

ReConnect Program: Frequently Asked Questions

General Application Inquiries for Round 3 Funding Opportunities

Updated: February 17, 2022

Question: What is the ReConnect Program?

Answer: The ReConnect Program offers federal loans, grants, and loan-grant combinations to help get broadband to rural areas that lack sufficient broadband access (defined as 100 megabits per second (Mbps) downstream, and 20 Mbps upstream). ReConnect loans and grants can help cover costs associated with the construction, improvement, or acquisition of facilities and equipment.

Question: What types of assistance are available in the ReConnect program?

Answer: USDA offers loans and grants to build infrastructure and install equipment that provides modern, reliable, high-speed internet service in rural places. The ReConnect program offers four products:

- 100 percent loans
- 50-50 loan-grant combinations
- 100 percent grants
- 100 percent grants for Tribal Governments and Socially Vulnerable Communities (with no matching requirement)

More information about the four products is available at this link: <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect>.

Question: Which aspects of the ReConnect Program have been codified in the new regulation?

Answer: Below is a summary of changes codified in the regulation. USDA's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) encourages you to closely review the regulation and the October 25, 2021 Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), and refer to them as you prepare your application. The regulation that governs ReConnect – 7 CFR 1740 – is available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xMJZU>.

- The regulation allows a number of important topics to be determined by each FOA:
 - Definition of “sufficient access to broadband”
 - Broadband speed of the proposed network

- The amounts and types of funds available for assistance, as well as the minimum and maximum award amounts
- Additional areas restricted from ReConnect funding (see 7 CFR 1740.11(b) – available at: <https://go.usa.gov/xexHA> for a basic list of service areas not eligible for ReConnect funding)
- Interest rate for 100 percent loans
- Possible deferral period for loans
- Whether an applicant can submit more than one application
- Scoring criteria for 100 percent grant, and loan-grant combination applications

Question: How does the October 25, 2021 Funding Opportunity Announcement define “sufficient access to broadband?”

Answer: “Sufficient access to broadband” is defined as any rural area in which households have fixed, terrestrial broadband service defined as 100 megabits per second (Mbps) downstream and 20 Mbps upstream.

Question: What are the buildout speeds required for facilities proposed to be constructed with ReConnect funds?

Answer: Proposed facilities funded by ReConnect must be capable of delivering 100 Mbps symmetrical service to every premise in the Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA) at the same time. Specifically, this means **every premise** within the PFSA can receive 100 Mbps downstream and 100 Mbps upstream service at once.

Question: What types of – and how much – ReConnect funding is provided under the October 25, 2021 FOA?

Answer: There are four types of funding available with this FOA:

- 100 Percent Loan. A total of up to \$200 million is available for loans. The maximum amount that can be requested in a single application is \$50 million.
- 50 Percent Loan – 50 Percent Grant Combination. Up to \$250 million is available for loan-grant combinations. The maximum amount that can be requested in an application is \$25 million for the loan, and \$25 million for the grant. Loan and grant amounts will always be equal.
- 100 Percent Grant. Up to \$350 million is available for grants. The maximum amount of grant funds that can be requested in an application is \$25 million.

- If an applicant provides supporting information that demonstrates the Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA) is comprised 100 percent of areas classified by the USDA Economic Research Service as Frontier and Remote Area (FAR) Level 4 (rural areas located 15 minutes or more from an urban area of 2,500 – 9,999 people, 30 minutes or more from an urban area of 10,000 – 24,999 people, 45 minutes or more from an urban area of 25,000 – 49,999 people, or 60 minutes or more from an urban area of 50,000 or more people) the applicant may request increase to \$35 million. Additional explanatory information about FAR levels is available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xMJ5x>. A GIS layer of FAR Level 4 areas is located at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect>.
- 100 Percent Grant for Tribal Governments and Socially-Vulnerable Communities. Up to \$350 million is available for grants. The maximum amount of grant funds that can be requested in an application is \$25 million.
 - If an applicant provides supporting information that demonstrates the PFSA(s) are comprised 100 percent of locations within areas classified by the USDA Economic Research Service as FAR Level 4, the applicant can request up to \$35 million. A Geographic Information System (GIS) layer of FAR Level 4 areas is available at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect>.

Question: What are the interest rates for loans allowed under the October 25, 2021 FOA?

Answer:

- For 100 percent loans, the interest rate is fixed at 2 percent
- For the loan portion of a loan-grant combination, the interest rate is set at the U.S. Treasury rate for the remaining amortization period at the time of each advance of funds

Question: What are the deferral periods for loans allowed under the October 25, 2021 FOA?

Answer:

- 100 percent loans: three (3) years deferral of principal and interest
- For the loan portion of a 50 – 50 percent loan-grant combination: three (3) years deferral of principal and interest

The deferral period begins on the date of the first advance of loan funds.

Question: What is the amortization period on which loan repayments (principal and interest) are based?

Answer: Unless the applicant requests a shorter repayment period, loans must be repaid with interest within a period that – rounded to the nearest whole year – is equal to the expected Composite Economic Life of the funded assets. This is determined by RUS using acceptable depreciation rates, plus three years. You can find the current acceptable depreciation rates table at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xexHF>.

“Composite Economic Life” means the weighted (by dollar amount of each class of facility) average economic life of all classes of facilities necessary to complete construction of the broadband facilities in the proposed funded service area.

Question: How many applications can one entity submit for consideration under the October 25, 2021 FOA?

Answer: Although you are free to **create** more than one application in the system, you can only **submit** one application for consideration.

Question: Do applicants for the 100 percent Grant for Tribal Governments and Socially-Vulnerable Communities need to be Tribal Governments AND ALSO serve socially-vulnerable areas?

Answer: No. Eligible applicants under this funding category include a Tribal Government – or a corporation wholly owned by a Tribal Government – proposing to provide service on its own lands, **OR** an applicant proposing to serve a geographic area comprised of at least 75 percent Socially-Vulnerable Communities.

Question: When can I apply through the online application system?

Answer: The RUS online application system will open November 24, 2021, and remain open until 11:59 a.m. Eastern on March 9, 2022. Applicants can access the application system at <https://reconnect.usda.gov>.

Question: Can an applicant start an application if they do not have their System for Award Management (SAM) registration, or Dun and Bradstreet Number (DUNS) yet?

Answer: No. Both DUNS and a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) are required to start a ReConnect application.

It can take up to three weeks to register in the System for Award Management (SAM), get a Commercial and Government Entity (CAGE) Code (information is available at this link: <https://sam.gov/content/home>) and get a Dun and Bradstreet (DUNS) number (information is available at this link: <https://fedgov.dnb.com/webform/displayHomePage.do>) so it is important to start these items as soon as possible.

Please keep in mind that entities creating new registrations in SAM, and entities completing their annual registration renewals both must review and complete financial assistance representations and certifications before their registration can be activated. All SAM registration certifications must be up-to-date and complete.

Question: What types of IDs do we need to access the ReConnect Application System?

Answer: To access the application system, applicants need a USDA-verified (Level II) eAuthentication (eAuth) account, which can be obtained at www.eauth.usda.gov.

To create and submit an application – as well as manage users in the application system – you must also have an approved Authorized Representative Request (ARR). Instructions on how to submit a new ARR or how to update an existing ARR are in the application guide, which is currently being updated, and will be made available before the application window opens at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect> under “Forms and Resources”.

Note: An ARR requires a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN), for which you can apply through the Internal Revenue Service website at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xMJnr>, and a Dun & Bradstreet Number (DUNS), obtainable at fedgov.dnb.com/webform.

Question: In addition to EIN and DUNS, are there other types of federal identification needed to submit an application?

Answer: Yes. To submit an application, an entity must also have a current, active registration in the System for Award Management (SAM), and a Commercial and Government Entity (CAGE) Code, both of which are obtainable at this link: <https://sam.gov/content/home>.

Please keep in mind that entities creating new registrations in SAM, and entities completing their annual registration renewals, are required to review and complete financial assistance representations and certifications before their registration can be activated.

Question: How do I get a verified (Level II) eAuthentication (eAuth) account?

Answer: Follow the instructions on the USDA eAuth website (available at this link: <https://www.eauth.usda.gov/eauth/b/usda/home>) to create a verified (Level II) eAuthentication (eAuth) account or upgrade an existing account to “verified” (Level II). All users who access the online application system must have a verified (Level II) eAuth account.

Question: Can we begin working on the application before the Authorized Representative Request is approved?

Answer: No. Applicants cannot begin working on an application until the Authorized Representative Request (ARR) is approved. ARR approval typically takes about two business days.

Question: Will consultants, including consulting engineers, have access to the online application site for clients?

Answer: Yes. Applicants can grant consultants access to the online application system. Once assigned the role of “Consultant,” they will then be able to access multiple applications within the system. **Note:** all individuals who log into the system must have a USDA verified (Level II) eAuth account.

Question: Can an employee of one company be added to a second company without needing a second, separate eAuth ID?

Answer: Yes. All users, regardless of security role, can now be added to multiple ReConnect accounts under a single eAuth ID. Users who are not consultants no longer need a unique eAuth ID in order to access different ReConnect accounts.

Question: How do I start my application for ReConnect funds?

Answer: Begin by reviewing the October 25, 2021 Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), and the ReConnect program regulation (7 CFR 1740 as revised – information is available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xex6b>) for current program and eligibility requirements. The FOA, regulation, and other resources including program information, fact sheets, and technical assistance materials are available at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect>. All applications must be submitted through the RUS online application system, which will open on November 24, 2021, and remain open until 11:59 a.m. Eastern on March 9, 2022.

Question: My organization uses Internet Explorer, and I am having problems accessing the application system. What can I do to improve my access to the system?

Answer: Do not use Internet Explorer or Safari when using the application system. Both can create technical hitches that result in incomplete applications. Google Chrome and Microsoft Edge are the recommended browsers to use when completing your application.

Question: My application timed out and I lost the information entered into the system. Can USDA recover this information?

Answer: We cannot recover any information lost from not saving your application. We recommend saving your application multiple times during the process. For security, the system times out after 15 minutes of inactivity, and you will receive a warning message at approximately 14 minutes and 30 seconds. If an application times out without being saved, you will lose all information entered since the last time you saved the application.

Question: When will USDA announce awards for the new round of funding?

Answer: For current award announcements, visit the ReConnect Program website at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect> and click "Subscribe" under the "Stay up-to-date" section at the bottom of the home page.

Question: What is considered an affiliate company? What is the ownership threshold for considering a company an affiliate?

Answer: Always refer to the FOA, regulation, or application guide for comprehensive guidance and legal definitions. The application guide is currently being updated and will be made available before the application window opens at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect> under "Forms and Resources".

Question: How does USDA know where broadband services at 100 Mbps down, 20 Mbps up speeds are currently provided?

Answer: Rural Development uses several methods to verify whether a particular Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA) currently has 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream broadband service. We will post a Public Notice Filing (PNF) of the proposed service area on the ReConnect webpage at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect>, and service providers in those areas can submit a Public Notice Response (PNR) indicating whether they already provide 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream service. Then, USDA will conduct Service Area Validations (SAVs) within the areas of the PFSA(s) where a PNR is filed.

Service area validations also include desktop research using currently available data. Additionally, we will send subject matter experts (SMEs) to service area locations where a PNR is filed to oversee field tests to determine if the areas meet eligibility requirements, to verify the availability of 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream service, and validate other aspects of the application.

Question: Does RUS require audited financial statements as part of the application?

Answer: Yes. Audited financial statements are required. You must submit unqualified comparative audited financial statements for the previous fiscal year from the date your application is submitted.

If an application is submitted and the most recent year-end audit has not yet been completed, you can submit the most recent, completed, unqualified audit.

Note: an applicant can use the consolidated audit of the parent as long as the parent fully guarantees the loan, or in the case of a grant, guarantees construction will be completed as approved in the application, or the parent will repay the grant to RUS. If the applicant has more than one parent, then each parent's audits must be submitted, and each parent must fully guarantee the award.

For government entities, financial statements must be accompanied with certifications regarding unrestricted cash that may be available to the applicant on a yearly basis.

Question: Can an applicant use fiscal year projections when completing the financials component of the application, or must they use calendar year projections?

Answer: You can submit your financial information using a calendar year or fiscal year basis for historical and forecasting, but the methodology must be consistent across all years. If you choose to provide

financial information on a fiscal year basis, you must indicate the fiscal year in the assumptions. We recommend you use the same basis as the unqualified, comparative, audited financial statements submitted with the application.

Question: Would two entities owned by the same holding company be able to submit separate applications as separate entities proposing to serve different areas? Or is only one application allowed because both entities are owned by the same holding company?

Answer: As long as each entity is organized as a standalone company, then each entity can submit separate applications. However, if a consolidated unqualified, comparative audit containing each entity's financial information is not available from the parent holding company, each company must independently provide the unqualified, comparative audited financial statement for the previous fiscal year of the applicant from the date the application is submitted, and meet all other eligibility requirements as standalone entities.

Question: Can a subsidiary use a parent company's financials when preparing the pro forma financial analysis?

Answer: Financial information and projections must be those of the applicant, and consolidated projections are not acceptable. Applicants must use their own standalone projections.

Question: What needs to be included for the real property question? (Example: Does the applicant own any real property? If so, upload all applicable copies of real estate deeds or any real property schedules). Do applicants need to upload documents for each property that they own, or can they use a real property schedule that lists all of their real property?

Answer: The question regarding real property is intended to determine whether or not a mortgage would be required if the project is awarded. To satisfy this requirement, upload a copy of the company's real estate deeds and real property schedule. Note: applicants for the 100 percent grant product must select "no" in response to this question.

Question: Are all CAF II – Auction 903 Winners' Census Block Group(s) off-limits to other applicants, regardless of the level and type of service that the CAF II Winner proposed to offer in those areas?

Answer: CAF II – Auction 903 Winners' Census block (information is available at this link: <https://www.fcc.gov/auction/903>) groups are no longer restricted when applying for ReConnect funding unless sufficient access to broadband (as defined by the most recent Funding Opportunity Announcement) exists.

Question: Will ReConnect fund middle-mile only projects?

Answer: Typically, no. The intent of the ReConnect program is to bring high-speed broadband service to rural residences and businesses. Therefore, stand-alone, middle-mile projects are not eligible. However, middle-mile facilities are eligible if they are necessary to bring sufficient broadband service to all premises in the PFSA.

Question: Can an applicant apply for Community Connect and ReConnect funds for different Proposed Funded Service Areas (PFSA)?

Answer: Yes. You can apply for funds from both programs if the projects serve different Proposed Funded Service Areas (PFSAs).

Question: What is the difference between the 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream service requirement and the 25 Mbps downstream, 3 Mbps upstream evaluation criteria?

Answer: To be eligible for ReConnect funding, 90 percent of the households within a Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA) must lack sufficient access to broadband service. "Sufficient access" is defined in the October 25, 2021 Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) as "fixed, terrestrial broadband service delivering at least 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream." If more than 10 percent of households in a proposed service area has 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream or greater service available, the area is not eligible for ReConnect funding.

The evaluation criteria for an application seeking a 100 percent grant or a loan-grant combination includes additional points if the proposed project serves an area of households that lack fixed, terrestrial broadband service of at least 25 Mbps downstream, 3 Mbps upstream. The applicant must provide supporting evidence that 25 Mbps downstream, 3 Mbps upstream service does not exist for those households. To the extent possible, you must identify all existing providers in the PFSA and indicate what level of service is actually being provided. The evaluation criteria do not apply to applications seeking 100 percent loan funding.

Question: Can one applicant request funding from all four funding categories?

Answer: No. You must choose one type of funding (100 percent loan, loan-grant combination, 100 percent grant, or 100 percent grant for Tribal Governments and Socially-Vulnerable Communities) from which to apply, and can submit only one application. You can, however, begin multiple applications in the application system.

Question: If an applicant applies for but does not receive a 100 percent grant, will they be considered for the 50 – 50 percent combination loan-grant category?

Answer: No. You can submit only one application within the application window specified in the October 25, 2021 FOA. An application submitted for one funding category is not eligible for any of the other funding categories.

Question: Does USDA have sample language for the Authorized Representative Request (ARR)? To whom and to where should the ARR and board resolution be submitted?

Answer: Authorized Representative Request (ARR) instructions and sample board resolution language are available on the ReConnect website at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect> under “Forms and Resources.” The instructions provide two sample resolutions featuring a corporation, and a Limited Liability Company (LLC). If the applicant is an entity other than a corporation or LLC, the content of the sample resolutions can be modified to reflect the applicant’s legal structure. Once completed, the board-approved resolution must be uploaded within the online application system as a part of the AAR.

Question: Can I use my RD Apply or eAuth login for access to ReConnect?

Answer: No. Although both use verified (Level II) eAuthentication for logins, the ReConnect program does not use the RD Apply system. To use the ReConnect online application system, you must have an approved ARR in ReConnect. The RUS ReConnect online application system can be found at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect>.

Question: Are there any application fees required in the ReConnect application?

Answer: No application fees are required to submit an application to USDA. However, you can incur pre-application expenses related to the creation and submission of an application. Pre-application expenses must fund eligible costs and be budgeted within the application in order to be reimbursed by Rural

Development. Additional details on pre-application expenses can be found in 7 CFR 1740.12(a)(2) – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xex6M>.

Question: Do applicants need to submit a legal opinion?

Answer: Yes. All applicants must submit a legal opinion. The document must address your ability to enter into the award documents, describe all material pending litigation matters, address your ability to pledge security as required by the award documents, and address your ability to provide broadband service under state law. We recommend the legal opinion be prepared according to the sample format available under “Forms and Resources” at this link: <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect>. This sample can be modified to meet your needs. **Note:** We recommend all such modifications be reviewed with RUS staff prior to final submission. Additional details on legal opinions required for the ReConnect program can be found in 7 CFR 1740.60(d)(9), available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xex6t>.

Question: Are the evaluation criteria datasets available for download?

Answer: Yes. The datasets used to determine evaluation criteria are available to download. These datasets represent a specific moment in time and will not be modified during the course of the current Funding Opportunity Announcement; nor can the data be challenged. The Evaluation Criteria Datasets available for download include:

- Economic Need of the Community (SAIPE)
- Rurality – 100 Miles from Urbanized Areas
- Socially-Vulnerable Communities
- Tribal Lands

More information about ReConnect Program Service Area Map Datasets can be found at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/x3GH>.

Question: What datasets are available to the public as they relate to the ReConnect Program Service Area Map?

Answer: You can access several datasets relating to the ReConnect Program, including the following:

- Economic Needs of the Community (SAIPE) – This dataset contains the results of the U.S. Census Bureau’s Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) program poverty estimates for all counties with a poverty percentage of 20 percent or higher. This program provides annual

estimates of income and poverty statistics for all school districts, counties, and states for the administration of federal programs and the allocation of federal funds to local jurisdictions.

- **Rurality – 100 Miles from Urbanized Areas** – This shapefile contains a multipart feature of all 2010 Census urbanized areas surrounded by a 100-mile buffer. Urbanized areas are areas of 50,000 or more people.
- **Socially-Vulnerable Communities** – The dataset contains Census Tracts with a Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) overall ranking of 0.75 or higher. The SVI determines the degree to which a community is perceived as able to prevent human suffering and financial loss in the event of a disaster.

The ReConnect Program Service Area Map Datasets can all be viewed at this link:

<https://go.usa.gov/xe3GH>.

Additionally, there are datasets for Service Area Eligibility Criteria. These datasets outline geographic areas where the service area eligibility possibly will be limited for some applications. These datasets include the following:

- **Frontier and Remote Areas (FAR) Level 4:**
 - 15 minutes or more from an urban area of 2,500-9,999 people
 - 30 minutes or more from an urban area of 10,000-24,999 people
 - 45 minutes or more from an urban area of 25,000-49,999 people
 - 60 minutes or more from an urban area of 50,000 or more people
- **Non-Rural Areas** –For more information, please refer to the ReConnect Program Service Area Map Datasets webpage at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xex6h>.
- **Pending Applications** – This dataset includes all Community Connect, Farm Bill Broadband, Telecommunications Infrastructure, and ReConnect Program loan, loan-grant combination, and grant applications submitted to the Rural Utilities Service (RUS). The layer updates when the status of an application changes. Approved applications remain protected under the Protected Broadband Borrower Service Areas layer. For applications no longer being considered by RUS, the applicant's Proposed Funded Service Area will no longer appear as part of this layer.
- **Protected Broadband Borrower Service Area** - This dataset includes the service areas of entities that received a Telecommunications Infrastructure loan, Farm Bill Broadband loan, Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP) award, or ReConnect Program grant, loan, or combination award during or after fiscal year 2000. This dataset also includes Community Connect projects still under construction. Service areas of projects that were approved but subsequently de-

obligated are not protected and have been omitted from this layer. With the exception of RUS projects still under construction, the service areas of existing RUS broadband borrowers and grant recipients without sufficient access to broadband, as defined in the October 25, 2021 Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), are eligible to apply for ReConnect funding.

Finally, there is a dataset for both Evaluation Criteria and Service Area Eligibility Criteria. This is the Tribal Lands dataset from the U.S. Census Bureau. It contains American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian areas as of January 1, 2020. Additional information is available on the Service Area Maps webpage at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xext6>.

Question: What is the difference between the 100 Mbps symmetrical buildout requirement and the 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream sufficient access to broadband definition?

Answer: The 100 Megabits per second (Mbps) symmetrical buildout speed is a requirement for all ReConnect Program projects. Projects incapable of delivering 100 Mbps symmetrical service to every premises in their Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA) at the same time will not be selected for funding. A professional engineer must certify the proposed network can deliver at least 100 Mbps symmetrical service.

The 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream service speed is the current definition for sufficient access to broadband. Only areas where at least 90 percent of household lack access to 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream service are eligible for ReConnect funding. If fewer than 90 percent of households in an area lack access to 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream service, the area is not eligible to be served.

Question: Can other federal funds be used to meet the ReConnect Program matching requirement for 100 percent grants?

Answer: Typically, federal funds from other programs cannot be used as match for ReConnect funds unless the program under which the non-ReConnect funds were awarded has specific statutory authorization allowing that program's funds to be used as match for other federal programs.

Question: Can ReConnect funds be used for monitoring expenses associated with National Historic Preservation Act (Section 106) reviews?

Answer: Yes; as long as the cost of the monitors are considered part of construction costs and are capitalized. Monitoring expenses are considered professional costs and are eligible to be funded using up to 3 percent of the total award amount. Awardees are required to submit associated invoices, along with a copy of the agreement with their state or Tribal historic preservation office.

Question: What areas are eligible for ReConnect funding?

Answer: To be eligible for ReConnect funding, a Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA) must be:

1. Rural

- According to 7 CFR 1740.2 (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xexFF>), a rural area is any area not located within:

1. A city, town, or incorporated area with a population greater than 20,000
2. An urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town with a population greater than 50,000

2. Lack sufficient access to broadband service as defined in the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA)

- For all funding categories, 90 percent of households within each proposed service area must lack sufficient access to broadband. Sufficient access to broadband is defined in the October 25, 2021 FOA (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xedWd>) as “any rural area in which households have fixed, terrestrial broadband service delivering at least 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream.”

In addition, 7 CFR 1740.2 (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xexFt>) states that mobile or cellular and satellite services – including systems that use satellite backbone facilities to connect to the internet – will not be considered when determining whether sufficient access to broadband exists.

A PFSA cannot include areas considered ineligible for funding under the ReConnect program. The ReConnect Program Service Area Map identifies ineligible and potentially ineligible areas due to a protected broadband borrower currently providing sufficient access to broadband.

Both the regulation and FOA provide information on this issue. The ReConnect Program Service Area Map (available at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/bdccjhap>) does **not** provide information on where sufficient access to broadband currently exists.

Question: The RUS Service Area Map does not differentiate between “Protected Broadband Borrowers” that have built to 100/20 Mbps (therefore ineligible) and those that have not. Does RUS intend to differentiate them on the tool, or is it up to applicants to determine which Protected Broadband Borrower areas are eligible, and which are not?

Answer: RUS currently does not list broadband download and upload speeds on either the Protected Broadband Borrower or Pending Applications layers of the Service Area Map (available at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/bdccjhap>). You must exercise your own due diligence in determining broadband speeds in potential PFSAs. RUS will review all submitted application information and will contact the RUS borrower to determine if sufficient access to broadband exists.

Question: If our application includes the Irrevocable Letter of Credit, is there still a requirement for an exclusive first lien on all grant-funded assets?

Answer: 7 CFR 1740.44(c)(2) states that for grant-only applications, applicants may request that standard grant security arrangements be replaced with an Irrevocable Letter of Credit (ILOC), to ensure that the project is completed. The ILOC would replace the need for an exclusive first lien on all grant-funded assets. However, even if there is no government lien filed on the grant assets, a subsequent sale of those assets before the completion of the service obligation results in an obligation (or debt) to repay the proceeds to the government, pursuant to 2 CFR 200.

Question: What are the requirements for a Pledged Deposit Account?

Answer: All ReConnect Awardees will be required to establish a Pledged Deposit Account (PDA). If a ReConnect Awardee has a matching fund requirement of either 25% or 50%, then those funds have to be expended prior to advancing any grant funds, with the exception of any eligible pre-application expenses. All matching funds must be deposited in the PDA and approved by RUS on an Financial Requirement Statement (FRS). Awardees have a choice of depositing the entire amount in the PDA prior to closing the award or they can choose to deposit them in tranches on a rolling basis prior to submitting an FRS to apply the respective amount that was deposited.

Question: If an applicant wants to use the ILOC option, does an unqualified comparative audit need to be submitted?

Answer: Yes, an unqualified comparative audit for the previous year does need to be submitted. By checking that an ILOC will be utilized, the financial section is turned off so applicants must upload their audits in the “Project Documents” section as an “Other” documents. In the description, the applicant should indicate that this is the audit.

Eligibility Inquiries

Question: Who is eligible to receive ReConnect funds?

Answer: As defined in 7 CFR 1740.9 (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xextf>) to be eligible for funding, an applicant can be either a nonprofit or for-profit organization, and must take one of the following forms:

- Corporation
- Limited Liability Companies and Limited Liability Partnerships
- Cooperative or mutual organizations
- States, local governments, or any agency, subdivision, instrumentality, or political subdivision thereof
- A territory or possession of the United States
- An Indian Tribe as defined in section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 450b – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xexF9>)

Individuals and legal general partnerships are not eligible entities. In addition, co-applicants are not eligible. If two entities want to partner in delivering broadband to areas without sufficient access, one entity must take the lead on submitting an application. In this case, intercompany agreements can be used to account for revenues and expenses on the applicant’s financial projections. However, based on the existing financial and security agreements, Rural Development can require that both – or other entities – be parties to the award documents, or to guarantee the award. **Note:** any proposed network to be funded with ReConnect funds must be a completely constructed and operational network. No fiber cable-only builds will be considered. The applicant must own and operate the complete network funded with ReConnect funds.

Question: What kinds of partnerships are eligible to apply for ReConnect funding?

Answer: Limited Liability Partnerships (LLP) can apply as eligible entities. An LLP has at least two partners in the relationship, and all partners are equally responsible for all considerations of the relationship including management, liability, and taxes, among other considerations. Co-applicants and legal general partnerships formed with individuals are not eligible entities. See 7 CFR 1740.9(b) – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xexFP> - for additional details on the eligibility of partnerships.

Question: I'm looking for help getting broadband internet at my residence. Is this program for me?

Answer: Individuals are not eligible to apply for funding under this program. We recommend you find an eligible provider in your area and work with them to apply.

Question: Is an applicant eligible if current network speeds are less than 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream, but more than 25 Mbps downstream, 3 Mbps upstream?

Answer: If you are not currently providing 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream in the proposed service area, and you meet all other program requirements, you are eligible to apply for the ReConnect program.

Question: If an applicant is proposing to place fiber facilities through an ineligible area to get to an eligible area, can the fiber facilities be used to provide service to the ineligible areas?

Answer: You may propose fiber facilities in an ineligible area in to serve both eligible and ineligible areas; however, you cannot use award funds or matching funds to fund the portion of the fiber facilities that serve the ineligible area. For example, if a 100-count fiber cable is proposed to pass through ineligible and eligible areas and 30 fibers will serve the ineligible area, then 30 percent of the total cost of the fiber facility (installation and materials) must be funded through non-ReConnect and non-matching funds.

Question: Is a Wireless Internet Service Provider eligible for ReConnect funds?

Answer: Technology which can deliver 100 Mbps downstream, 100 Mbps upstream service at the same time to every premises in the Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA) is eligible for funding. However, if the wireless service is overlaid on top of a cellular network, it is not eligible for funding. More information about the ReConnect program can be found at: <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect>.

Question: Can areas under consideration for Rural Digital Opportunity Fund money be eligible for ReConnect?

Answer: Yes. Areas receiving, or under consideration for, a Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) award are eligible for ReConnect funding as long as the areas in question do not have existing service at the minimum level of sufficient access to broadband, (100/20 Mbps for FOA 3) or as long as an entity has not already received other federal funding to construct facilities providing at least 100/20 Mbps service in those areas. Applicants submitting a project to serve an area in which an entity has already received, or will be receiving, RDOF funding should explain in the application why ReConnect funding is being requested and why Rural Utilities Service should provide additional funding. (For example, will the applicant commit to an accelerated deployment schedule if it receives RUS funding?) RDOF awards may fund both operational and capital expenses, while ReConnect awards may only fund capital expenses, as such, RUS also will require all ReConnect awardees receiving or under consideration for RDOF funding to submit a statement certifying that the funds requested from ReConnect have not been – and will not be – reimbursed by the RDOF award. Therefore, funding recipients cannot claim that both RDOF and ReConnect funds were used to pay for the same labor or materials used to deploy broadband to specific locations, or to procure the same unit of network equipment. Recipients that receive both RDOF and ReConnect funding must keep separate accounts to track the sources and uses of funding to support the certification statement submitted with the ReConnect application.

Question: How will RUS decide between two or more ReConnect applications that propose to serve the same Tribal Lands when one or more of the applicants is also under consideration for an RDOF award?

Answer: If two or more applications are submitted proposing to serve the same Tribal Lands either under consideration for – or receiving – an RDOF award, RUS will give preference to the applicant that has a Resolution from the Tribal Government in support of the proposed project. If the application having an RDOF award also has a tribal resolution in support of the project, then the RDOF application will have priority with respect to areas covering those Tribal Lands. Please note that for Tribal Lands to be eligible for funding, as with any other service area, existing service at the minimum level of sufficient access to broadband, (100/20 Mbps for FOA 3) must not exist.

Question: Can I apply for ReConnect funding to serve an area where I have received funding from another federal program to serve?

Answer: Yes, as long as the area in question does not have existing service at the minimum level of sufficient access to broadband, (100/20 Mbps for FOA 3) or as long as an entity has not already received other federal funding to construct facilities providing at least 100/20 Mbps service in that area. If you have applied for or are receiving other federal funds to deploy broadband in all or part of the Proposed Funding Service Area (PFSA) you propose to serve with ReConnect funds, you must explain why additional funding is necessary, why RUS should provide that funding, and how RUS funding will not be duplicative of the other funding. ReConnect awardees are required to submit a statement certifying that the funds requested from ReConnect have not been – and will not be – reimbursed by any other federal funding mechanism.

Question: If a company applies for the 100 percent grant product and USDA finds households with 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream service, will the entire application be thrown out, or can the applicant modify its Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA) in the application?

Answer: No. You cannot modify your application to remove one or more PFSAs found ineligible by USDA. Multiple Proposed Funded Service Areas (PFSAs) are treated as separate, standalone service areas when determining what percentage of a PFSA lacks sufficient access to broadband. This means each individual PFSA must meet the eligibility requirement (90 percent of the households in a PFSA cannot have access to broadband service at a speed of 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream). If any service area in a competitive application does not meet these eligibility requirements, the entire application will be disqualified.

Question: How will USDA staff judge applications which propose service to the same Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA).

Answer: We will not fund more than one project that serves a sole geographic area. Invariably, applicants do propose service areas that overlap – varying from minor areas of the territory that can be significant with respect to households involved – to larger areas of the service territory that contain few, if any, households or businesses. As a result, accounting for every overlap circumstance is not possible. Nevertheless, it is Rural Development’s intent to make as many eligible applications viable for consideration as possible. This means we can:

- Determine the overlap to be so insignificant that no action by RUS is necessary
- Request one or more of the applications be revised to eliminate the overlapping territory
- Choose one application over another, considering factors such as:

- the amount of assistance requested
- the number of awards already selected in the region or state
- an assessment of area needs
- Simply choose the project that scores higher – or in the judgement of Rural Development – is more financially feasible

We reserve the right to request additional information from you concerning any part of your application, including the Proposed Funded Service Area. The applicant has 30 days to return the requested information. Failure to do so can result in application rejection.

Question: Are service areas covered by RUS Broadband Loan borrowers eligible for ReConnect funding?

Answer: As detailed in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Public Law 116-260 – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xexM2>) the service areas of existing RUS borrowers without sufficient access to broadband (as defined in the October 25, 2021 Funding Opportunity Announcement) are eligible for ReConnect funding. However, current RUS Broadband Borrowers that have received funding to provide sufficient access to broadband but have not yet built-out their system are ineligible to apply for funding for these service areas.

Question: Are areas that received grants under the RUS Community Connect Grant Program eligible for ReConnect funding?

Answer: Service areas that received grants under the RUS Community Connect Grant Program are eligible if they do not have sufficient access to broadband, except for those grants still under construction and proposing a service speed of at least 100 Mbps downstream, 20 Mbps upstream. The ReConnect Program Service Area Map (located at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/bdcccjhap>) offers a layer that illustrates current RUS borrowers and projects still under construction.

Question: Are service areas that received 100 percent grants under the RUS Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP) eligible for ReConnect funding?

Answer: Service areas that received a 100 percent BIP grant are eligible if they do not have sufficient access to broadband.

Question: Are areas that received smart grid funding under an RUS Electric Program loan eligible for ReConnect Funding?

Answer: Areas that receive smart grid funding from the RUS Electric Program can be eligible for ReConnect funding as long as the smart grid facilities are not leveraged into providing sufficient access to broadband.

Question: What is the definition of a “Broadband Loan” for the purposes of the ReConnect Program?

Answer: For the ReConnect Program only, an RUS broadband loan is defined as “any loan that has been approved or is currently under review by RUS after the beginning of fiscal year 2000 in the Telecommunications Infrastructure Program, Farm Bill Broadband Program, Broadband Initiatives Program, or the ReConnect Program.”

Notes:

- Broadband loans that were rescinded, are in default, or upon which loan terms and conditions were not met, are not included in the ReConnect definition of a “broadband loan” as long as the entity under consideration for ReConnect funding **has not previously** defaulted on, failed to meet the terms and conditions of, or had rescinded, an RUS broadband loan.
- If the project funded by such a broadband loan does not provide sufficient access to broadband as defined in the October 25, 2021 Funding Opportunity Announcement, then those areas covered by the broadband loan are open to any provider that wants to submit an application.

Question: How can we successfully challenge FCC Form 477 data?

Answer: To the extent possible, you must identify all existing providers in the PFSA and indicate what level of service is actually being provided. You are not required to treat current, publicly-available FCC Form 477 data (additional information is available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xeqdX>) as unquestionable proof of what speed service currently exists. FCC Form 477 data can be used as one source of data regarding sufficient access to broadband.

Question: Can a competitive local exchange carrier (CLEC) apply for funding?

Answer: A Competitive Local Exchange Carrier (CLEC) is an eligible entity as long as it meets all eligibility requirements as outlined in the October 25, 2021 Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA).

Question: Can applicants apply for more than one service area?

Answer: A single application can propose multiple service areas. For eligibility purposes, if you are applying for multiple Proposed Funded Service Areas (PFSAs), each service area will be evaluated on a standalone basis when determining whether a PFSA has sufficient access to broadband. If any service area in a competitive application does not meet the eligibility requirements, the entire application will be disqualified.

When an application is evaluated for **technical feasibility**, the proposed PFSAs are evaluated together. The determination of technical feasibility is based on the entire network proposed for construction with ReConnect funds.

Question: The Funding Opportunity Announcement defines “Tribal Government” using The Federally-Recognized Indian Tribe List Act of 1994 (25 U.S.C. 479a). However, the ReConnect regulation defines “Tribe” using the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 450b). Do Tribal applicants need to meet both definitions in order to apply for the program?

Answer: No, a Tribe can be eligible for ReConnect funding by meeting either of the definitions referenced in the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) and regulation.

Question: What is a Socially-Vulnerable Community?

Answer: Socially-Vulnerable Community means a community or area identified in the Center for Disease Control’s Social Vulnerability Index with a score of .75 or higher. For the purposes of this FOA, Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, Northern Mariana Island, Palau, Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands are considered Socially-Vulnerable Communities. A GIS layer identifying Socially-Vulnerable Communities is available at this link: <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect>.

Required Documents Inquiries

Question: How do I know which organizational documents I need to submit?

Answer: The online application system determines the list of required documents based on the legal entity type chosen. The ReConnect application guide - which is currently being updated – details the required documents for each entity type and will be made available before the application window opens at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect> under “Forms and Resources”.

Question: To whom should letters of support be addressed?

Answer: Letters of support can be included in your application and can be uploaded to the documents section in the online application system and addressed to:

Assistant Administrator Laurel Leverrier
Rural Utilities Service Telecommunications Program
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Note: Letters of support are not required.

Evaluation Criteria and Scoring Inquiries

Question: Where can I find an explanation of application evaluation points?

Answer: The application evaluation point system is provided in the October 25, 2021 Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA). Evaluation criteria can also be found at <https://reconnect.usda.gov>. Additional information is provided in the application guide – which is currently being updated – and will be made available before the application window opens at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect> under “Forms and Resources”.

Question: What are the application evaluation criteria?

Answer: Please consult the October 25, 2021 Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) for thorough details on evaluation criteria. Applications for loan-grant combinations, 100 percent grants, and 100 percent grants for Tribal Governments and Socially-Vulnerable Communities are scored and ranked against the following criteria:

Evaluation Criteria	Points
Rurality of the Proposed Service Area	25
Level of Existing Service	25
Economic Need of the Community	20
Affordability	20
Labor Standards	20
Tribal Lands	15
Local Governments, Nonprofits, and Cooperatives	15
Socially-Vulnerable Communities	15
Net Neutrality	10
Wholesale Broadband Services	10
Total: 175 Points	

Question: Can you provide more details on how to qualify for the points associated with each element of scoring?

Answer: While we recommend you always refer to the FOA, regulation, and application guide (which is currently being updated and will be made available before the application window opens at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect> under “Forms and Resources”) for comprehensive guidance, here is a summarization of scoring criteria:

- Rurality of PFSA (25 points):** Points are awarded for serving the least dense rural areas as measured by the population of the Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA) per square mile, or if the PFSA is located at least 100 miles from a city or town with a population of greater than 50,000 people. If multiple service areas are proposed, the density calculation will be made on the combined areas as if they were a single area; not based on average densities. For population densities of 6 or fewer, or if the PFSA is located 100 miles from a city or town of 50,000 or more people, 25 points will be awarded.
- Level of existing service (25 points):** Projects proposing to build in areas not receiving service of at least 25 Mbps downstream, 3 Mbps upstream will receive 25 points, with points awarded based on the number of households lacking such service the project will serve. Applicants must

provide supporting evidence that 25 Mbps downstream, 3 Mbps upstream service does not exist for those households. To the extent possible, you must identify all existing providers in the PFSA and indicate what level of service is actually being provided. However, you are not required to treat current, publicly-available FCC Form 477 data as unquestionable proof of what speed service currently exists.

- **Economic need of the community (20 points):** Economic need is based on the county poverty percentage of the PFSA in the application. The percentages must be determined using the United States Census Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) Program. For applications where 75 percent of the PFSA(s) are proposing to serve communities with a SAIPE score of 20 percent or higher, 20 points will be awarded. Proposed funded service areas located in geographic areas for which no SAIPE data exist will be determined to have an average SAIPE poverty percentage of 30 percent. Such geographic areas may include territories of the United States or other locations eligible for funding through the ReConnect Program. A GIS layer identifying SAIPE areas can be found in the ReConnect Program Service Area Map located at <https://tinyurl.com/bdccjhap>.
- **Affordability (20 points):** Applications can receive 20 points based on the level of affordability of their broadband prices. Applications will be evaluated on the pricing of the broadband services they will offer compared to existing broadband services in the proposed service area or based on a state or national average. You must demonstrate that the broadband prices you will offer are affordable to your target markets, provide information about the pricing and speed tiers you intend to offer, and include at least one low-cost option offered at speeds sufficient for a household with multiple users to simultaneously telework and engage in remote learning. We recommend you also commit to participating in the Federal Communication Commission's Lifeline Program, the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program and any successors to those programs that provide low-income consumers with discounts on broadband services.
- **Labor Standards (20 points):** It is important that necessary investments in broadband infrastructure be carried out in ways that produce high-quality infrastructure and promote efficiency. We understand the importance of promoting workforce development, and we encourage recipients to ensure their broadband projects use strong labor standards consistent with Tribal laws when projects propose to build infrastructure on Tribal Lands. Using these practices in construction projects promotes effective and efficient delivery of high-quality infrastructure and supports economic recovery through employment opportunities.
 - If applicable, include a description of how the project will incorporate strong labor standards, including:

- Whether workers (including contractors and subcontractors) will be paid wages at or above the prevailing rate*
- If the project will be covered by a project labor agreement
- What safety training, professional certifications, in-house training or licensure will be required of workers (including contractors and subcontractors)
- Whether a locally-based workforce will be used
- If work will be performed by a directly-employed workforce, or whether the employer has policies and practices in place to ensure employees of contractors and subcontractors are qualified
- Whether the applicant, its contractors, or subcontractors have had any violations of state or federal labor, workplace safety and health, or employment laws within the last five years.

*Prevailing rate means that all laborers and mechanics employed by contractors and subcontractors are paid wages at rates not less than those prevailing, as determined by the U.S. Secretary of Labor in accordance with the Davis-Bacon Act (information available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xexef>). Please refer to the Davis-Bacon Act for all questions pertaining to prevailing wages.

Twenty points will be awarded to applicants that commit to strong labor standards consistent with Tribal Laws when the project proposes to build infrastructure on Tribal Lands. Projects that propose to build infrastructure on Tribal Lands must follow Tribal Laws, including Tribal Employment Rights Ordinances (TERO) to be in compliance with a ReConnect award, regardless of receiving points under this standard. Rural Development reserves the right to adjust award amounts for unforeseen circumstances.

- **Tribal Lands (15 points):** For applicants that are Tribal Governments and Tribal entities as defined in the FOA – and at a minimum, 50 percent of the geographical area of the PFSA(s) will provide service on Tribal lands – 15 points will be awarded. For non-Tribal entities where at least 50 percent of the geographic area of the PFSA(s) will provide service on Tribal lands, 10 points will be awarded. Tribal lands are analyzed using the GIS layer in the ReConnect Program Service Area Map available at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/bdcccjhap>.
- **Local governments, nonprofits and cooperatives (15 points):** Applications submitted by local governments, nonprofits or cooperatives (including projects involving public-private partnerships where the local government, nonprofit, or cooperative is the applicant) will be awarded 15 points.

As defined by the October 25, 2021 Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), “local government” means “the administration of a particular town, county, or district, with representatives elected by those who live there.”

- **Socially-Vulnerable Communities (15 points):** For applications where at least 75 percent of the PFSA(s) propose to serve Socially-Vulnerable Communities, as defined in the October 25, 2021 FOA, 15 points will be awarded.
- **Net neutrality (10 points):** For applicants that commit to net neutrality, 10 points will be awarded. A board resolution or its equivalent must be submitted in the application confirming that the applicant’s networks shall not:
 1. block lawful content, applications, services, or non-harmful devices, subject to reasonable network management
 2. impair or degrade lawful internet traffic on the basis of internet content, application, or service, or use of a non-harmful device, subject to reasonable network management
 3. engage in paid prioritization – meaning the management of a broadband provider’s network to directly or indirectly favor some traffic over other traffic – including through use of techniques such as traffic shaping, prioritization, resource reservation, or other forms of preferential traffic management, either (a) in exchange for consideration (monetary or otherwise) from a third party, or (b) to benefit an affiliated entity
- **Wholesale broadband services (10 points):** Recipients that commit to offering wholesale broadband services at reasonable and nondiscriminatory rates and terms will receive 10 points.

Question: For “Level of Service,” what is the range of points based on the number of households not receiving 25 Mbps downstream, 3 Mbps upstream service?

Answer: There is no range of points for this scoring criteria. You will either receive all of the points, or none of the points. USDA’s Rural Utilities Service (RUS) will evaluate evidence of broadband service at or below 25 Mbps downstream, 3 Mbps upstream submitted by applicants seeking Level of Service points. To receive the 25 points, you must include clear and compelling evidence of the lack of 25/3 broadband access for households within your PFSA.

To be considered for these points, you must:

- Identify the number of households within each PFSA that lack access to broadband service at speeds of at least 25/3
- Provide supporting evidence the households lack access to such service

To the extent possible, you must identify all existing providers in the PFSA and indicate what level of service is actually being provided.

Question: How does an applicant determine what an affordable rate is for the PFSA?

Answer: Review the medium household income for the PFSA, identify any potential competition in the PFSA – including what rates they are proposing – and also review Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Urban Rate Survey Data and Resources (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xe35x>). Use this information to demonstrate the affordability of your proposed rate packages. You also are free to provide additional supporting information on the low cost option you are proposing.

Question: How will an applicant receive points for Labor Standards?

Answer: You must submit support demonstrating you will include clauses in construction contracts requiring contractors to implement wages at rates not less than those prevailing, as determined by the U.S. Secretary of Labor in accordance with subchapter IV of chapter 31 of title 40, United States Code (commonly known as the “Davis-Bacon Act” – information available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xexef>).

Question: How is population density (or rurality) calculated for application points?

Answer: For the purposes of the ReConnect Program, rurality is measured in one of two ways:

1. If the population of the proposed funded service area per square mile is 6 or fewer people
2. If the proposed funded service area is located at least 100 miles from a population center (a city or town with a population of greater than 50,000).

If multiple service areas are proposed, the density calculation will be made on the combined areas as if they were a single area, not the average densities. **Note:** areas with population densities with fewer people per square mile will receive the same number of points as areas with 6 or fewer people per square mile. No partial points will be awarded for other densities.

Question: How do I get points for wholesale broadband services?

Answer: Wholesale broadband services are broadband services purchased for resale to end-user customers. Applicants that commit to offering wholesale broadband services at rates and terms that are reasonable and nondiscriminatory will receive 10 points.

Question: Are all scoring criteria “all or nothing,” or can partial points be awarded?

Answer: Scoring criteria points are “all or nothing.” Partial points are not awarded under any of the ReConnect scoring criteria. You will either receive all points available in a given scoring category, or none.

Question: Are evaluation criteria datasets available for download?

Answer: Yes. The datasets used to determine evaluation criteria are available to download at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xextf6>. **Note:** These datasets represent a specific moment in time and will not be modified during the course of the current Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), nor can the data be challenged. The Evaluation Criteria Datasets available for download include:

- Economic Need of the Community (SAIPE)
- Rurality – 100 Miles from Urbanized Areas
- Socially-Vulnerable Communities
- Tribal Lands

Certifications Inquiries

Question: Does it matter what type of Professional Engineer (PE) certifies the project?

Answer: All applicants are required to submit the following certifications:

- Network Design
- Network Diagram
- Project Costs
- Buildout Timeline and Milestones
- Capital Investment Schedule

All of these must be certified by a Professional Engineer (PE). The PE must be licensed in at least one of the states where the proposed project will be constructed. The selection of the PE does not require prior RUS approval. However, it is your responsibility to hire PEs experienced in the design and construction of broadband networks.

Question: What certifications must an applicant sign?

Answer: You must sign and submit the following certifications within the ReConnect online application system and <https://www.SAM.gov> system. The only person permitted to sign and certify each item within the online application system is the Representative Signature Certifier (Rep-Sign-Cert) – additional information is available at this link: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/arr-resolution-instructions-samples.pdf>.

The following are required:

- Certification Regarding Architectural Barriers
- Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, and Other Responsibility Matters – Primary Covered Transactions
- Certificate Regarding Flood Hazard Area Precautions
- Certification Regarding Lobbying for Contracts, Grants, Loans and Cooperative Agreements
- Civil Rights Compliance Certification
- Federal Collection Policies for Commercial Debt Certification
- Representations Regarding Felony Conviction (Required only for Non-profit, For-profit corporations, and Cooperatives and Mutual Organizations)
- Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 Certification
- Compliance with RUS Award Documents

Some of the certifications on this list require you to answer questions or upload documents before signing.

In addition, other parts of the application require certifications that vary according to the specifics of each proposed project. For guidance, consult the October 25, 2021 Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) available under “Forms and Resources” at this link: <https://reconnect.usda.gov>. The application guide – which is currently being updated - also provides additional details and will be made available before the application window opens at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect> under “Forms and Resources”.

Reminder: Prior to submitting your application, you must create a SAM.gov registration, or ensure your existing registration is current. As part of this process, you are required to complete financial assistance representations and certifications before your registration can be activated. It can take up to three weeks to complete changes in SAM.gov. ReConnect applications cannot be submitted without a valid, current SAM.gov registration. Please allow ample time to complete this task.

