



Program Guidelines

The Broadband Accessibility Grant Program is designed to offset the capital expenses in the deployment of broadband in unserved areas. The goal of this program is to facilitate broadband access to all Tennesseans while promoting practices that increase deployment and encourage adoption. Funds will be targeted to areas that are unlikely to receive broadband service without grant funding.

Eligible Applicants

- Applicants must be authorized to provide retail broadband in the area proposed to be served with grant funding.
- Types of eligible applicants:
 - Political subdivisions or entities of political subdivisions,
 - Corporations,
 - Limited liability companies,
 - Partnerships or other business entities,
 - Cooperatives organized under Tenn. Code. Ann. § 65-25-101 et seq. and § 65-29-101 et seq., and
 - Any other entity authorized by state law to provide broadband services.

Eligible Areas

- Grant funding can only be used to pay for costs associated with deployment of broadband to unserved areas.
- An unserved area is defined as a designated geographic area in which households or businesses are without a fixed, terrestrial connection supporting at least 10 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload speeds.
- Determination of the available broadband service:
 - The most recent available data from the FCC Form 477 (June 2016) will be used to determine existing service levels.
 - Because this data is collected on a census block level and can overstate the availability of services, an applicant is permitted to provide additional information to demonstrate that the proposed service area is in fact unserved.
 - Additional information must be sufficient to conclude that an area is in fact eligible and may include but is not limited to:
 - Statistically significant survey data for the designated area, or
 - Documentation of the location of existing infrastructure within a given census block.

- Application scoring will include an evaluation of the likelihood that the proposed area will receive broadband service without grant funding. This will include consideration of CAF II eligible areas and any other federal funding sources that will result in the provision of at least 10/1 service.
- Applications must include a written description and map file (acceptable formats: .shp, .kml, or .kmz) of the proposed service area.
- Maps of areas eligible according to the FCC data will be available as well as a downloadable GIS shapefile for use in preparing an application.
- Applicants may provide information regarding additional infrastructure deployments that are not eligible for grant funding to provide context for the proposed project in the relevant portions of the application.

Eligible expenses

- The grant will cover up to a certain percentage of eligible project expenses depending on the current broadband service level of the county to be served according to the most recent FCC data:
 - 70%: Counties with more than 50% of the population without broadband
 - 60%: Counties with 25-50% of the population without broadband
 - 50%: Counties with less than 25% of the population without broadband access
- Match rates from projects serving multiple counties will be determined by averaging the match rates from the counties to be served.
- Applicants with additional local match or leveraged funds will receive additional points in the scoring process. Federal grant or other federal broadband funding is not an eligible match.
- Eligible project cost: costs associated with the installation and/or acquisition of middle-mile and last-mile broadband infrastructure that supports broadband service at the locations and speeds identified in the application.
 - Examples: Project planning, construction permits, construction of facilities, equipment, installation, and test of service.
- Ineligible costs:
 - General broadband planning not associated with a specific last-mile build,
 - Operational expenses,
 - Middle-mile infrastructure that is not directly connected to service provision for an end user,
 - Expenses related to the provision of telephone or video services which are not necessary for the delivery of broadband services.
- Applicants will be required to provide a preliminary technical evaluation of the project certified by a Professional Engineer (PE) registered in Tennessee or another qualified individual. If the evaluation is not stamped by a PE, applicants must provide the credentials of the individual who prepared the report.
- TNECD reserves the right to amend the scope of grant awards or partially fund applications.

Statutory Priorities

The enabling legislation for the grant program establishes priority for projects that:

- Serve locations without access to download speeds of at least ten megabits per second (10 Mbps) and upload speeds of at least one megabit per second (1 Mbps);
- Propose to acquire and install infrastructure that supports broadband services scalable to higher download and upload speeds without taking precedent over the number of locations and size of the area to be served;
- Serve locations with community support including participation in the Broadband Ready Community program;
- Have not received funds or have not been designated to receive funds through other state or federally funded broadband grant programs; and
- Will provide higher download and upload speeds to locations served.

Reimbursement and Accountability

- Funds disbursement will occur on a reimbursable basis.
- For the first 85% of the grant award, expenses will be reimbursed as incurred and requests for payment are submitted. The remaining 15% of grant funds will be available upon submission of grant closeout and final report.
- Grant closeout will require certification from a PE that build has been completed; that the design and installation conforms to all applicable federal, state, and local requirements and standard engineering practice; and that the installed infrastructure will provide the service levels stated in the application.
- If project costs exceed the budget included with the application, grantees will still be required to finish the proposed project without an increase in the grant award.
- Grantees will be required at a minimum to offer service at pricing and speed levels stated in the application for 3 years after close out of the contract.
- TNECD reserves the right to require an accountability agreement in addition to the grant contract.

Adoption and Community Involvement

Application scoring will include an evaluation of the applicant's broadband adoption plans and community impact. Examples include:

- Digital literacy training,
- Low income assistance programs (for equipment and/or broadband service),
- Partnerships with co-working or entrepreneurship organizations,
- Awareness or marketing campaigns,
- Service provision to community anchor institutions and/or additional programing, and
- Other programs designed to meet the needs of the local community.

Public Comment for Pending Applications

To ensure transparency and best use of taxpayer funds, the application process will include a public comment period.

- Within 3 business days of the close of applications, TNECD will post a description of the applications received including the proposed service area.
- The online public comment period will last from November 22, 2017 until December 15, 2017.
- Providers are encouraged to submit comments and corresponding documentation if:
 - The area proposed to be served already has service available;
 - Construction is underway in the area proposed to be served and will be completed within 12 months; or
 - The area proposed to be served is in future expansion plans.
- Where evidence demonstrates that an area is currently served (with a 10/1 fixed, terrestrial connection) that area will be disqualified. Documentation that shows that a provider anticipates serving an area in the future will be factored into the scoring to demonstrate that the area is likely to be served without grant funding.

Application Timeline

September 7, 2017	Applications Available
September 8, 2017	Webinar (10-11 am CDT)
September 12, 2017	Webinar (2-3 pm CDT)
September 13, 2017	West TN Regional Meeting (Jackson, 10-11 am CDT)
September 15, 2017	East TN Regional Meeting (Knoxville, 11-12 pm EDT)
September 21, 2017	Middle TN Regional Meeting (Nashville, 1-2 pm CDT)
November 13, 2017	Questions Due by 5 pm CST
November 17, 2017	Applications Due by 5 pm CST
November 22, 2017	Application Descriptions Posted and Public Comment Period Begins
December 15, 2017	Public Comment Period Closes at 5:00 pm CST
January 2018	Grantees Announced

** Projects must be completed within 2 years of the start of contract.