



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture • Rural Development

1550 Earl Core Road, Suite 101 • Morgantown, WV 26505

Phone: 304.284.4860 OR 1.800.295.8228 • Fax: 304.284.4893 • TDD: 304.284.4836 • Web: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/wv>

Gail Bennett, Public Affairs Specialist – (304) 284-4875

Contact: Bart Kendrick (202) 720-0698

USDA Invites Applications for Grants to Connect Rural Communities to Broadband Service

WASHINGTON, March 4, 2011 – USDA Rural Utilities Service (RUS) Administrator Jonathan Adelstein announced that USDA is accepting applications for grants to provide broadband access in rural communities currently without broadband service. Joining him to make the announcement was Aneesh Chopra, Chief Technology Officer, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP).

“As President Obama has said, ‘Students should graduate from high school prepared for college and a career – no matter who you are or where you come from’ – and this program connects school children to educational opportunities via the Internet in some of America’s most remote locations,” Adelstein said. “It also enhances commerce, public safety, and health care in rural areas that have been overlooked by modern communications technology. Broadband is an important part of the Obama Administration’s effort to help rural America ‘win the future.’”

“The industries and jobs of the future will be increasingly reliant upon our ability to move people, goods and information,” said Chopra. “So if we want new jobs and businesses here in America, especially in our most rural communities, we’ve got to have a robust digital infrastructure as supported by investments through programs like Community Connect.”

Funding is provided through the Community Connect Grant program. Grants are available to communities in the most rural, economically challenged areas where loans would not be sustainable. Funds may be used to construct, acquire or lease facilities to deploy broadband to residents, businesses and essential community facilities such as police and fire stations, libraries, schools, and health care clinics.

Eligible entities are incorporated organizations, Tribes and tribal organizations, state and local government bodies, for-profit or non-profit cooperatives, private corporations and limited liability corporations. Individuals are not eligible to apply. Grants range from \$50,000 to \$1.5 million. While grants cannot be renewed, applications to extend existing projects are welcome. Each project requires matching contributions, must serve a rural area where broadband service does not exist, must provide services to critical communities free of charge for two years, and must offer basic service to all premises within the proposed service area.

In Huerfano, New Mexico, for example, a Community Connect grant has measurably changed lives of the 400 residents in the northeast part of the Navajo Nation. Huerfano residents and community facilities, such as the community center, senior center, and schools, now have access to affordable phone and Internet service. Broadband has allowed residents to communicate with

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family members and access educational and health care information, which is critical to sustaining the Tribe's way of life. To learn more about this program, visit:
<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/STELPRD4007349.html>

Information on available funding and application requirements are published on page 12017 of the March 4, 2011 Federal Register. More information on Community Connect Grants, including the application guide, can be viewed and downloaded from the USDA Rural Development website.

USDA, through its Rural Development mission area, administers and manages more than 40 housing, business and community infrastructure and facility programs through a national network of employees located in the nation's capital and state and local offices. These programs are designed to improve the economic stability of rural communities, businesses, residents, farmers and ranchers and improve the quality of life in rural America. Rural Development has an existing portfolio of more than \$146 billion in loans and loan guarantees.

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Further information on USDA Rural Development may be obtained by visiting USDA's web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>. In West Virginia, call 1-800-295-8228 to be put in touch with the appropriate personnel serving your county. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202.720.2600 (voice and TDD).

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