

As One Broadband Funding Window Closes, Another One Opens

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Although opportunities to fund broadband through the Federal Communication Commission's auction are ending soon under its March 30 application deadline, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) opened yesterday (March 28) its own avenue to fund broadband. Under a Notice of Solicitation of Applications (NOSA) issued yesterday, RUS made available applications for funding of rural broadband projects through the agency's Rural Broadband Access Loan and Loan Guarantee Program and announced certain changes to the process for accepting applications and approving loans. Requested loans must be no less than \$100,000 and no more than \$25 million.

RUS previously accepted applications only during isolated application windows. RUS elected to depart from this practice and will now accept applications on a rolling basis throughout the remainder of its 2018 fiscal year, which ends September 30, 2018.

For purposes of this NOSA, "broadband service" is defined as the ability to access download speeds of 25 megabits per second and upload speeds of 3 megabits per second for both mobile and fixed service. RUS funding is available only to those offering these speeds or better.

Applications will be processed on a first-come, first-served basis; however, RUS will evaluate submitted applications every 90 days. During this evaluation, RUS will rank the applications based on the percentage of households in the service area that will benefit from the loan. Funding will be issued based on this ranking, with applications that will benefit higher percentages receiving funding before applications that will serve a lower percentage. Due to rolling prioritization of applications received based on need/benefit, those interested in applying for financing under this program should seek to submit applications as soon as possible—especially applications for smaller projects.

Applications must be submitted online through the RD Apply web portal.