South Carolina 2021 Rural Broadband Grant Program
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Rev. June 29, 2021

Q: Would it benefit us to break the proposed areas into multiple projects and applications or wouldORS prefer us to submit a single application for all areas/projects?

> **A:** Application split is ultimately up to the Applicant; however, we offer a couple of notes for consideration:
>
> If you plan to apply for **Eligible Counties** as well as **Contiguous Counties,** you may want to consider two applications because support is limited in **Contiguous Counties**. Therefore, depending on the overall volume of submissions, we may not be able to offer much support to Contiguous Counties and it will be helpful to ORS have these segregated during grant evaluation.
>
> Additionally, from an engineering perspective, you may choose to apply for a project(s) that is self-contained. In other words, there may be some projects that only make sense in an "all or nothing" mode. These would also be good candidates for separate applications.

Q: For one of our projects, we must build from a Contiguous County to reach an Eligible County. Should we submit one application or two?

> **A:** The Applicant is welcome to submit one or two applications; however, in this case, a single application for this project is likely the best answer. From an engineering perspective, this project won't likely make much sense in two separate applications. Further, the overall project will likely score more points during grant evaluation due to strategic impact.

Q: One of our projects rests partly in a Contiguous County and a small portion is in an ineligible county. Will the piece in the ineligible county be an issue?

> **A:** The Applicant is welcome to request funding in the Contiguous County; however, the small piece in the ineligible county should be removed from the application. Applications which include any project area outside of Eligible or Contiguous Counties will be eliminated from consideration.

Q: Is the requirement to use non-public funds for a match intended to prevent counties and municipalities from participating in the 2021 Rural Broadband Grant Program? Are cooperatives public entities? Are funds from USDA considered public?

> **A:** Funding for the 2021 Rural Broadband Grant Program was made available by an appropriation from the SC General Assembly to the SC Department of Commerce (SCDOC) through Proviso 50.21 of the General Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2019-20. In Jan. 2021, the Joint Bond Review Committee (JBRC) approved the allocation of $30M for the Rural Broadband Grant Program to be developed and implemented by ORS, in coordination with SCDOC. Further, the JBRC stipulated that grant recipients provide a 1:1 match of non-public funds for any projects receiving grant funds. No intent was expressed to prevent counties and municipalities from participating.
>
> No, cooperatives are not considered public entities.

Yes, USDA funds are considered public funds since they come from the federal government.

Q: Will ORS be releasing challenges made by other providers?

A: ORS will not be making challenge information public for the 2021 Rural Broadband Grant Program; however, we will utilize all information received, together with our most-recent data (FCC and Ookla Speedtest Intelligence) to make the best informed grant decisions.

Application-specific comments may be submitted in writing to broadband@ors.sc.gov until June1, 2021.

Q: Will ORS be releasing application-specific GIS shape files?

A: Yes. Project-specific shape files will be made available to interested parties on a case-by-case basis. However, please note that these shape files may require specialized software licenses and technical expertise to be viewed. ORS cannot provide technical support or assistance with these files. Please contact broadband@ors.sc.gov.

Q: Section I.A of the Rural Broadband Grant Program Agreement states that "[t]he Project may be completed in phases or milestones so long as each fully completed phase or milestone enables broadband service to be available to a home, business or otherwise available to the public for use during the public health emergency and supports telehealth, telework, and/or distance learning." Are proposed projects still eligible for Rural Broadband Grant Program funds now that the COVID-19 state of emergency in South Carolina has expired? Do proposed projects have to ensure the provision of telehealth, telework, and/or distance learning?

A: Even though the COVID-19 state of emergency in South Carolina has expired, proposed projects may still be eligible for Rural Broadband Grant Program funds if they meet the other requirements of the Program and are selected as an eligible Project.

Because proposed projects are required to make broadband services available to the public, it is expected that the proposed project will support telehealth, telework, and distance learning in the proposed project area.

Q: Section II.A.b of the Rural Broadband Grant Program Agreement states that "Grant funds authorized by ORS under this Agreement shall not be used for or to reimburse any operating expenses, including but not limited to: ... salaries, or overhead not directly related to the construction of the Project." Are recipients of Rural Broadband Grant Program funds prohibited from using funds for or to reimburse expenses for all salaries and overhead?

A: No. Rural Broadband Grant Program funds may be used for or to reimburse 1) salaries directly related to the construction of the proposed project, or 2) overhead directly related to the construction of the proposed project. However, Rural Broadband Grant Program funds may **not** be used for or to reimburse 1) salaries **not** directly related to the construction of the proposed project, or 2) overhead **not** directly related to the construction of the proposed project.

Q: Section II.A.b of the Rural Broadband Grant Program Agreement also states that Grant funds "may not be used to purchase equipment that is depreciable and has a useful life after project completion." In the context of this Section, what does the term "equipment" include? What are some examples of equipment that would be excluded as an Eligible Expense under this Section?

A: In the context of Section II.A.b, ORS defines equipment to mean vehicles, trailers, heavy equipment or machinery, and similar property that can be used for work other than the proposed project or will have a useful life after the proposed project has been completed. Accordingly, Rural Broadband Grant Program funds may not be used to purchase these types of equipment. Funds may be used, however, to lease vehicles, trailers, heavy equipment or machinery, and similar property if the lease is directly related to work for the proposed project.