

NTIA/RUS Notices of Funds Availability

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration and the Rural Utilities Service have announced the release of separate notices of funds availability for the second round of broadband stimulus funding. Copies of the joint agency press release, the NTIA notice and a fact sheet released by the two agencies are attached. (The RUS notice is not yet available.) Applications for funding for the second round will be accepted starting February 16 and are due by March 15.

In addition to setting the application deadline, the notices modify some of the rules adopted for the first round and announce some new policies. The key changes are as follows:

- Remaining funding rounds: This will be the last round of funding for NTIA. RUS will open one more funding window for specific services (described in more detail below).
- No joint applications: Applicants that wish to apply to both the NTIA BTOP program and the RUS BIP program must file separate applications. The agencies concluded that the original rule, permitting joint applications, was burdensome for applicants and slowed NTIA's application review process.
- Focus on "comprehensive community" infrastructure projects: The NTIA has replaced the "broadband infrastructure" category of funding with a "comprehensive community infrastructure" category, which focuses on middle mile projects and the connection of community anchor institutions.
- Unserved and underserved area requirements scaled back: Comprehensive community infrastructure projects will not be required to serve unserved or underserved areas, although there will be preferences for such projects.
- Modified application process: NTIA claims that it has made the process more user-friendly. Fewer attachments will be required, the mapping tool has been eliminated and service areas will be designated by Census tracts and block groups, rather than by Census blocks.
- Simplified eligibility criteria: NTIA will consider just three factors – eligibility of the entity, whether the application is complete and matching – to determine whether an

application is eligible for consideration. Several factors that previously were considered in evaluating eligibility, including technical feasibility and funding, will now be part of the expert review and due diligence phases of the application process.

- Modified evaluation factors: In addition to the adoption of the comprehensive communities approach to BTOP funding, NTIA will be giving additional consideration to projects that propose at least 30 percent matching funding and has adopted new rules for waivers of the matching funds requirement, the last mile coverage obligation and the restriction on the sale or lease of project assets.
- NTIA funding allocation: NTIA intends to make \$2.35 billion available for infrastructure projects, to make at least \$150 million available for public computing centers, and to make at least \$100 million for sustainable broadband adoption.
- RUS funding allocation: RUS intends to make \$2.2 billion available for broadband infrastructure projects. In a second funding window, RUS will provide grants for satellite services for places that are unserved after all other broadband stimulus funding is granted; make grants available to develop plans to use broadband for regional economic development; and to make grants to provide broadband service to rural libraries.