applicant's service area using the Agency's Mapping Tool. Please note that the Agency will be contacting any entity that responds to the notice and will be requesting additional information such as test results that demonstrate that the area in

question has sufficient access to broadband service.

c. **Agency Determination of Sufficient Access to Broadband in PFSA.** The Agency will use the information submitted to determine if there is sufficient access to broadband in any part of the proposed funded service area. Notwithstanding non-responses by actual and potential providers, the Agency will use all information available in evaluating the feasibility of the project.

d. **Treatment of Submitted Information.** The information submitted by an existing service provider will not be subject to public disclosure under 7 USC 950cc(b)(3).

e. **Notice of Application Approval.** If an application is approved, an additional notice will be published on the Agency's website that will include the following information:

- i. The name of the entity receiving the financial assistance;
- ii. The type of assistance being received;
- iii. The purpose of the assistance and the location of the proposed funded service area; and
- iv. The annual performance reports submitted for a period of three years following project completion.

f. **Ranking of Eligible Grant Applications.** Grants are awarded in rank order, subject to the availability of funds and consistent with 7 CFR 1739.17. It should be noted that an application receiving fewer points can be selected over an application receiving more points in the event that there are insufficient funds available to cover the

costs of the higher scoring application, as stated in 7 CFR 1739.16(f).

g. The Agency reserves the right to offer the applicant a lower amount than the amount proposed in the application, as stated in 7 CFR 1739.16(g).

h. If the Agency receives more than one proposal from the same applicant, then the Agency will only consider the application with the highest score, except in accordance with 7 CFR 1739.16(f).

F. Federal Award Administration Information

1. Federal Award Notices.

RUS notifies applicants whose projects are selected for awards by mailing and/or emailing a copy of an award letter. The receipt of an award letter does not authorize the applicant to commence performance under the award. After sending the award letter, the Agency will send an agreement that contains all the terms and conditions for the grant.

An applicant must execute and return the grant agreement, accompanied by any additional items required by the agreement, within the number of days specified in the selection notice letter.

2. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.

The items listed in this announcement, the Community Connect Grant Program regulation, the Application Guide, and program resources implement the appropriate administrative and national policy requirements, which include but are not limited to:

- a. Executing a Community Connect Grant Agreement.
- b. Using Form SF 270, “Request for Advance or Reimbursement,” to request reimbursements (along with the submission of receipts for expenditures, timesheets, and any other documentation to support the request for reimbursement).
- c. Ensuring that records are maintained to document all activities and expenditures utilizing Community Connect grant funds and matching funds (receipts for expenditures are to be included in this documentation).
- d. Complying with policies, guidance, and requirements as described in the following applicable Code of Federal Regulations, and any successor regulations:
 - i. 2 CFR parts 200 and 400 (Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards). The government must be provided an exclusive first lien on all grant assets during the service obligation of the grant, and thereafter any sale or disposition of grant assets must comply with the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, codified in 2 CFR part 200. Note that this part will apply to ALL grant funds of an Awardee, regardless of the entity status or type of organization.
 - ii. 2 CFR parts 417 and 180 (Government-wide Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension).
- e. Complying with Executive Order 13166, “Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency.” For information on limited English proficiency and agency-specific guidance, go to <https://www.LEP.gov>.
- f. Accountability and Compliance with Civil Rights Laws. The regulation

found at 7 CFR part 1901 Subpart E contains policies and procedures for implementing the regulations of the Department of Agriculture issued pursuant to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, Title IX, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Executive Order 13166, Executive Order 11246, and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974, as they relate to Rural Development. Nothing herein shall be interpreted to prohibit preference to American Indians on Indian Reservations.

The policies contained in this subpart apply to recipients. As recipients of federal financial assistance, awardees are required to comply with the applicable federal, state and local laws. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination by recipients of federal financial assistance. Recipients are required to adhere to specific outreach activities. These outreach activities include contacting community organizations and leaders that include minority leaders; advertising in local newspapers and other media throughout the entire service area; and including the nondiscrimination slogan, "This is an Equal Opportunity Program. Discrimination is prohibited by Federal Law," in methods that may include, but not be limited to, advertisements, public broadcasts, and printed materials, such as brochures and pamphlets. All recipients must submit and have on file a valid Form RD 400-1 (Equal Opportunity Agreement); and RD Form 400-4 (Assurance Agreement).

By completing the SAM Certification and Representations, recipients affirm they will operate the program free from discrimination. The recipient will maintain the race and ethnic data on the board members and beneficiaries of the program. The recipient will provide alternative forms of communication to persons with limited

English proficiency. The Agency will conduct Civil Rights Compliance Reviews on recipients to identify the collection of racial and ethnic data on program beneficiaries. In addition, the Compliance Review will ensure that equal access to the program benefits and activities are provided for persons with disabilities and language barriers.

3. Reporting.

a. Annual Project Performance Activity Report. All recipients of Community Connect financial assistance must provide annual project performance activity reports to RUS until the project is complete and the funds are expended. A final performance report is also required; 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 the Community Connect Grant Program objectives. See 7 CFR 1739.19 for additional information on these reporting requirements.

b. Annual Performance Report. For three years starting the first January 31st after Project Completion, the Awardee must submit the following information utilizing RUS' online reporting system:

i. Existing network service improvements and facility upgrades, as well as new equipment and capacity enhancements that support high-speed broadband access for educational institutions, health care providers, and public safety service providers;

ii. The estimated number of end users who are currently using or forecasted to use the new or upgraded infrastructure;

iii. The progress towards fulfilling the objectives for which the assistance was granted;

iv. The speed and average price of the most subscribed tier of the Awardee's broadband service offerings in the Project's service area; and

v. The average price of broadband service in the Project's service area;

c. Annual Map Reporting: No later than thirty (30) calendar days after the end of the Calendar Year, the Awardee shall be required to submit an updated Approved Project Service Area map through RUS' online mapping tool showing the areas where construction has been completed and geospatial location of residences and businesses that are receiving new broadband service until the entire Approved Project Service Area can receive the broadband service.

d. Financial Reporting. All recipients of Community Connect financial assistance must provide an annual audit, consistent with the Community Connect grant agreement, and the applicable USDA audit regulations at 7 CFR 1739.20, 7 CFR part 1773, and 2 CFR part 200, Subpart F.

e. Recipient and Sub-recipient Reporting. The applicant must have the necessary processes and systems in place to comply with the reporting requirements for first-tier sub-awards and executive compensation under the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 in the event the applicant receives funding, unless such applicant is exempt from such reporting requirements pursuant to 2 CFR 170.110(b). The reporting requirements under the Transparency Act pursuant to 2 CFR part 170 are as follows:

i. First Tier Sub-Awards of \$25,000 or more (unless they are exempt under 2 CFR part 170) must be reported by the recipient to <https://www.fsr.gov> no later than the end of the month following the month the obligation was made. There is

currently underway a consolidation of eight federal procurement systems, including the Federal Sub-award Reporting System (FSRS), into one system, the System for Award Management (SAM). As a result, the FSRS will soon be consolidated into and accessed through <https://www.sam.gov>.

ii. The total compensation of the recipient's executives (the five most highly compensated executives) must be reported by the recipient (if the recipient meets the criteria under 2 CFR part 170) to <https://www.sam.gov> by the end of the month following the month in which the award was made.

iii. The total compensation of the sub-recipient's executives (the five most highly compensated executives) must be reported by the sub-recipient (if the sub-recipient meets the criteria under 2 CFR part 170) to the recipient by the end of the month following the month in which the sub-award was made.

f. Record Keeping and Accounting. The agreement will contain provisions related to record keeping and accounting requirements.

G. Federal Awarding Agency Contacts

1. *Website:* <https://www.rd.usda.gov/community-connect>. The Community Connect website maintains up-to-date resources and contact information for the Community Connect Grant Program.

2. *Contact Us:* https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-connect-grants#blocktabs-program_page--45

3. *Telephone:* 202-720-0800

4. *Email:* community.connect@usda.gov

5. *Main point of contact:* Shawn Arner, Deputy Assistant Administrator, Office of

Loan Origination and Approval, Rural Utilities Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

H. Other Information

USDA Non-Discrimination Statement

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and USDA civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992.

Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

1. Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.

Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or

2. E-mail: program.intake@usda.gov.

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