



USDA Rural Development | Rural Utilities Service

Broadband Technical Assistance 2024 Application Guide

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Introduction

The Broadband Technical Assistance (BTA) Application Guide explains the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Utilities Service's (RUS) policies and procedures for submitting an application for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 funding.

This guide is divided into three sections:

1. **Program Summary:** This section describes BTA requirements and features. Chapters include:
 - Eligibility requirements
 - The application and award process
 - Program and reporting requirements
2. **Application Instructions:** This section provides step-by-step instructions on how to submit a BTA application.
3. **Appendix:** This section contains definitions and acronyms used in the guide.

Note: This application guide is optimized for digital delivery and usability. If you need assistance using this guide, please contact the Rural Utilities Service team using the “contact us” form available at tinyurl.com/ysr6kann.

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Section 1: Program Summary

Introduction to Broadband Technical Assistance

USDA Rural Development's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) administers federal programs that support the development and improvement of infrastructure in rural areas. To further our mission of expanding economic opportunities and improving the quality of life for rural residents, we invest across a range of sectors, including electric, renewable energy, and telecommunications.

The Broadband Technical Assistance (BTA) Program encourages expansion of broadband services in rural areas by awarding cooperative agreement funding to eligible applicants. This funding enables recipients to deliver or receive technical assistance and training to support broadband deployment.

Among other things, BTA funding can be used for project planning and community engagement, financial sustainability, environmental compliance, construction planning and engineering, help accessing federal resources, and data collection and reporting.

Authorization

The 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act (Public Law 115-141 – available at this link: [tinyurl.com/bdcpa4v6](https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/pub141/2018publ141_1.pdf) - PDF) authorizes broadband technical assistance. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Public Law 117-58 – available at this link: [tinyurl.com/2p9hcpww](https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/pub58/2021publ58_1.pdf) - PDF) supports the authorization.

Available Funding

About \$25 million is available in fiscal year 2024 BTA funding.

Minimum and maximum awards vary depending upon the funding category selected. You must choose **one** of the following two funding categories for consideration:

- Up to \$15 million is available for technical assistance **providers**. The minimum award is \$100,000, and the maximum award is \$1 million. Those applying under this funding category must propose to deliver broadband technical assistance that will benefit rural communities.
- Up to \$10 million is available for technical assistance **recipients**. The minimum award is \$50,000, and the maximum award is \$500,000. Those applying under this funding category must be beneficiaries of broadband technical assistance.

Note: Neither of the funding categories require cost share or matching funds.

Selecting a Funding Category

In the BTA program, **technical assistance recipients** seek expertise and assistance to further their broadband efforts. On the other hand, **technical assistance providers** support broadband efforts by delivering expertise and assistance. Please be sure you clearly identify your funding category selection in your application.

Applicant Eligibility

The following are eligible to apply for BTA:

- Federally recognized Tribes and Tribal organizations
- State or local governments, including their agencies, subdivisions, instrumentalities, or political subdivisions
- Territories or possessions of the United States
- Institutions of higher education, including 1862 and 1890 (Historically Black Colleges and Universities – HBCUs), and 1994 (Tribal Colleges and Universities – TCUs) Land Grant Institutions, and Hispanic-serving Institutions
- Nonprofit organizations with 501(c)(3) Internal Revenue Service status
- Cooperatives or mutual organizations
- Corporations
- Limited liability companies or limited liability partnerships

Note: Individuals are not eligible for BTA funding.

Eligible Project Purposes

BTA provides financial assistance to promote the expansion of broadband service in eligible rural areas, defined as any area **not** located within:

- A city, town, or incorporated area with a population greater than 20,000
- An urbanized area adjacent to a city or town with a population greater than 50,000, as confirmed by the most recent decennial U.S. Census

Rural areas exclude certain populations as noted in 7 U.S.C. 1991(a)(13)(H) and (I), (available at this link: tinyurl.com/22ndu5ck - PDF). An “urbanized area” means a densely populated territory as defined in the most recent decennial U.S. Census.

Recipients must use funds to support BTA activities, which include:

- Identifying public and private resources to finance broadband facilities

- Preparing feasibility studies, financial forecasts, market surveys, environmental studies, and technical design information to support broadband services
- 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

Note: While certain digital inclusion activities – such as user education and digital literacy training – are valuable components of comprehensive broadband services, such activities must be incorporated as secondary aspects of the proposed project, complementing the primary focus of promoting the expansion of broadband services into eligible rural areas.

Proposed projects also must include a component that allows for active participation and substantial involvement by USDA RD staff. **Your application must contain examples of measurable, substantial USDA RD staff involvement.** Examples include:

- Developing training sessions and outreach materials
- Hosting joint gatherings of community members, partners, and stakeholders
- Providing joint delivery of training for USDA RD programs

You also must show intent to engage USDA RD staff in broadband technical assistance activities. As such, it is your responsibility to identify specific tasks in which USDA RD staff can provide measurable, substantial involvement in your proposed project. While you are not required to identify USDA RD staff by name in your application, **if you do not identify tasks with which we can be substantially involved, your application will not be considered for funding.** If your project is selected for an award, we will identify a substantial involvement point of contact for the project.

You also must obtain certification from the appropriate Tribal officials for any projects proposed by a non-Tribal applicant that crosses over – or is located on – Tribal lands. An example of “appropriate officials” is the Tribal Council of the Tribal Government with jurisdiction over the Tribal lands in question. **Projects from non-Tribal applications that fail to provide Tribal certification to administer a project on Tribal lands can be disqualified.**

To determine if a proposed project crosses – or is located on – Tribal lands, use the Tribal lands geographic information system (GIS) layers available on USDA RD’s BTA map (available on the BTA webpage at this link: tinyurl.com/2p95jduf).

Ineligible Project Purposes

BTA award funds cannot be used to pay for the following expenses:

- Construction in any form
- Activities serving communities in nonrural areas or those with existing broadband access

Note: For a community to be eligible for funding, at least 50 percent of households in the community 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 projects funded by another federal award
- Indirect costs

Note: Indirect costs are defined as “those not readily identified with a particular grant, contract, project function, or activity.” Indirect costs are those necessary for the general operation of the organization and the activities it performs.

A list of ineligible costs is in 2 CFR Part 200 (available at this link: [tinyurl.com/k2rwavza](https://www.tinyurl.com/k2rwavza)).

Scoring Criteria

We will evaluate each eligible, complete application based on the criteria identified in this section. A maximum of 120 points is possible.

A written narrative proposal is required and must address criteria in this order:

- 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

Project Work Plan (Up to 30 points)

The work plan must address the soundness of your proposed broadband technical assistance approach. Here is how this section will be scored:

Work Plan Approach

- Clearly defines and describes project objectives and key goals, rural communities served, existing and potential partnerships, and anticipated deliverables.
- Lists all rural communities that will benefit from the project.
- Describes the characteristics of the communities served, including information such as population size and density, poverty rate, and other economic indicators.

Work Plan Implementation

- Describes in detail how the project will provide technical assistance, and how it will lead to expanded broadband service in rural areas.
- Outlines major tasks, key personnel involvement, the time required for each task, any substantial involvement from USDA RD staff, and the expected deliverables.

Alignment of Budget to Work Plan

- Aligns the budget justification with the tasks detailed in the workplan.
- Discusses how the budget supports the proposed activities described in the project's key tasks.
- Provides the budget narrative in a chart, spreadsheet, table, or similar format.
- Ensures the budget narrative is easily readable on letter-sized, printable pages.
- Presents the information in such a way that reviewers can readily understand what expenses the project will incur.
- Includes statements of work for subcontractors and consultants.

We have created a sample budget worksheet (available at this link: tinyurl.com/2p95jduf) to help you develop a budget and alignment justification. You will find instructions on how to complete it in the **Budget Worksheet** section of this guide.

Organizational Capacity (Up to 20 points)

Depending on the type of funding you are requesting, you must demonstrate the capacity to either **deliver** or **support** broadband technical assistance activities.

For **Technical Assistance Providers**, we will evaluate how well your application:

- Details your ability to successfully carry out the proposed project
- Specifies the number of years of experience the technical assistance provider has in providing broadband technical assistance to rural communities

- Details the technical assistance provider's experience in providing broadband technical assistance to rural communities
- Identifies the types of rural communities previously served by the technical assistance provider
- Demonstrates you have identified appropriate key personnel, both in terms of the number of personnel and their qualifications to support your proposed project
- Provides specific detail regarding the qualifications of key personnel relating to the broadband technical assistance project
- Demonstrates project personnel's ability to access data for needs assessments, as well as evaluating their access to planners and other technical experts
- Explains your experience in performance evaluation

For **Technical Assistance Recipients**, we will evaluate how well your application:

- Details your ability to successfully carry out the proposed project
- Demonstrates you have identified appropriate key personnel, both in terms of the number of personnel and their qualifications to support your proposed project
- Provides specific detail regarding the qualifications of key personnel relating to the broadband technical assistance project
- Demonstrates project personnel's ability to access data for needs assessments, and evaluates their access to planners and other technical experts
- Explains your experience in performance evaluation

Rurality (Up to 20 points)

We will award rurality points for projects serving the least dense rural areas as measured by the population of the communities served. The overall rurality score is determined by the **average** of the scores for all communities served by the project. Here is how this section will be scored:

Exceptionally Rural: Areas with populations of 5,000 or fewer will receive 20 points. This means:

- Any area of the United States **not included** within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough with a population of more than 5,000
- Any area **not** part of an urbanized area adjacent to a city or town with a population of more than 50,000

Rural: Areas with populations of **5,001 – 10,000** will receive **15 points**. This means:

- Any area of the United States **included** within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough with a population of more than 5,000, but not more than 10,000
- Any area **not** part of an urbanized area adjacent to a city or town with a population of more than 50,000

Midrural: Areas with populations of **10,001 – 20,000** will receive **10 points**. This means:

- Any area of the United States **included** within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough with a population of more than 10,000, but not more than 20,000
- Any area **not** part of an urbanized area adjacent to a city or town with a population of more than 50,000

Urban: Areas with populations of **more than 20,000** are **ineligible** for BTA funds.

- Any area of the United States **included within the boundaries** of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough with a population of more than 20,000
- Any area **part** of an urbanized area adjacent to a city or town with a population of more than 50,000

If a community is **not within** the boundaries of a town or place identified by the 2020 U.S. Census, there is a possibility the community is so rural that it is not associated with any Census-recognized community. If this is the case, we will consider the location “Census Rural.” You can report such communities as “Exceptionally Rural” areas unless they are adjacent to a city or town with a population of more than 50,000.

To streamline the application process, you can use the **Sample Communities Worksheet** to determine the rurality score of your proposed project.

Note: “Communities” can be defined at various geographic scales, including census-designated places, census blocks or tracts, towns, cities, and counties. It is important to carefully consider the scale at which project communities are defined, as this can impact both the rurality score and eligibility of your application. We recommend using the Sample Communities Worksheet to create a structured community list. We also encourage including maps to enhance application clarity.

For instructions on how to find the U.S. Census data for each community, and on using the BTA map to determine the rurality of communities, see the **Determining Rurality** section of the guide.

Economic Need (Up to 20 points)

Economic need is based on the **county poverty percentage** of the communities proposed within the application. U.S. Census Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE – available at this link: tinyurl.com/8w49cwrw) data determines these percentages. The Economic Need score is based on SAIPE data for the county in which application communities are located. We will determine the Economic Need Score percentage by calculating **the average** scores for all communities to be served by the proposed project.

Each community will receive points as follows:

- County poverty percentage **greater than or equal to 30 percent: 20 points**
- County poverty percentage **greater than or equal to 20 percent but less than 30 percent: 15 points**
- County poverty percentage **greater than or equal to 10 percent but less than 20 percent: 10 points**
- County poverty percentage **less than 10 percent: 0 points**

Note: In geographic areas for which no SAIPE data exists, we will use an average SAIPE poverty percentage of **30 percent**.

To find the relevant data to calculate the economic need score, review the “SAIPE Poverty Data” file available on the BTA program webpage at tinyurl.com/2p95jduf.

In the SAIPE data file, relevant U.S. Census Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates data is provided in column H, shown in the highlighted box in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1: SAIPE County Poverty Percentage Location

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
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
00	000	US	United States	40,951,625	40,691,315	41,211,935	12.6	12.5
01	000	AL	Alabama	798,469	780,933	816,005	16.2	15.8
01	001	AL	Autauga County	6,988	5,522	8,454	11.8	9.3
01	003	AL	Baldwin County	30,195	26,604	33,786	12.4	10.9
01	005	AL	Barbour County	5,860	4,715	7,005	26.7	21.5
01	007	AL	Bibb County	3,979	3,190	4,768	20.0	16.0
01	009	AL	Blount County	8,022	6,474	9,570	13.6	11.0
01	011	AL	Bullock County	2,670	1,990	3,350	31.5	23.5

To streamline the process and help estimate the Economic Need score, we created the **Sample Economic Need Calculation Worksheet** available on the BTA webpage under the “To Apply” tab “Sample BTA Worksheets” link at: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz.

Creating More and Better Markets (10 points)

Projects located in or serving rural communities whose economic well-being ranks in the most distressed tier of the Distressed Communities Index are eligible for 10 points. The most distressed tier encompasses communities with a score over 80. A list of Distressed Communities and a BTA Map can be found on the BTA webpage under the “To Apply” tab at: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz. Ten (10) points will be awarded for projects serving **at least one** Distressed Community.

You can use the Sample Communities Worksheet to help document which Distressed Communities your proposed project will serve. For instructions on how to complete the sample worksheet, see the **Sample Communities Worksheet** section of this guide.

Projects advancing Racial Justice, Place-Based Equity, and Opportunity (10 points)

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. For the purposes of this funding opportunity, 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 considered Socially Vulnerable Communities. A GIS layer identifying Socially Vulnerable Communities can be found using the BTA mapping tool available at: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz.
2. Projects proposed by a federally recognized Tribe, including Tribal instrumentalities and wholly owned Tribal entities
3. Projects that promote the expansion of broadband service on Tribal Lands, which are identified in GIS layers included in the BTA mapping tool available at: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz

Note: If you are a non-Tribal applicant, certification from the appropriate Tribal official is required if your proposed project crosses 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 proposing to serve **at least one** Rural Partners Network (RPN) community network. A GIS layer identifying RPN community networks can be found using the BTA mapping tool available at: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz. Currently, there are 36 RPN community networks spanning 10 states and Puerto Rico. You can learn more about RPN community networks and their locations at this link: tinyurl.com/yc4wbzww.

Note: RPN is an all-of-government program that helps rural communities find resources and funding to create jobs, build infrastructure, and support long-term economic stability on your own terms. The RPN is supported by more than 20 federal agencies and regional commissions.

You can include RPN community networks in your proposals by identifying community networks as collaborative partners or including work to benefit a community network area in your proposal. Including RPN community networks helps applicants to coordinate with other federal agencies that fund broadband technical assistance. For contact information regarding specific network participants, email RuralPartnersNetwork@usda.gov.

You can use the sample communities worksheet to document which projects advancing racial justice, place-based equity, and opportunity communities your proposed project will serve. For instructions on completing the sample worksheet, see the **Sample Communities Worksheet** section of this guide.

Performance Measures (Up to 10 points)

You can receive **up to 10 points** based on identified performance measures to evaluate the progress and impact of your proposed project. Performance measures must be based on your proposal. They also must include descriptions of how the results of the technical assistance will be measured, and explain benchmarks used to measure effectiveness. In this section, we will evaluate how well your application meets these criteria:

- Are performance measures based on your proposal?
- Is there a description of how the results of the technical assistance will be measured?
- Is there a description of the benchmarks you will use to measure effectiveness?
- Are these measurements specific and quantifiable?

Program Resources

- BTA program webpage (available at this link: tinyurl.com/2p95jduf)
- BTA Mapping Tool (available on the BTA webpage). The map includes a GIS layer to identify Socially Vulnerable Communities, Tribal Lands, and nonrural areas.
- Grants.gov website (available at this link: grants.gov/)

For questions, fill out the “Contact Us” form at this link: tinyurl.com/ysr6kann, and choose “Broadband Technical Assistance” from the dropdown menu.

Section 2: Application Instructions

Application Requirements

Please submit your application electronically using grants.gov. We will not accept paper or email submissions. To be considered for funding, your application must include all required forms, information, and supporting documentation described below.

Written Narrative Proposal

- Assemble your written narrative into one or more Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) files.
- Limit your written narrative to 25 pages. The scoring panel will not consider information exceeding 25 pages.
Note: The Sample Budget, Community, and Economic Need Worksheets do not count toward the 25 page limit.
- Include the elements described in the Scoring Criteria section of this guide.
- Clearly identify the funding category (technical assistance **provider** or **recipient**).
- Upload completed PDFs as attachments to your application using the Grants.gov website (available at this link: [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)).

Standard Form 424: Application for Federal Assistance (non-construction)

- Available on the BTA webpage at this link: tinyurl.com/2p95jduf

Standard Form 424B: Assurances: Non-Construction Programs

- Available on the BTA webpage at this link: tinyurl.com/2p95jduf

Note: A BTA application checklist is available at this link: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz under the “To Apply” tab. We may contact you to request additional information or seek clarification on any materials you submit.

Sample Budget Worksheet

You must include all budget items to be funded by the award in your proposed project budget. The budget must **only include eligible project costs**. Please review the BTA NOFO (available at this link: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz) for a list of eligible and ineligible project costs.

Note: The project budget must be consistent across the sample budget worksheet, SF-424 and SF-424A, and anywhere else mentioned in the application.

Instructions for Using the Sample Budget Worksheet

1. **Applicant Name:** Enter the name of the applicant at the top of the worksheet.
2. **Item Category:** Select the appropriate category from the dropdown menu. If selecting “other,” please clearly explain the category in the “Item Description” column.
3. **Item Description:** Explain in detail the line item added to the worksheet.
4. **Item Cost:** List the total cost for the line item.
5. **Communities Served:** List all the communities the line item will serve. Communities must match those listed in your Sample Communities Worksheet.

6. **Work Plan Alignment and Item Justification:** The detailed budget justification must align with the tasks identified in the workplan. Discuss how the budget line-item specifically supports the proposed activities discussed in your project's key tasks.

Sample Communities Worksheet

This worksheet will help you identify:

- The areas you propose to serve
- The rurality of those communities
- The Distressed Communities served, if any
- The Tribal Lands and Socially Vulnerable Communities served, if any

Please follow the instructions below to complete the Sample Communities Worksheet located on the BTA webpage under the "To Apply" tab, "Sample BTA Worksheets" link available at: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz.

1. **Applicant Name:** Enter the applicant's name at the top of the worksheet.
2. **Communities Served:** Enter the city, town, **or** county you are proposing to serve on each row. You can add as many rows as necessary. **Note:** Ensure the communities you list are consistent with your project narrative and application.
3. **State:** Enter the State where the community listed in Column A is located
4. **Distressed Communities** For estimating points for Creating More and Better Markets:
 - a. A list of **Distressed Communities** (available at this link: tinyurl.com/hhterj7m) can help you determine if the community you propose to serve overlaps a Distressed Community. A GIS layer identifying Distressed Communities can be found using the BTA mapping tool available at: tinyurl.com/4kfzwnp3.
 - b. Select "Yes" or "No" from the dropdown menu if the community overlaps with a Distressed Community. **Note:** If the project's community only partially overlaps a Distressed Community, you can still select "Yes."
 - c. Review the **Scoring Criteria section** of this guide and in the NOFO for information on **Creating More and Better Markets** points.
5. **Distressed Communities Zip Codes:** If the community listed in Column A is a Distressed Community, list its zip codes. You will find a list of Distressed Communities at this link: tinyurl.com/hhterj7m.
6. **Tribal Lands, Socially Vulnerable Communities, or RPN Community Networks Served:** For estimating points for projects advancing Racial Justice, Place-Based Equity, and Opportunity:

- a. Tribal Lands, Socially Vulnerable Communities, or RPN community network layers on the BTA map are available at this link: tinyurl.com/4kfzwnp3.
 - b. Review the BTA map to determine if your proposed project overlaps Tribal Lands, Socially Vulnerable Communities, or RPN community networks.
 - c. If your proposed project overlaps any these areas, use the dropdown menu to mark them on the worksheet.
 - d. Review the **Scoring Criteria section** of this guide and the NOFO for more information.
7. **Census Population:** Enter the community’s U.S. Census population.
- a. Review the **Determining Rurality section** of this guide for detailed instructions on how to find the population using the U.S. Census website.
8. **Is the community adjacent to a city or town with a population greater than 50,000 (a nonrural area)?** (Select “Yes” or “No” from the dropdown menu.):
- a. Use the map available on the BTA webpage to determine if the community identified in Column A is adjacent to a city or town with a population greater than 50,000 (a nonrural area).
 - b. Review the **Determining Rurality section** of this guide for detailed instructions on how to determine if a community is in a nonrural area.
9. **Name of Adjacent City or Town:** If the community listed in Column A is adjacent to a city or town with a population greater than 50,000, list the name of the adjacent city or town in this column.

Additional Resources: To help streamline the application process, we created a Sample Communities Worksheet User Guide for Fiscal Year 2024. This will help you complete the sample communities worksheet, define rural communities served, and include maps as needed. The Sample Communities Worksheet User Guide is under the “To Apply” tab at this link: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz.

Availability of Existing Broadband Access

Activities supporting communities with existing broadband access are ineligible for BTA funding. For the purposes of the BTA program, existing broadband access is defined as wired or licensed terrestrial fixed wireless service providing 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload (100/20 Mbps).

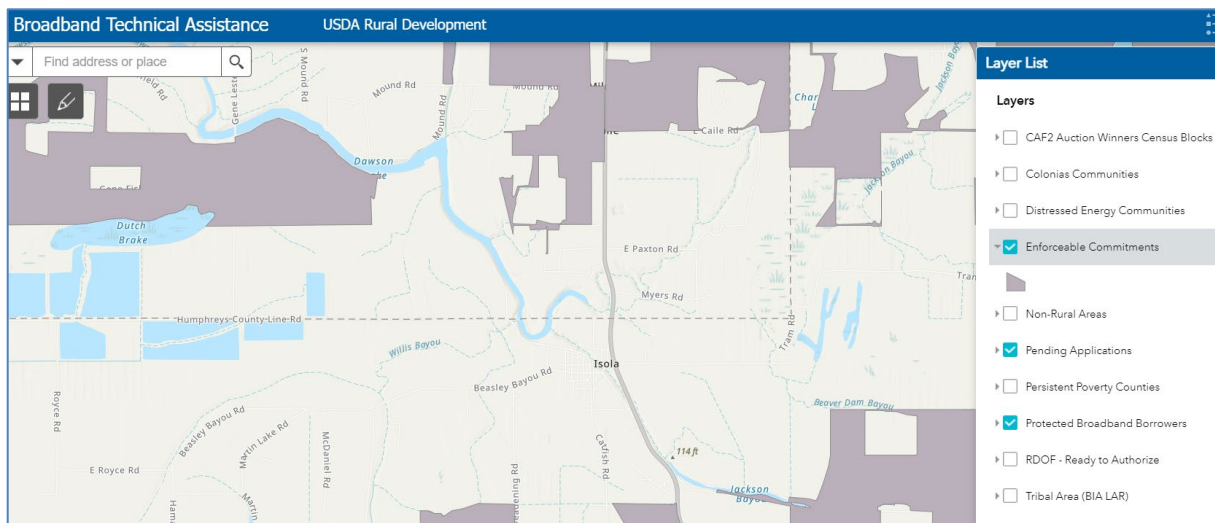
For a community to be eligible for funding, at least 50 percent of households in the community must lack existing broadband access. Mobile or cellular and satellite services do not need to be considered in evaluating the determination of existing broadband access.

We encourage you to review broadband service availability in your intended project areas prior to submitting your application. We also encourage you to include information about how your project will **not** include activities that support communities with existing broadband access.

The BTA map (available at this link: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz) contains mapping layers that show federally funded broadband projects and pending RUS Telecom applications as shown in Figure 2, below.

For more information about these layers, see the **Existing Broadband Projects** section of the **Communities Worksheet User Guide** available at this link: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz. You can also review the FCC Broadband Funding Map (available at this link: tinyurl.com/bdw53jbk) and the FCC National Broadband Map (available at this link: tinyurl.com/2r39zm83). Both tools provide detailed information on broadband service levels across the United States.

Figure 2: BTA Map Enforceable Commitment, Protected Broadband Borrowers, and Pending Applications Layers



Determining Rurality

You must use both U.S. Census data and the nonrural areas GIS layer available on the BTA map to determine the rurality score of a community in your proposed project. Follow these steps:

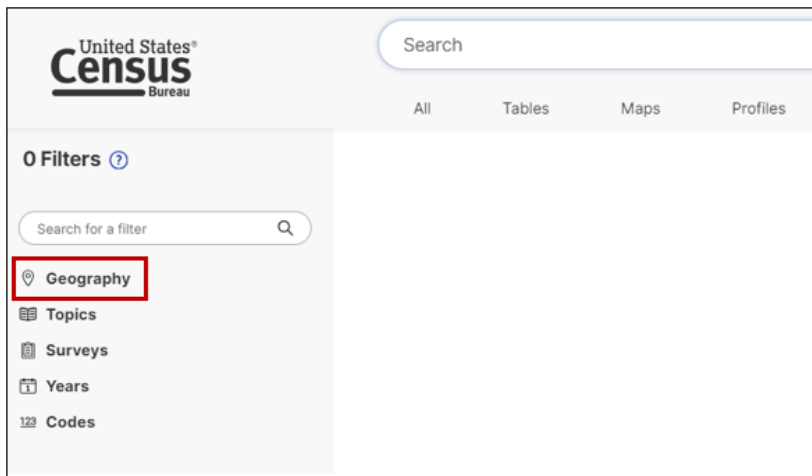
1. Go to the U.S. Census website (available at this link: data.census.gov/) and select “Advanced Search” just below the search bar as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Select Advanced Search on the Census data landing page.



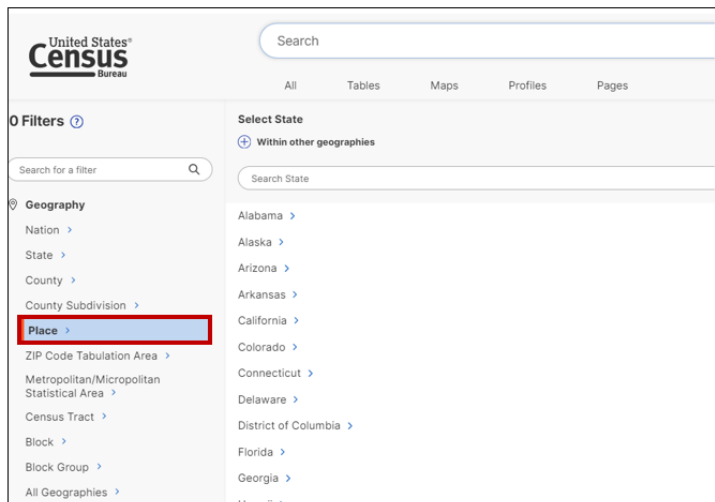
2. On the Advanced Search screen, select “Geography.”

Figure 4. Select Geography from the list of filters.



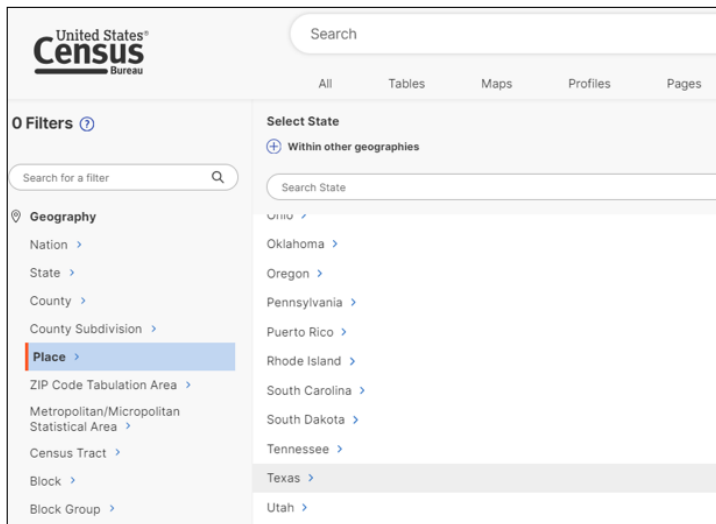
3. Then, select "Place." **Note:** This guidance applies if a project defines communities by "Place." If the communities in the application instead are defined as counties, select "County."

Figure 5. Select "Place."



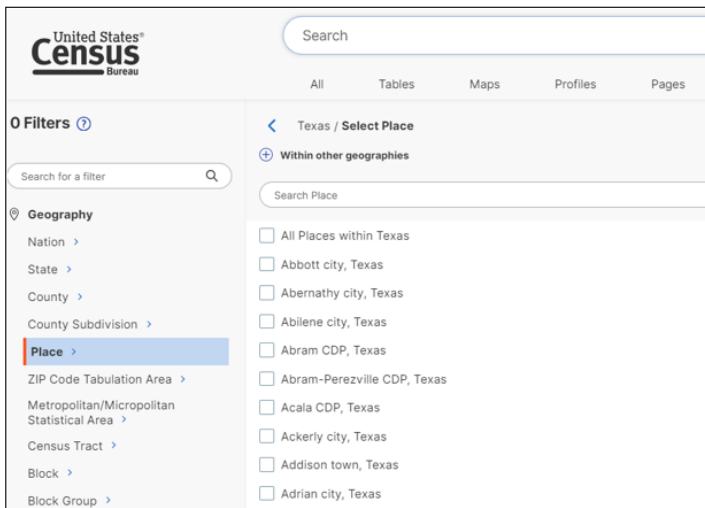
4. Select the state or territory in which the project's community is located. In this example, communities from Texas are selected.

Figure 6. Select the appropriate state or U.S. territory from the list.



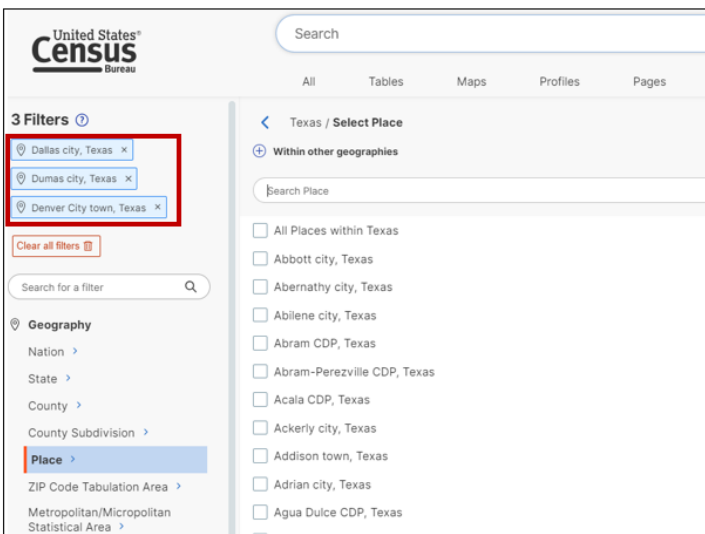
5. Select or search for the city, town, or place in which your proposed project is located. In this example, Dallas, Dumas, and Denver City, Texas are selected.

Figure 7. Select the appropriate locations.



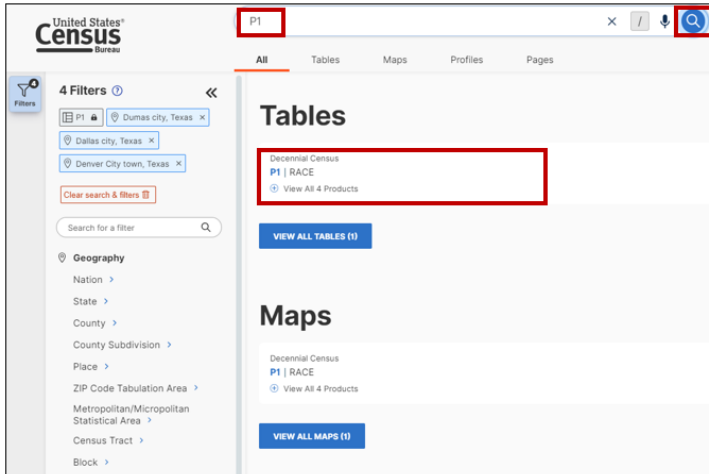
6. Selections can be viewed under “Filters”

Figure 8. Confirm location or locations under filters.



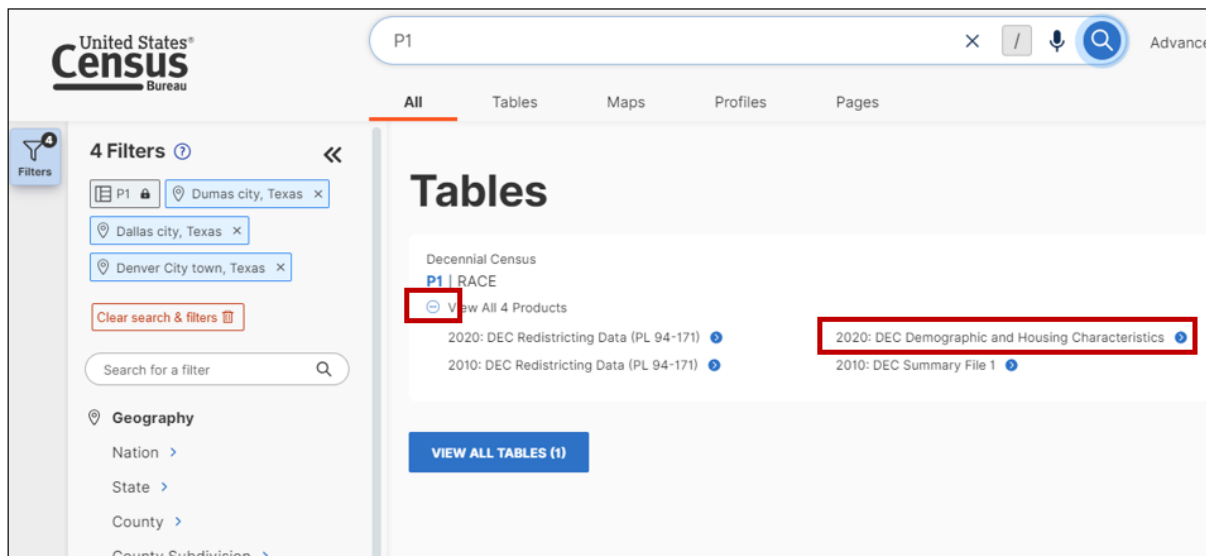
- After your communities have been selected, type “P1” in the search bar and then tap the search button (represented by the magnifying glass icon). The page will populate a “P1:Race” table. This is the correct table to use.

Figure 9. Search “P1.” The page then populates with available tables.



- Select the plus icon to “view all four products” associated with the “P1: Race” table. Then, select “2020: DEC Demographic and Housing Characteristics.”

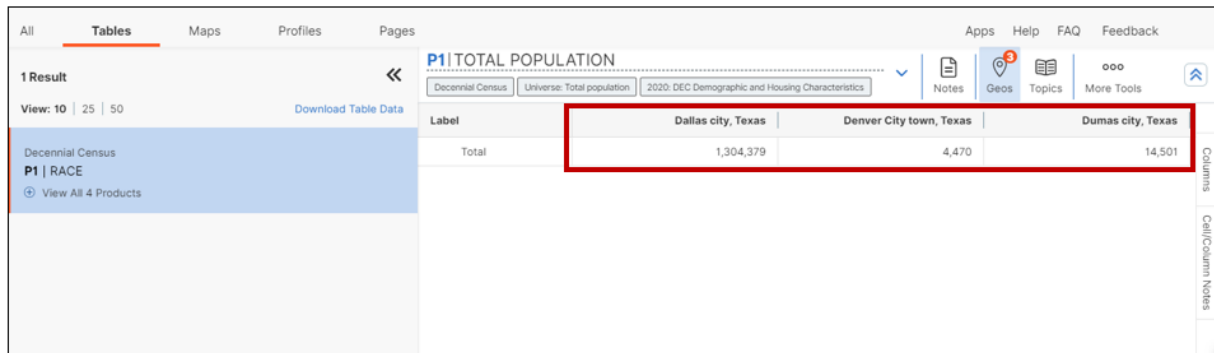
Figure 10. Search for the "P1" table.



9. This file will list the populations of all the places you selected.

In this example – based on the rurality scoring criteria and the populations of Dallas, Denver City, and Dumas – these communities would receive **preliminary** rurality scores of 0, 20, and 10, respectively. Thus, based on its population, Dallas, Texas, is **not** eligible for BTA funding.

Figure 11. Population tables

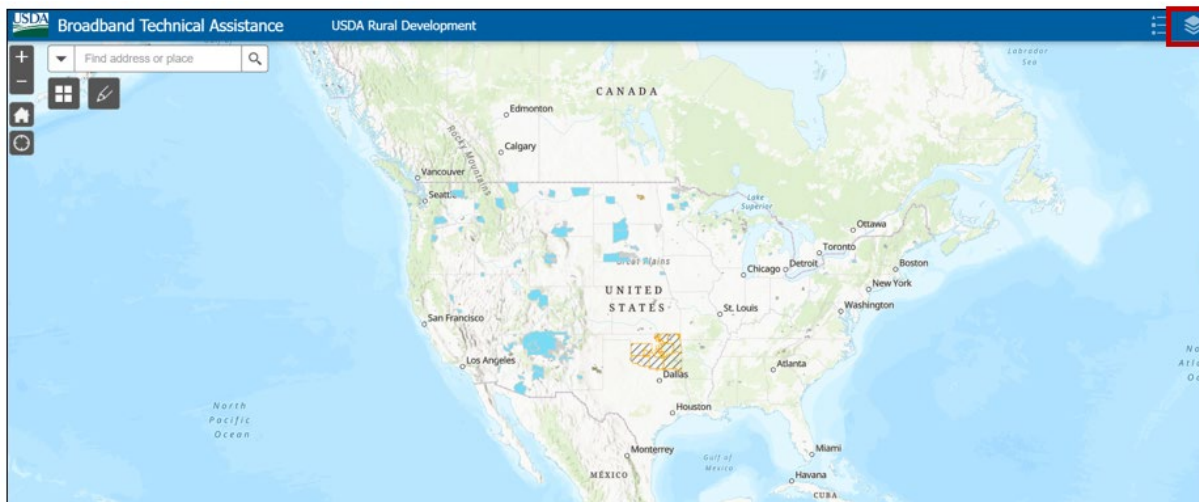


The screenshot shows a web interface with a table titled "P1 | TOTAL POPULATION". The table has three columns: "Dallas city, Texas", "Denver City town, Texas", and "Dumas city, Texas". The row for "Total" shows populations of 1,304,379, 4,470, and 14,501 respectively. A red box highlights the data cells for these three cities.

Label	Dallas city, Texas	Denver City town, Texas	Dumas city, Texas
Total	1,304,379	4,470	14,501

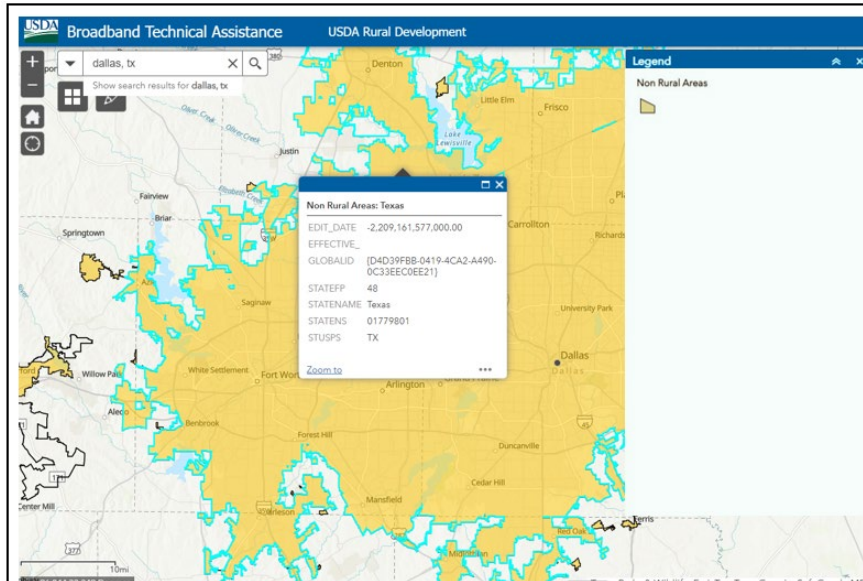
10. Next, use the BTA map to ensure your proposed project communities are not located in nonrural areas (which are ineligible for BTA program funding). To reduce map clutter, use the layer list icon shown in the top right-hand corner of Figure 11 to turn off all layers except the “nonrural areas” layer.

Figure 12. BTA map.



11. With the nonrural areas layer selected, search for the name of the city or town in which your proposed project is located. This should be the same city or town you viewed on the U.S. Census website. In this example, "Dallas" is typed into the search bar.

Figure 13. Search for a community location.

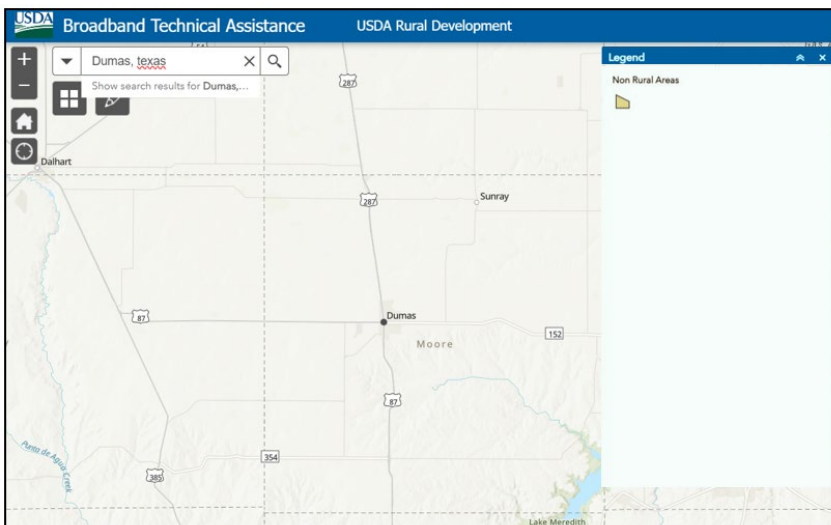


The map will automatically zoom to the selected location. If a proposed project location falls within the nonrural areas layer (as depicted for Dallas, in yellow, above) it is ineligible for BTA funding.

12. Next, we will search for Dumas, Texas.

When the map zooms to this location, we can see that it is **not** located in a nonrural area. Therefore, the area is eligible and the preliminary score we gave this location based on U.S. Census population data is the correct score for the area.

Figure 14. Example of a location in a rural area.



Registration Requirements

System for Award Management (SAM) and Grants.gov Registration

You must register in the System for Award Management (SAM) **prior** to registering on Grants.gov. You must also complete the Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications required of anyone applying for – or receiving – funding under any federal financial assistance project or program.

Note: Your application will be ineligible for consideration if the SAM registration lacks the Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications.

SAM registration is free and available at this link: sam.gov/content/home. Keep in mind registration can take 12 – 15 business days. It also takes an additional 24 hours for Grants.gov to recognize SAM information. Please plan accordingly, and begin these processes well in advance of the application deadline.

The applicant's SAM registration with Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications must remain active and current from the time of application and review, and during the entire active federal grant funding period.

To maintain active SAM registration, review and update your information in the SAM database annually from the date of initial registration (or from the date from which the last update was done). Ensure all database information is current, accurate, and complete.

Even if your SAM registration is current, be certain to add the Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications information before submitting your application.

Important: It can take 10 business days for SAM to recognize registration updates. Please review your SAM registration for accuracy before submitting an application.

Unique Entity Identifier

In 2022, the DUNS number was replaced by a unique entity identifier (UEI) as the authoritative identifier for organizations applying for federal contracts or financial assistance. You must provide a UEI when applying for BTA funding.

You can get a UEI when you create or update your SAM registration at sam.gov/content/home. Regardless of whether your organization has an active or inactive SAM registration, the system has already assigned it a UEI. **Note:** A UEI must belong to the **applicant**; not an affiliate, subsidiary, or parent company.

Reminder: If you do not comply with all SAM requirements – including providing a UEI – your project will not be eligible for consideration.

Application Submission

You must submit your application electronically using Grants.gov no later than 11:59 p.m. eastern on August 20, 2024.

We will not accept paper or email applications.

We strongly encourage you to obtain all necessary credentials and authorizations well in advance of the application deadline, including the required SAM.gov registration and Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications.

Grants.gov requires some one-time credentialing and online authentication procedures. These procedures can take several business days to complete. Additionally, some information on both Grants.gov and SAM.gov requires annual updates. Please be sure to maintain up-to-date credentials and authorizations.

Note: If several federal grant programs have the same application deadline, the Grants.gov site can experience periods during which the site becomes inaccessible. Please plan accordingly. **We encourage you to submit your application to Grants.gov several days ahead of the deadline to mitigate potential last-minute complications.** USDA has no oversight on the Grants.gov website. If you experience a problem retrieving or submitting an electronic application, contact Grants.gov customer support resources.

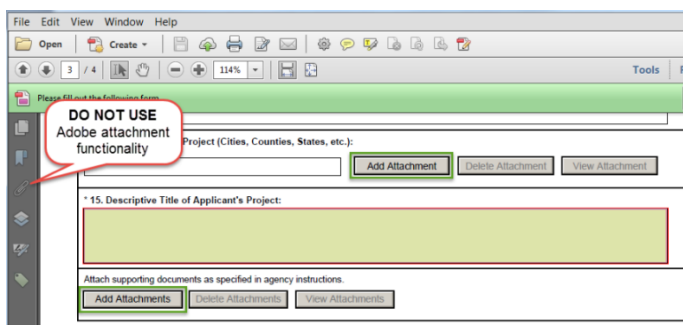
We are available to answer questions about the BTA program and application process. If you need assistance, contact the USDA Rural Development Rural Utilities Service team using the “Contact Us” link available at this link: tinyurl.com/ysr6kann. Select “Broadband Technical Assistance” from the subject dropdown menu.

Attachments

You must submit all application documents, including your written narrative proposal and any other supporting material, using Grants.gov. Attachments can be added using **either** SF-424 Block 15 **or** the Attachments Form:

1. **SF-424 Block 15:** Use the “Add Attachments” button under Block 15 of the SF-424. It is important to use **only** the Add Attachments buttons to attach documents. The sequence in which attachments are added does not matter. See the green boxes in Figure 15 below for locations to attach documents within the mandatory SF-424.

Figure 15: Form SF424 location to add attachments



2. **Attachments Form:** Use the “Add Attachments” button to add a single attachments. You can add up to 15 separate attachments. Use of the Attachments Form is optional.

Figure 16: Attachments Form

ATTACHMENTS FORM

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.

Important: Please attach your files in the proper sequence. See the appropriate Agency Guidelines for details.

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"/>

Additional Attachment Guidance:

- When completing a PDF form using Adobe software, it is important to only use the Add Attachments buttons in the form to attach a document. Do not use other attachment functions within SF-424 or the Attachments Form (such as those in Adobe Reader or on the menu bar). This causes errors in submission, and your attachments will not actually transmit.
- You do not need to combine all attachment files into a single document. You can upload multiple attachments. Grants.gov does not restrict types of file attachments (for example: .pdf, .xls, or .docx). However, if more than one attachment is included in a grant submission and make sure they have different names.

Completing Standard Form 424 (SF-424)

To be considered for BTA funding, you must complete Standard Form 424, Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424), on Grants.gov. Additional guidance for SF-424 follows below.

Block 1: Select “Application” for your submission. If you make changes to a submitted application, select “Changed or Corrected Application” for the resubmission. For duplicative applications submitted through Grants.gov, USDA will base its evaluation on the most recent application submitted.

Block 8: There are multiple entries in this block. We will use the information here for all contact and correspondence. Full, accurate contact information must be provided for someone with the authority to answer any questions about your application.

Block 10: The Name of the Federal Agency is Rural Utilities Service.

Block 11: The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number is 10.752.

Block 12: The Funding Opportunity Number is RUS-BTA-2024. The Title is “Broadband Technical Assistance.”

Block 14: This can be left blank, but you will still need to provide information about project communities in your narrative, along with any pertinent supplemental materials.

Block 15: Include a brief, descriptive title of your proposed project.

Add Attachments: It is important to only use the “Add Attachments” button under block 15 in SF-424 to attach a document. See the **Attachment** section of this guide for additional details.

Block 20: If you check “yes,” provide an explanation of the delinquency.

Block 21: Be sure to check “I agree.” The application must be submitted by an authorized representative of the organization that will be awarded the project if the grant is awarded.

Application Review and Selection Process

Application Submission

To be considered for funding, you must electronically submit a complete BTA application through Grants.gov no later than 11:59 p.m. eastern on August 20, 2024.

Incomplete Applications

We will not consider late or incomplete applications.

Scoring

We will score all complete applications following guidelines in the BTA NOFO. See the **Scoring Criteria** section of this guide for additional information.

Ineligible Applications

We will notify you in writing if your application is determined ineligible.

Selection Process

We will select applications based on scores and funding availability. To increase the range of successful applicants, only **one** application per applicant is eligible for approval.

If you submit more than one application **for different projects**, we will only consider the application with the highest score. If you submit more than one application **for the same project**, we will consider the most recent submission.

Additionally, regardless of the number of points an application receives, the Rural Utilities Service Administrator can elect to:

- Limit the number of applications selected for projects located in any one state during a fiscal year
- Select an application based on availability of funds in a particular funding cycle

Legal Documents

USDA requires all awardees to execute a standard legal agreement. This agreement is available on the BTA webpage under the “To Apply” tab.

Award Receipt

If your proposed project is selected, you will receive an award letter and cooperative agreement by email or postal letter. You must execute and return the agreement – and any other required items – by the date specified in the selection notice letter.

Post-Award Reporting Requirements

Awardees must comply with the following reporting requirements:

Using Form SF-270

You must use Form SF-270 Request for Advance or Reimbursement) *available at this link tinyurl.com/559e94kw) to request reimbursements.

Performance Reporting

All federal financial assistance recipients must provide annual performance activity reports to USDA RD’s Rural Utilities Service. You must submit activity reports no later than January 31 of the year following the year in which all or any portion of the award is first made. Activity reports are due until the recipient completes the project and expends all funds.

You also are required to submit a final performance report no later than 120 days after the expiration or termination of the award, project completion, or final award disbursement, whichever occurs last. The final report can serve as your last annual report, and must include an evaluation of the project’s success in meeting BTA program objectives.

All project performance reports must include:

- A comparison of actual accomplishments to objectives established for the period
- A description of problems, delays, or adverse conditions that occurred or are anticipated. Such situations could affect the accomplishment of project objectives, prevent meeting time schedules or objectives, or prevent completion of project work elements during established time periods.
- A statement of action taken or planned to resolve any situations listed above
- A timetable with objectives for the next reporting period
- Activities demonstrating the coordination with the state broadband office(available at this link: broadbandusa.ntia.gov/resources/states).

Compliance with other federal policies

Recipients must comply with the policies, guidance, and requirements described in the following Codes of Federal Regulations (CFR):

- 2 CFR Part 200 (available at this link: [tinyurl.com/k2rwavza](https://www.tinyurl.com/k2rwavza)): Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards
- 2 CFR Part 400 (available at this link: [tinyurl.com/23cy656f](https://www.tinyurl.com/23cy656f)): Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards
- 2 CFR Part 180 (available at this link: [tinyurl.com/3jmbwt36](https://www.tinyurl.com/3jmbwt36)): Office of Management and Budget Guidelines to Agencies on Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement)
- 2 CFR Part 417 (available at this link: [tinyurl.com/bdh3eptk](https://www.tinyurl.com/bdh3eptk)): Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension
- Executive Order 13166 (available at this link: [tinyurl.com/bdh376ux](https://www.tinyurl.com/bdh376ux)): Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency
- 7 CFR 1901 Subpart E (available at this link: [tinyurl.com/bd5eepdm](https://www.tinyurl.com/bd5eepdm)): Civil Rights Compliance Requirements Recipient and Subrecipient Reporting

Awardees must have the necessary processes and systems in place to comply with the reporting requirements for first-tier subawards and executive compensation under the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 (2 CFR Part 170 – available at this link: [tinyurl.com/2e2rdach](https://www.tinyurl.com/2e2rdach)). Reporting exceptions to these reporting requirements are in 2 CFR 170.110(b) – available at this link: [tinyurl.com/2p8jdvj8](https://www.tinyurl.com/2p8jdvj8).

Section 3: Appendix

Definitions

Applicant means an entity applying for funding under the Broadband Technical Assistance (BTA) Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

Award: In this instance, a cooperative agreement created under the BTA NOFO.

Broadband Technical Assistance (BTA): Activities that support broadband expansion in eligible rural areas. This assistance can include project planning and community engagement, financial sustainability, environmental compliance, construction planning and engineering, accessing federal resources, and data collection and reporting.

Cooperative Agreement: The instrument used to fund support of USDA Rural Development's goal to increase rural economic growth. In a cooperative agreement, federal employees participate more closely in project activities and often work side-by-side with the recipient.

Distressed Communities: Distressed communities are identified as communities whose economic well-being ranks in the most distressed tier of the Distressed Communities Index. 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 webpage under the "To Apply" tab at: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz. A GIS layer identifying Distressed Communities can also be found using the BTA mapping tool available at: tinyurl.com/yckdtabz.

Digital Inclusion: By definition, "digital inclusion" refers to activities necessary to ensure all individuals in the U.S. have access to affordable information and communication technologies, including:

- Reliable fixed and wireless broadband internet service
- Internet-enabled devices that meet user needs
- Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration
- This also includes:
 - Access to digital literacy training
 - Quality technical support
 - Basic awareness of measures to ensure online privacy and cybersecurity

Existing Broadband Access: 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 or 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.

Indirect Costs: Expenses not readily identified within a particular grant, contract, project function, or activity. Indirect costs are those necessary for the general operation of the organization and the activities it performs. Such costs are not eligible for funding under the BTA program.

Rural Area*: For purposes of BTA, and using the most recent decennial Census of the United States, “rural area” is defined as any area **not** located within:

- A city, town, or incorporated area that has a population greater than 20,000
- An urbanized area adjacent to a city or town that has a population greater than 50,000

*Rural areas exclude certain populations as noted in 7 U.S.C. 1991(a)(13)(H) and (I), (available at this link: tinyurl.com/22ndu5ck - PDF). An “urbanized area” means a densely populated territory as defined in the most recent decennial U.S. Census.

Tribe: As defined in the Federally Recognized Indian Tribe List Act of 1994 (available at this link: tinyurl.com/yc27upk5 - PDF), an American Indian or Alaska Native Tribe, band, nation, pueblo, village, or community that the Secretary of the Interior acknowledges as an Indian Tribe under 25 U.S.C. 5131 (available at this link: tinyurl.com/42v5wpj8 - PDF).

Tribal Entity: All entities that fall under eligible legal structures, including:

- Tribal-owned corporations
- Tribal enterprises
- Subsidiaries of Tribally owned corporations and enterprises
- Tribal authorities
- Tribal utilities
- Intertribal nonprofits and associations
- Alaska Native Corporations
- Native entities in Alaska eligible to receive services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (available at this link: bia.gov/)
- Native Hawaiian organizations, including Homestead Associations
- State-recognized Tribes and nonprofits
- Individually owned Native American entities

Tribal Land: Any area identified by the U.S. Department of Interior (available at this link: doi.gov/) as Tribal land. A GIS map layer identifying most Tribal lands can be found on the BTA webpage.

Socially Vulnerable Community: Communities with Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) scores 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 Socially Vulnerable Communities is available in the BTA mapping tool at this link: tinyurl.com/ywmjebm5.

In keeping with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (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 or 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.

If you need an alternative way to receive and understand the information included in this document (for example, Braille, large print, audiotape, or American Sign Language, among others) you can 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. Program information also can be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form (AD-3027, available at this link: go.usa.gov/xzzfW) and at any USDA office. Or, write a letter addressed to USDA and provide all of the information requested in the form. You can call (866) 632-9992 to request a copy of the complaint form.

Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

1. **Email:** program.intake@usda.gov
2. **Postal mail:**
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410
3. **Fax:** (202) 690-7442

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June 2024



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