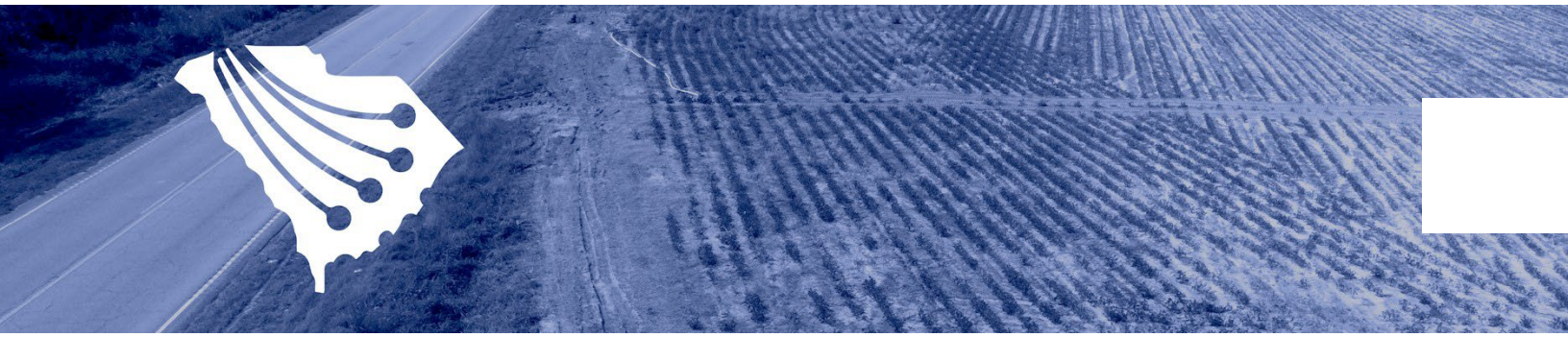


**South Carolina 2023 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Capital Projects Fund (CPF)**
**1.0 Broadband Grant Program**
Application Guidelines

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## Purpose

The 2023 American Rescue Plan Act ("ARPA") Capital Projects Fund ("CPF") Grant Program seeks to expand broadband infrastructure to households, business, and communities in the State. This grant program will directly support South Carolina Act 244 (July 25, 2022), which authorizes the Office of Broadband Coordinator, an office within the Office of Regulatory Staff ("ORS") that is more commonly known as the SC Broadband Office ("SCBBO"), to expand broadband infrastructure to households, businesses, and communities that are unserved or underserved by broadband services.

The US Department of the Treasury has allocated $185,765,655 of American Rescue Plan Act ("ARPA") funds, less administrative costs, to provide financial assistance to install and deliver broadband infrastructure in unserved areas throughout South Carolina. This competitive grant program is being administered by the SCBBO, depending on the number of qualified applications, the office has a goal of awarding $100,000,000 during this grant cycle, but may award up to $184,521,661 of the allocated ARPA funds.

ARPA CPF shall prioritize 1) unserved areas with no current Internet Service Provider ("ISP"), 2) Difficult Development Areas as identified by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD"), 3) census blocks that have a high concentration of unserved public K-12 student households as documented by the South Carolina Department of Education, and 4) Main Street Eligible Service Areas (ESAs).

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## Designated Contact Person

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## Questions

Questions must be submitted using the SCBBO CPF Comment form available at: **https://arcg.is/1uKXPX**, prior to the close of the Application Period. A Frequently Asked Questions ("FAQ"), document will be published with answers to questions. Individual responses will not be provided. An FAQ will be published on the ORS website at https://ors.sc.gov/broadband/investments/state/arpacpf.

## Schedule of Events

| Event | Date |
|---|---|
| **BSL Fabric Availability Challenge Period Opens** | 4/21/2023 |
| **Draft Eligibility Map Published on the ORS Website** | 5/1/2023 |
| **BSL Fabric Availability Challenge Period Closes** | 5/8/2023 |
| **Application Period Opens / Funded Project Register (FPR) Opens** | 5/15/2023 |
| **Availability Challenges accepted and posted to ORS Website as Final Eligibility Map** | 5/18/2023 |
| **CPF Webinar hosted by ORS** | 5/23/2023 |
| **Submission period for the FPR closes** | 6/16/2023 |
| **Application Period Closes** | 7/17/2023 |
| **Submitted Applications Posted on the ORS Website / Comment Period Opens** | 7/19/2023 |
| **Comment Period Closes** | 8/18/2023 |
| **Internal Application Review / Selection** | 8/31/2023 |
| **Funding Agreements Sent to the Companies** | 10/30/2023 |
| **Funding Agreements Returned to the ORS** | 11/27/2023 |
| **Notices to Proceed ("NTP") Issued** | 12/18/2023 |
| **1st - 3 Month Financial/Construction Progress Report and Expenses Due – Period of: NTP – 2/29/2024** | 3/29/2024 |
| **2nd - 3 Month Financial/Construction Progress Report and Expenses Due – Period of: 3/1/2024 – 5/31/2024** | 6/28/2024 |
| **3rd - 3 Month Financial/Construction Progress Report and Expenses Due – Period of: 6/1/2024 – 8/31/2024** | 9/27/2024 |
| **4th - 3 Month Financial/Construction Progress Report and Expenses Due – Period of: 9/1/2024 – 11/30/2024** | 12/27/2024 |
| **5th - 3 Month Financial/Construction Progress Report and Expenses Due – Period of: 12/1/2024 – 2/28/2025** | 3/28/2025 |
| **6th - 3 Month Financial/Construction Progress Report and Expenses Due – Period of: 3/1/2025 – 5/31/2025** | 6/27/2025 |
| **7th - 3 Month Financial/Construction Progress Report and Expenses Due – Period of: 6/1/2025 – 8/31/2025** | 9/26/2025 |
| **Project Completion** | 12/29/2025 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Final Reporting Due** | 2/2/2026 |

** All dates reflect no later than and are subject to change.*

All ARPA CPF 1.0 information, including the Eligibility Map depicting priority areas and detailed Schedule of Events are posted to the ORS website at: https://ors.sc.gov/broadband/investments/state/arpacpf

## Funding Award Selected

Applicants will be notified in writing, which may include email, if their proposed project is approved for funding, subject to the execution of a contractual funding agreement approved by the ORS.

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## Funding Agreement Process

Selected Applicants must enter into a contractual funding agreement ("Funding Agreement") with the ORS. The ORS reserves the right to negotiate the final terms and conditions of the Funding Agreement with Applicants whose proposals are selected and to reject any Applicants with whom the ORS cannot agree to terms and conditions, including but not limited to the addition and omission of proposed funded areas provided by an Applicant. Such Funding Agreement is not valid until approved by the ORS. Selected Applicants must be in receipt of a Notice to Proceed before any work may begin. With the exception of allowable engineering expenses, any project costs incurred prior to receipt of a Notice to Proceed are ineligible expenses under this grant program. The anticipated Funding Agreement term begins on the effective date of the Funding Agreement and construction must be completed by the deadline as set forth in the timeline.

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## Definitions

**Broadband Serviceable Locations ("BSL")** - A broadband serviceable location is defined as "a business or residential location in the United States at which fixed broadband Internet access service is, or can be, installed." A residential BSL includes all residential structures, including structures that are (or contain) housing units or group quarters (as those terms are defined by the United States Census Bureau). A business BSL includes "all non-residential (business, government, non-profit, etc.) structures that are on property without residential locations and that would expect to demand Internet access service."

**Eligibility Map** - The SC Broadband Office analysis of Federal Communications Commission ("FCC") Broadband Data Collection ("BDC") Submission, Dec. 31, 2022. BDC data is aggregated to 2020 Census Blocks, into four categories (*Priority Areas, Main Street Priority Areas, Unserved, and Partially Served*). Satellite, mobile broadband, and all DSL services are excluded. Census blocks in the eligibility map will be the only areas available for funding.

**Served –** A BSL as defined by the FCC is considered served if standard broadband service at reliable speeds of 25/3 megabits per second ("Mbps") download/upload is available to the residence or business via wire line cable or fiber connection at no additional charge for aid in construction cost (standard hookup fees are excluded from this provision). If the broadband customer is asked or required to bear the additional costs to construct a drop or line to the residence or business to obtain broadband service at reliable speeds of 25/3 Mbps download/upload, then the structure is considered unserved.

**Unserved –** Any BSL at which standard broadband service at reliable speeds of 25/3 Mbps download/upload is unavailable to the BSL without additional charge for aid in construction cost as of the 5/2023 Eligibility Map published by the SCBBO. Note, fixed wireless, satellite, or wire-lined copper connections via dial up (or DSL) connection are considered unserved.

**Challenges –** Availability challenges may submitted the SCBBO During the availability challenge period. Comments must be provided to the SCBBO by the deadline set forth in the timeline in order to be considered, and if accepted, will serve as an update to the 5/2023 Eligibility Map.

**Comments –** A comment period provides the ISPs or any interested party the opportunity to raise issues regarding an application submitted for grant funding. Comments must be provided to the SCBBO by the deadline set forth in the timeline in order to be considered.

**Partnerships –** Any documented collaboration between an Applicant and a third party.

**Network Resiliency –** Broadband Infrastructure that provides continuous business operation (i.e., highly resistant to disruption and able to operate in a degraded mode if damaged), rapid recovery if failure does occur, and the ability to scale to meet rapid or unpredictable demands.

**Universal Service** – Telecommunications services including internet access, internet services, and internet connection services and other services that are identified by the FCC as eligible for federal universal service support mechanisms. *See* 47 U.S.C. 254(c), (h)(5)(A)(ii). Universal service is the principle that all Americans should have access to communications services. Since that time, universal service policies have helped make telephone service universally available, even in remote rural areas. Today, the FCC recognizes high-speed Internet as the 21st Century's essential communications technology and is working to make broadband as universally available as telephone services, while continuing to support telephone services.

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## Challenging Availability of FCC Broadband Serviceable Locations

This funding is not approved for projects that may duplicate existing broadband facilities that meet or exceed the 25/3 Mbps download/upload requirement. The SCBBO aggregated the FCC BSL structures for the State of South Carolina and classified which structures are reflected as unserved utilizing the definition of 'unserved' identified in these guidelines. ISPs who have executed a User Tier 2 License Agreement with CostQuest currently providing access to standard broadband service in South Carolina at reliable speeds at or above 25/3 Mbps download/upload to an FCC BSL location may challenge the status of availability for broadband service at these structures. Licensing of this data is restricted for the sole use to correct, challenge, and/or submit broadband availability data to the FCC in the Broadband Data Collection as required by the Broadband DATA Act, 47 U.S.C. § 641 et seq. Therefore, the scope of this availability challenge is for ISPs to identify BSL structures the SCBBO has flagged as unserved, that may in fact have access and should be considered served utilizing the definition of 'served' identified in these guidelines. ISPs may also challenge whether a BSL point meets the definition of a serviceable location as defined in these guidelines and should be removed from the list of unserved BSL points. Challenged BSL data must be sent back to the FCC by the ISP for correction during the next reporting cycle.

ISPs must register with the SCBBO to participate in the availability challenge process by using the following form: https://arcg.is/1COCbX. A copy of their CostQuest User Tier 2 License Agreement must also be provided prior to receiving a copy of a subset of the unserved BSL data for areas where mass market broadband service is offered by a given challenger. Challenges must be received by the SCBBO by the deadline as set forth in the timeline. A successful challenge may occur when sufficient evidence is provided by the ISP (which may be requested by the SCBBO), a subset of BSL data representing locations understood as unserved by the SCBBO but are in fact served according to the challenger are provided to the SCBBO, and a signed affidavit attesting representations are accurate and subsequent challenged BSL data will be reported to the FCC under the next data update cycle. Upon completion of registration, ISPs will be able to download data and obtain an MS Word formatted copy of the affidavit for their use from the ORS Citrix ShareFile site. Only

the points provided by SCBBO may be challenged. All data and associated documentation provided by a challenger must be uploaded to the ORS Citrix ShareFile site for ARPA CPF 1.0, emails will not be accepted. By submitting BSL data back to the SCBBO as part of the 2023 Availability Challenge, ISP's acknowledge and agree submitting false or inaccurate data to the SCBBO may result in the exclusion of participating in current and future grant rounds, as well as the ability to submit future challenges and/or comments to the SCBBO. Results of this challenge process will assist in creating the Final Eligibility Map that will be used for applications. This Final Eligibility Map will be published on ORS' website. Further instructions regarding the Final Eligibility Map are provided below.

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## Final Eligibility Map and Data for Applying

The SCBBO will publish a draft Eligibility Map as set forth in the timeline. This map should not be used as a basis for applying to the ARPA CPF 1.0 grant program, its use is for planning purposes only. Upon completion of the availability challenge process, SCBBO will publish a final Eligibility Map as set forth in the timeline. Applicants must use the final version of the SCBBO Broadband Eligibility Map to apply to the correct 2020 Census Blocks for the ARPA CPF 1.0 grant program. A list depicting all eligible census blocks in CSV and ESRI shapefile format will be posted on Citrix in the Capital Projects Fund 1.0 "Map and Data Folder".

In addition, a final list of all eligible BSLs will be published to the Citrix folder referenced above. Access will be granted when the Applicant has filled out the data access request form located here https://arcg.is/1fiq1j and the availability challenge data form located here https://arcg.is/1COCbX. ISPs cannot apply for ARPA CPF 1.0 without providing a copy of their signed CostQuest Tier 2 license which must be uploaded to Citrix Capital Projects Fund 1.0 "Availability Challenge 2023" folder.

Applicants must use the SCBBO data published to the Citrix Capital Projects Fund 1.0 "Maps and Data" folder as their starting point (as referenced above, these are the final census blocks and final point locations eligible for funding, post-availability challenge process). ISPs must upload a subset of the eligible census block data and eligible BSL data to their Citrix Capital Projects Fund 1.0 "GIS Data" folder.

Data provided in support of this grant program must be paired alongside their completed grant application and associated attachments in the "Applications and Attachments" folder. Do not change the format or attribution of the files provided.

ISPs must create and provide shapefile layers of their proposed linework and a point layer representing their network junctions linking existing facilities to newly proposed facilities in their project area. Please see Attachment 1 (GIS Data dictionary), for proper field attributions.

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## Comments to ISP Grant Applications

The SCBBO will receive comments on grant applications by using the following form (NO COMMENTS ON AVAILABILTY WILL BE ACCEPTED): **https://arcg.is/1feb9m0** and submitting supplemental evidence (when applicable), to the Citrix ShareFile site for ARPA CPF, if provided by the deadline of as set forth in the timeline.

Upon notice by ORS to an Applicant stating the SCBBO has received comment(s) on a grant application, Applicants may, within three (3) business days:

1. Submit a response to the comments containing specific evidence, where applicable

2. Demonstrate with specific evidence the ISP's claims are not valid or incorrect;
3. Modify the application to meet the criteria if necessary; or
4. Withdraw their application.

Upon review of the application, the challenge, the Applicant's response, and additional information (if any) requested and provided to the ORS, the ORS will make a determination concerning the challenge. Such determination shall be final and binding upon both the Applicant and the commenter. Email will be deemed a sufficient means of communicating the final determination.

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## Funded Project Register

To comply with ARPA CPF requirements, and in an effort to avoid duplication of facilities to the greatest extent practicable, SCBBO will afford each ISP, county, or municipal government the opportunity to share their fully funded projects with the SCBBO in order to accelerate broadband deployment in unserved areas of the State.

For broadband infrastructure funds associated with ARPA CPF, the SCBBO seeks to avoid duplicating investments and facilities by collecting geospatial information and construction-related detail for any **Privately Funded Projects**, the **FCC's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund ("RDOF")**, the **USDA's ReConnect Program**, as well as any county or municipal **ARPA Local Fiscal Recovery Funds ("LFRF")** investments. Properly documented projects will be maintained in the SCBBO Funded Project Register ("FPR") for the duration of the indicated FPR construction period. However, by accepting this information, SCBBO makes no affirmation or commitment that it will not fund those unserved areas for which there is an identified need for additional broadband infrastructure investment, notwithstanding any existing state or federal funding commitments.

The SCBBO will accept eligible project submissions for the FPR from **May 15th 2023 through June 16th 2023**, at midnight Eastern Standard Time. Eligible projects must represent construction that will be completed by June 30, 2024.

More detailed information for the FPR may be found at https://ors.sc.gov/broadband/investments/state/arpacpf.

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## Eligible/Ineligible Activities under ARPA CPF 1.0

Any ISP's project currently under contract or under construction is not eligible to apply. An Applicant may submit no more than 5 applications for any single parent holding company. If an Applicant applies for a priority area main street ESA, the application for the main street ESA will not count towards the ISP's 5 application limit. The Applicant must provide evidence that each project will be completed by the deadline set forth in the timeline in order to be considered. To be eligible, the Applicant must fund a financial match of the total project cost but may use funds from other sources to make its match. The use of other federal funds that seek to braid or blend projects are permissible but must be disclosed and tracked such that compliance is maintained around all federal funding sources. The Applicant must provide proof that it has secured the necessary funds to meet its proposed match requirement.

**After the application period has closed, there shall be no further telephonic, email, text messages, or in-person contact by Applicants, their agents, or representatives with the ORS and SCBBO in an attempt to lobby or influence the approval of its applications relating to the ARPA CPF grant program (known as the "quiet period").** Only formal written comments regarding submitted applications, which are due by the

deadline set forth in the timeline will be accepted and considered by the SCBBO. Any improper contact with the ORS can lead to disqualification of the application. The ORS may contact the Applicant to seek clarification or additional information regarding an application. The quiet period will terminate upon receipt of the Funding Agreement.

To be eligible for funding, a project must meet the Universal Broadband Service requirements established in these guidelines. Any deviation from the Universal Broadband Service requirements will require a written request by the Applicant and must be documented in the Funding Agreement for each project.

### Universal Service Broadband Requirement

Upon approval of a project under this grant program, all existing BSL's (whether recognized by the FCC or not), in the Project Area must be served in a manner that is non-discriminatory, at speeds or technology equal to or greater than the minimum required in these guidelines, and without additional construction or startup costs to the customer. New construction or development occurring after a notice to proceed has been issued by the SCBBO is exempt from this provision.

### Projects and associated Applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

1. Each project must contain at least one census block that includes a high-priority area. Census blocks must be unserved and/or partially served according to the SC Broadband Office 5/2023 Eligibility Map. Census blocks applied for do **NOT** have to be contiguous.
2. Applicant must provide access to 100% of the BSL's in the entire project area outlined in the grant application upon completion of the project. Applicants must identify all BSL's in a given census block (see Project Applications section below). An Applicant must submit adequate justification in their grant application if they are not providing access to 100% of the structures in the project area. SCBBO maintains sole discretion as to whether any such justification is deemed acceptable. Inadequate justification may result in rejection of the application.
3. Private ISPs, public ISPs, and ISPs working in partnership with electric and telecommunication cooperatives and local governments are the only eligible Applicants for the ARPA CPF grant program.
4. Deploy new broadband infrastructure in unserved and/or partially served areas to include at least 1 priority area, including: 1) areas with no current ISPs, 2) Difficult Development Areas as identified by HUD, 3) areas with a high concentration of public K-12 student households, or 4) within a main street eligible service area.
5. For projects **excluding** a main street ESA, Applicants shall propose a financial match percentage not to exceed a maximum of 75% for each project submitted and must disclose the source of those funds. Additional documented and disclosed third-party financial contributions (public or private), for a project are permissible, proof of available financing is required.
6. For projects **including** a main street ESA, Applicants shall propose a financial match percentage not to exceed a maximum of 90% for each project submitted and must disclose the source of those funds. Additional documented and disclosed third-party financial contributions (public or private), for a project are permissible, proof of available financing is required. Additionally, in-kind match of up to 10% is required for projects which include a main street ESA. A main street ESA work plan is required as a separate attachment to the grant application. Construction and network activation must be complete within the 1st year of the project (by November 30, 2024), the 2nd year of the project must include main street-related activities through project completion (November 28, 2025). ORS will allow the Applicant to submit a one-time milestone invoice for 33% of the eligible project cost at the end of construction. The remaining 67% of eligible costs, up to the grant award, will be submitted to ORS on the final reporting date of 12/31/2025 as shown on the project timeline. Should the Applicant choose a 75% or less financial match percent, in-kind match is not required. The nature of in-kind

match must include item a. below, and may include but are not limited to any combination of the following additional activities identified in items b. through e.:

a. Staff resources for customer service and/or technical support, located within the main street ESA through the end of November 2025.

b. Provide hardware, software, and necessary broadband connectivity to conduct in-person trainings which focuses on enabling work, telehealth monitoring, education, and economic development on a quarterly basis and facilitate outreach events semi-annually within the main street ESA through the end of November 2025.

c. Provide free Wi-Fi connectivity to citizens within the main street ESA through the end of November 2025.

d. Purchase hardware (laptop, tablet) and free internet for students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch in the project area through the end of November 2025.

e. Other (subject to ORS approval).

7. All projects must utilize wireline technology that is capable of reliably meeting or exceeding 100/100 Mbps symmetric (download/upload) speeds; provided, however, if such speeds are not practicable because of geography, topography, or excessive costs, the project shall be designed to deliver 100/20 Mbps download/upload speeds and be scalable to 100/100 Mbps symmetrical download/upload speeds. If not symmetrical, the Applicant must provide an affidavit that such speeds are not practicable and provide support for its assertion.

8. A project that does not overbuild another ISP's existing wired broadband network that currently delivers service at sustainable speeds equal to or greater than the 25/3 Mbps minimum benchmark to all requesting customers without additional charges. (Networks that cannot deliver or sustain reliable 25/3 or cannot deliver service without additional construction or setup charges may be overbuilt.)

9. Upon project completion, provide retail broadband service verifying all addresses are searchable through the ISPs online service signup search portal (as applicable), within the Applicant's proposed project area and report availability for the project area through the FCC bi-annual data submission process.

10. Adhere to the South Carolina Universal Service Broadband Requirement.

11. Completed, operable, paid for, and submitted to the ORS for reimbursement of the lesser of the grant amount or a percentage of allowable expenses, as determined by the grant agreement, by the deadline set forth in the timeline.

12. Mandatory participation in the Affordable Connectivity Program ("ACP") for the life of the ACP, or its successor.

13. Provide an affordable high-speed Internet plan (minimum speeds of 100/20 Mbps down/up with no data caps and no contract), option that does not include an income threshold requirement for a disclosed period of time.

14. Document and implement strategies to bolster Community-based Broadband Adoption and Use with an emphasis on enabling work, telehealth monitoring, education, and economic development.

15. Comply with all current and future federal and state ARPA CPF requirements, for which Grantees of public funds are responsible.

    a. Department of the US Treasury Guidance for the Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund for States, Territories, and Freely Associated States https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/Capital-Projects-Fund-Guidance-States-Territories-and-Freely-Associated-States.pdf

    b. 2021-2022 Bill 4408: American Rescue Plan authorizations https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess124_2021-2022/bills/4408.htm

c. South Carolina Notice of Award from US Treasury for Capital Projects Fund

https://ors.sc.gov/sites/ors/files/Documents/Broadband/Capital%20Projects%20Fund/South%20Carolina%20Grant%20Agreement%20with%20US%20Treasury%20for%20CPF%20signed.pdf

16. Eligible costs include, but are not limited to:
    a. Construction and Materials (e.g., fiber, conduit, photonics, electronics, etc.)
    b. New and rehabilitative construction contracts
    c. Architect and engineering services, incurred prior to NTP, subject to ORS approval
    d. Permitting fees
    e. Validation of Service expenses
    f. Equipment related to broadband infrastructure
    g. Equipment installation
    h. Salaries directly related to construction of the project
    i. Payroll overhead costs related to fringe benefits only (employer paid payroll taxes, employer paid insurance, employer paid retirement benefits)
    j. Overhead costs related to company-owned fleet vehicle usage used in construction of the project
17. Grant funds may not be used for ineligible costs. Ineligible costs include, but are not limited to:
    a. General broadband planning not associated with the project
    b. Expenses related to providing broadband services
    c. Ongoing overhead, operating costs, or staff costs
    d. Political activities, lawyer fees, or lobbying
    e. Expenses related to administering the Grant
    f. Expenses related to preparing the Grant application(s)
    g. Food and lodging expenses.
    h. Equipment that is depreciable and has a useful life after project completion
    i. Equipment installed within a residence, business, or community anchor institution
    j. Supply and Material Markups
    k. Operating expenses not directly related to the construction of the project, including, but not limited to, leases of any kind
    l. Expenses related to the provision of customer devices (handsets, laptops, tablets, etc.)
    m. Bandwidth or spectrum expenses
    n. Salaries, or overhead not directly related to the construction of the project
    o. Expenses related to the purchase or construction of towers, land, or buildings, or for building renovations, tower upgrades, or the acquisition of facilities or companies
    p. Purchase of equipment that is depreciable and has a useful life after project completion, unless it is part of the facilities used to deliver the broadband service (e.g., fiber, conduit, electronics, etc.)

## Special Considerations and Exceptions

To provide broadband service to an unserved area, an application may include costs to build facilities through an area already served by broadband. The ORS will evaluate such applications on a case-by-case basis to determine approval of eligible costs.

## Project Application

Applications are due by 3 pm (EDT) on the date listed in the Schedule of Events above. Applications, all attachments, and GIS Data must be uploaded to the ORS Citrix site under the "Capital Projects Fund 1.0 Applications and Attachments" folder. If an Applicant does not have access to the "Capital Projects Fund 1.0 Applications and Attachments" folder, complete the data access request form located here https://arcg.is/1fiq1j

and access will be granted. Applications received after the deadline will **NOT** be considered. Failure to answer each question and section completely may result in disqualification of the application. All questions with answers highlighted in the following color ( ) are **REQUIRED** to be answered. Questions with answers highlighted in yellow are optional. All applications must be submitted by ISPs providing retail service to broadband, including the following sections:

1. Applicant Information
   1.1. Descriptors reflecting the primary Applicant
   1.2. Project Name/Number - Provide a project name and number, the number should be unique and formatted as such XXX-XX, with the first three digits alphabetical and the last two numerical
   1.3. Project Priority - Applicants must rank their grant applications (if multiple submitted) in order of preference (1 - 5; 1 serving as highest priority for Applicant)
   1.4. Broadband Provider Context – Provide information on the nature of the ISP and its compliance with FCC reporting
   1.5. Broadband Infrastructure Information – Choose the type of Broadband Infrastructure to be deployed and provide the ISP's Broadband Network Up-Time across the State of South Carolina and within the County applied for in the application. Provide estimates of miles of fiber to be installed and percentages of deployment methods (aerial/underground)
   1.6. Project Timeline – Provide relevant dates reflecting the project's proposed period of performance
   1.7. ESA Project – Choose whether the proposed project includes a main street Eligible Service Area
   1.8. Low-Cost Plan – Indicate the low-cost residential plan including speed, cost, and duration
2. Budget Summary
   2.1. Project Costs – Provide details associated with project costs by category. If quantity and per unit cost are known, please include. All fields in column E are required
   2.2. In-Kind Match (for main street designated projects only) – Provide a description and duration of the in-kind match along with associated quantities and amounts
   2.3. Funding Details – Provide details on project match and any 3rd party funding sources
3. Confirmations
   3.1. Agree/Disagree answers to confirm Applicant acceptance of key elements associated with ARPA CPF 1.0 grant program.
4. Additional Information – Narrative portion of the grant application. 750-character limit on Summary Narrative. All other questions include a 2000-character limit on any specific response
5. Project Sponsors
   5.1. – 5.4 Identify any sponsors that will provide support toward the Applicant's project, including level of contribution. Applicants must also identify any sponsor providing financial support under the 'role within proposed project' field
6. Attachments – Attachments listed in the application tab must accompany the grant application to be considered for ARPA CPF funds. Failure to provide requested attachments may result in disqualification of a submission

   6.1. GIS Shapefiles – Applicants are required to submit GIS Shapefiles or a File Geodatabase to the ORS as part of the application submission process. Applicants must provide GIS data showcasing the **proposed project limits utilizing the templates provided by the ORS** in accordance with GIS standards established under the ARPA CPF grant program. The proposed project must include data depicting the 2020 Census Blocks that will be served, proposed broadband infrastructure lines,

proposed network junctions, and structures that will have access using the FCC BSL Fabric data as their source. Data must be fully attributed and compiled in accordance with the GIS data standard and associated template data developed as part of this grant program. See Attachment 1.

GIS data from Applicants will be evaluated by the ORS. Applications which are funded will include a print map and corresponding table of Census Block IDs that will be produced by ORS and will serve as the basis of the project limits which must be dated and initialed by the ISP as part of the execution of a grant agreement and issuance of a Notice to Proceed. See Attachments 2 and 3.

Applicants are reminded all GIS data (excluding 2020 Census Blocks depicting proposed project areas), are considered confidential, proprietary, trade secret, and privileged information from each ISP, and are treated with the highest level of control and protection by the ORS. South Carolina HB 4408 Section 12 Paragraph B also states:

> "(B) The Office of Broadband Coordinator shall maintain as confidential all individual company-designated proprietary information. All such individual proprietary information is exempt from the provisions contained in S.C. Code Sections 30-4-10, et seq., the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act."

6.2. Signed Affidavit - All applications will require certification and signature through execution of an affidavit by the President, CEO, or CFO. Signed affidavits must be included as an attachment to an application submission. See Attachment 4.

6.3. Proof of Financial Backing from Applicant and any 3rd Party Funding Source covering total project cost excluding any prior investments and/or awarded projects from the ORS SCBBO.

6.4. Demonstrated Partnerships via letters of support with a pledge of assistance and/or commitment with Local Government, Communities, and Non-Profit Organizations in Project Area

6.5. Copies of Applicant's Current Fee Structure for all Internet Speed Tiers, must include minimum of 100/20 Mpbs low-cost residential plan with no income requirement threshold

6.6. Certificate of General Liability Insurance

6.7. Main Street Work Plan – Any application that includes a main street ESA must provide a detailed narrative describing how the Applicant will 1) meet the requirements specific to the ESA Project Areas as mentioned in these guidelines, 2) offer their proposed in-kind match in further detail than as listed in the Budget Summary of the Application, 3) collaborate with community officials and the residents to expand on partnership and support of broadband infrastructure in the project area, and 4) provide other necessary information pertaining to plans within the main street ESA

6.8. Provide any additional information to demonstrate community need exists for the main street ESA.

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## Application Selection

The ORS will review applications and rank eligible projects in accordance with the criteria and priorities set forth in these guidelines. Applicants may only submit one project per application with a maximum of 5 grant applications, by holding company, per provider. Applicants submitting more than one project may prioritize their projects for the community in a cover letter submitted with each application.

Applications will be reviewed and scored; however, ORS reserves the right to award grants that are in the public interest and accelerates internet deployment. Applications will be evaluated and scored based on the following criteria, notwithstanding past project performance and compliance reporting of an ISP supporting Broadband deployment:

**1. <u>30% High Priority Area</u>**

- Census blocks of 20 or more K-12 student households; or,
- Census blocks where no ISPs currently provide retail service; or,
- Census blocks represented as Difficult Development Areas ("DDA"); or,
- Areas designated as a main street ESA.

Scoring is calculated as follows:

- Project includes main street ESA – ***30 points***
- Project includes at least one priority unserved census block(s) with 20 or more K-12 students **– *15 points***
- Project includes at least one priority unserved census block(s)with no ISP currently serving any form of Internet to citizens **– *10 points***
- Project includes at least one priority unserved census block(s) with Difficult Development Area designation **– *5 points***
- Unserved census blocks chosen that are geographically coincident with two or more of the factors outlined in items above (e.g. an unserved census block includes concentrations of 20 or more K-12 housing units, **and** is also a DDA)**- *up to 5 additional bonus points***

**2. <u>20% Geography</u>**

- Identified census blocks that accelerate deployment and are in the public interest to fund. May include, but not be limited to rural areas where costs to deploy broadband infrastructure are higher with fewer concentrations of citizens or areas with high concentrations of I Need Internet Survey Results. – ***up to 20 points***

**3. <u>20% Collaboration/Adoption/Community Assistance - Applicant Strategy and Training Plan</u>**

- Community Adoption/Use Strategy and Plan for Project Area – ***up to 10 points***
- Free Community-based Wi-Fi for a disclosed period of time in Project Area – ***up to 5 points***
- Demonstrated Partnerships via letters of support with a pledge of assistance and/or commitment with Local Government, Communities, and Non-Profit Organizations in Project Area – ***up to 5 points***

**4. <u>15% Average Cost Per Structure and Financial Match Percentage</u>**

- Lower percent of funding requested by Applicant receives higher points – ***up to 10 points***
- Lower average cost per structure receives higher points – ***up to 5 points***

**5. <u>10% Network Resiliency</u>**

- Measures which will be used to ensure resiliency of the Network as defined in these guidelines – ***up to 10 points***

**6. <u>5% Availability - Broadband Infrastructure</u>**

- FTTP 100/100 Mbps symmetric service – ***5 points***
- HFC 100/100 Mbps symmetric service – ***0 points***
- HFC 100/20 Mbps non-symmetric service scalable to 100/100 Mbps service – ***0 points***

The ORS will post all completed applications to the ORS website (*See*: https://ors.sc.gov/broadband/investments/state/arpacpf).

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## Disbursement of Funds

Funds will be disbursed to participants upon the successful completion of the project and submittal of invoice and any other documentation required by the ORS. Milestone payments are not permissible with the exception

for main street ESA projects. For a main street ESA projects, ORS may allow the Applicant to submit a one-time milestone invoice for 33% of the eligible project cost at the end of construction. For the main street ESA projects, upon completion of Applicant's required in-kind activities and submittal of expenses related to those activities, the remaining 67% of eligible costs, up to the grant award, will be submitted to ORS on the final reporting date of 12/31/2025 as shown on the project timeline.

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## Reporting Requirements and Right to Audit

The grant award recipients will be required to report the status of the project, including delays, each quarter, and must notify the ORS immediately if delays are identified or when major project milestones are met. Grant recipients must also comply with ARPA CPF reporting, monitoring, and audit requirements as prescribed by the applicable federal authority.

All projects awarded under ARPA CPF 1.0 will require receipt of a construction Bond or evidence of $100 million in electric or telecommunications plant in production in the State of South Carolina.

At any point, the ORS reserves the right to audit the project, conduct site visits, ensure timelines are met, and obtain additional information from the ISP to verify compliance with contractual obligations. Throughout the project, geotagged photographs of active construction must be captured and reported by the ISP through quarterly reporting. As structures are connected, geotagged photographs of speed tests are required throughout various parts of the project area to verify the network is functional and capable of meeting upload/download speed thresholds required as part of the grant program. The grant award recipients will be required to provide address specific information for all structures passed as part of their post-construction list of addresses which now have access upon the completion of the project. In addition, award recipients will also be required to share their FCC data submission to the SCBBO. Upon project completion, their FCC submission must include the structures which now have access as a result of the project award. ORS timelines for obtaining a copy of the FCC reporting are identical to those published by the FCC.

The grant award recipients must track and report for a period of two (2) years after completion of construction on the number of homes passed, the take rate, and agree to survey those that do not subscribe to determine the reason they are not subscribing to service.