



Legislative UPDATE

August 10, 2018
Number 23

USDA Rural Broadband Pilot Program

Last week, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released [a notice seeking comment](#) on its planned \$600 million rural broadband pilot program. The program is expected to be a one-time funding opportunity that will include loans and grants for projects in areas with 20,000 or fewer population.

Local governments are among the eligible recipients for funds. Some aspects of eligibility are dictated by the federal Consolidated Budget Act of 2018, but the USDA is seeking feedback on the following:

- Ways to evaluate a rural household's "sufficient access" to broadband e-connectivity based on download and upload speeds.
- How broadband service affordability should be factored into the program.
- Best options to verify the speed of broadband service provided to rural households.
- Best leading indicators of the potential project benefits for rural industries, such as agriculture, manufacturing, e-commerce, transportation, health care, and education.

The USDA notice also provided that "[p]ublic input on methods to evaluate the viability of applications that include local utility partnership arrangements is also being sought."

Comments are due by September 10, 2018. The National League of Cities plans to comment on this proceeding. NLC and TML will share eligibility information for the funding when it has been finalized and is available.

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