



December 23, 2024

Connecting Constituents with Federal Assistance for Broadband

This In Focus includes a list of selected federal agencies and programs that support broadband initiatives as the primary eligible funding activity. The programs included here vary in scope and funding level and are not a comprehensive list of all federal programs that may fund broadband activities.

Some programs award funds to state and local governments, which in turn may issue grant awards to other entities. Other programs make grant awards to eligible entities directly on a competitive basis. Interested applicants are encouraged to contact federal agencies, state agencies, or both for information on eligibility, the application process, award cycles, and funding availability. Each program's funding availability depends on annual appropriations. Where applicable, program websites and Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) numbers are included to provide direct access to information about each program. CFDA numbers can be used to search assistance listings for potential open funding opportunities for the competitive grant programs at <https://grants.gov>.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC)

The FCC directs the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) to administer the following programs. These programs provide subsidies or discounts for broadband-related services to eligible entities.

High Cost Program

The High Cost Program provides subsidies through legacy (voice service) and modernized (broadband service) funds to eligible telecommunications carriers for services in rural areas that are unserved or underserved.

<https://www.usac.org/high-cost/funds/>

Lifeline Program

The Lifeline Program provides subsidies to telecommunication service providers to cover up to \$9.25, or \$34.25 on tribal lands, toward the monthly costs of phone or internet service for eligible consumers. Eligibility is determined based on an income of no more than 135% of the federal poverty guidelines or participation in a Lifeline-qualifying program as detailed on USAC's Lifeline Consumer Eligibility resource. Eligibility is limited to one beneficiary per household.

<https://www.usac.org/lifeline/get-started/>

Rural Health Care (RHC) Program

The RHC Program provides funding to eligible public or nonprofit health care providers for broadband to deliver health care.

<https://www.usac.org/rural-health-care/get-started/>

Schools and Libraries (E-Rate) Program

The E-Rate Program assists individual schools, school districts, and libraries with discounts on services under the following two categories:

- Category One: Connectivity services to a school or library, such as telecommunications, telecommunications services, and internet access.
- Category Two: Connectivity services within a school or library, such as internal connections, basic maintenance of internal connections, and managed internal broadband services.

<https://www.usac.org/e-rate/get-started/>

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

USDA's Office of Rural Development (RD) administers grant and loan programs to entities located in defined rural areas. For additional information on eligibility, contact the USDA RD's State Office. Information about USDA's broadband programs is available at the department's Telecom Programs page.

Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans & Loan Guarantees Program

The Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans & Loan Guarantees program provides loan and loan guarantees to state and local governmental entities, including federally recognized tribes, and nonprofit and for-profit businesses for the purpose of financing the construction, maintenance, improvement, and expansion of telephone service and broadband in rural areas.

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/telecommunications-programs/telecommunications-infrastructure-loans-loan-guarantees>

National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)

Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program

The Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program supports efforts to achieve digital equity, promote digital inclusion activities, and spur greater adoption and meaningful use of

broadband among the Covered Populations as defined by 47 U.S.C. §1721(8).

CFDA 11.036

<https://www.ntia.gov/funding-programs/internet-all/digital-equity-act-programs/digital-equity-competitive-grant-program>

State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program

The State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program provides funds for states and territories to implement their digital equity plans developed with the funding from the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program.

CFDA 11.032

<https://www.ntia.gov/funding-programs/internet-all/digital-equity-act-programs/state-digital-equity-capacity-grant-program>

Additional Resources

Additional federal funding opportunities and state broadband resources are available from the following National Telecommunications and Information Administration BroadbandUSA resources. BroadbandUSA serves as an online portal for NTIA to aggregate broadband funding, guidance, and technical resources for stakeholders seeking to expand broadband connectivity and promote digital inclusion.

- The “Federal Resources” webpage on the BroadbandUSA site provides a link to an updated spreadsheet of programs, *Federal Broadband Funding Opportunities*, that includes federal funding opportunities where broadband initiatives are one of the

many possible eligible activities. Updates about grant program guidance and webinars can be received by subscribing to the BroadbandUSA Newsletter.

- The State Broadband Leaders Network (SBLN) provides information on the state broadband websites, state broadband contacts, and state broadband coordinators. Broadband grant resources specific to the states can be identified through these resources.

For federal funding opportunities related to emergency communication initiatives, see CRS Report R45213, *Federal Grants and Loans for State and Local Emergency Communications Projects: Frequently Asked Questions*, by Jill C. Gallagher.

Regional commissions composed of member state governors and a federally appointed co-chair receive federal appropriations for regional economic development, which may be used for infrastructure-related projects, among other purposes. For additional information about these commissions, see CRS Report R45997, *Federal Regional Commissions and Authorities: Structural Features and Function*, by Julie M. Lawhorn.

For general information about grants, see CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*, by Maria Kreiser, and CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*, by Maria Kreiser.

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IF12859

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