**2022 Alabama Broadband Accessibility Fund Frequently Asked Questions**

1. **What is the typical timeframe for the ABAF grant program?**

ADECA will generally accept applications within a 60-90 day window from the day of the grant program workshop held by ADECA.

Applicants must first submit a letter of intent by the deadline set in the Grant Application and Guide. That deadline will generally be within 20-30 days of the application workshop. The letter of intent shall include the applicant’s contact information and the applicant’s proposed project area in either a .kmz, .kml, or shapefile format. The applicant’s shapefile must use a polygon format to represent the proposed project area. Other formats such as lines or points will not be accepted. The applicant must also ensure that the polygon format covers the rooftop locations of all addresses in the proposed project area. A sample letter of intent is in the Grant Application and Guide and posted on the ADECA website which can be found at <https://adeca.alabama.gov/grant-application-and-implementation/>.

Applicants that have submitted a letter of intent can submit applications until the deadline provided in the Grant Application and Guide. Any applications received after the deadline will not be considered. Applications for eligible projects shall be evaluated according to a scoring system developed by ADECA, with grant awards published as soon as possible, but no more than 60 days after expiration of the filing window. For more information related to the ABAF and other broadband programs, please see ADECA’s Digital Expansion Division website at <https://adeca.alabama.gov/broadband/>.

1. **Why is a letter of intent required?**

An applicant’s letter of intent will notify ADECA of its intent to file an ABAF application during the upcoming grant cycle, provide a preview of the proposed area(s) for funding, and provide an opportunity for incumbent Internet Service Providers (ISP) and other ABAF applicants to review the proposed area(s).

1. **Will letters of intent be posted online after the submission window closes to allow for review?**

Letters of intent will be posted on the ADECA website as soon as possible after the close of the letter of intent submission window.

ADECA will send a notice that the letters of intent are available on the website. The notices will be sent to all subscribers of its email notification service. To sign up for the email notification service, please go to <https://adeca.alabama.gov/broadband-alabama-mailing-list/>. ADECA makes the letters of intent publicly available to promote coordination between applicants and with existing ISPs regarding potentially overlapping service areas. Applicants and ISPs are strongly encouraged to contact applicants regarding their letters of intent within 30 days of the posting of the letters on the ADECA website. A sample document to help facilitate communication between service providers is provided in the Grant Application and Guide and posted on the ADECA website at <https://adeca.alabama.gov/grant-application-and-implementation/>.

1. **Can an applicant revise the project area description from its letter of intent when it submits its application?**

Yes, applicants may submit a final application with minor changes to the project area as it was described in the letter of intent. Applicants must clearly identify any changes in the final application map and narrative.

1. **How should applicants identify eligible project areas in the letter of intent and the application? Is it possible to get a shapefile of specific layers of the Alabama Broadband Map?**

Generally, applicants may establish that the proposed project is in an unserved area and in a rural area by using the Alabama Broadband Map. Please see the map at: <https://broadband.alabama.gov/broadband-maps/>.

Applicants are *strongly encouraged* to conduct a field review or confirm the served/unserved status of an area through additional means beyond the map.

Please contact broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov to request a shapefile based on the Alabama Broadband Map or to ask further questions about the mapping process.

1. **What are the requirements for a project area to be eligible for funding?**

In order to be eligible for funding, an area normally must be located in a rural area and meet the definition of unserved.

* **Rural Area:** Any area within Alabama not included within the boundaries of any incorporated city or town having a population in excess of 25,000 inhabitants, according to the last federal census.
* **Unserved:** Any rural area in which there is not at least one provider of terrestrial broadband service that is either: (1) offering a connection to the Internet meeting the minimum service threshold; or (2) is required, under the terms of another state or federal grant, to provide a connection to the Internet at speeds meeting the minimum service threshold within the same or similar timeframe of projects of similar complexity or scale awarded during each grant cycle.
	+ **Terrestrial Broadband Service:** Any wireline or fixed wireless service, excluding both cellular and satellite service.
	+ **Minimum Service Threshold:** A connection to the Internet that provides capacity for transmission at an average speed per customer of at least 100 megabits per second (100 Mbps) downstream and at least 20 megabits per second (20 Mbps) upstream (100 Mbps/20 Mbps).

Please see the Grant Application and Guide for additional information and requirements for documentation to demonstrate the eligibility of the proposed service area, including an area associated with a middle mile project or a hospital, health care facility, public school, public safety, or economic development project.

1. **Are there any other project types that may be eligible?**

Please see the Grant Application and Guide for specific processes that allow applicants to identify targeted locations for hospitals, health care facilities, public schools, public safety facilities, or economic development projects as well as middle mile projects that do not meet the definition of unserved area but otherwise meet the requirements of the program.

* For example, an applicant can propose to serve a hospital that requires 1 gigabit per second of download speed and 1 gigabit per second of upload speed to offer telemedicine services, but the current local ISP can only offer 100 megabits per second of download speed and 20 megabits per second of upload speed to the hospital. An application for such funding would include a letter by the hospital explaining the need for greater broadband speeds and documentation that it has attempted to gain greater speeds from the current local ISP.
* For example, an applicant could propose a middle mile project that does not provide broadband service to end users or to end user devices in a rural area that is served by an ISP offering 100 megabits per second of download speed and 20 megabits per second of upload speed, if it demonstrates through engineering studies, support from local communities, or other documentation that such project is necessary to improve broadband access, capacity, and resiliency.
1. **Will areas covered by CAF, RDOF, or other state and federal funding programs be considered ineligible?**

Generally, areas that already have state and federal funding sources for projects that will result in service meeting the minimum service threshold will be ineligible for funding through the ABAF. However, an area with CAF, RDOF, or other state or federal funding may still be eligible for ABAF funding if the provider is not required under the terms of another state or federal grant to provide the area with a connection to the Internet at speeds meeting the minimum service threshold within the same or similar timeframe of projects of similar complexity or scale awarded during each grant cycle.

1. **What if an area that qualified as unserved at the time of submitting the application becomes served prior to the grant agreement being executed?**

In addition to reviewing the Alabama Broadband Map, applicants are strongly encouraged to conduct field reviews to determine if there is current construction or other indications of new service in an area that would potentially change the classification of an area. If ADECA becomes aware that a previously unserved area becomes served prior to the execution of the grant agreement, the project will no longer be eligible for funding.

1. **What are the minimum service standards and other requirements for the funded projects?**

An applicant must commit to providing service throughout the project area with an average speed per customer of at least 100 megabits per second (100 Mbps) downstream and at least 100 megabits per second (100 Mbps) upstream (100 Mbps/100 Mbps) and include a preliminary technical evaluation of the capabilities of the project certified by a licensed Professional Engineer.

Please refer to the Grant Application and Guide for further information regarding other required elements for an application.

1. **Who is eligible to receive funding under this program?**

Eligible applicants are entities that are cooperatives, corporations, limited liability companies, partnerships, other private business entities, or units of government that provide broadband service.

An entity is not eligible for an ABAF grant unless the entity has submitted, within the one-year period preceding the awarding of the grant, the entity's broadband service availability information to Alabama’s broadband mapping program and agrees to continue to participate in the mapping program throughout the entire project period.

1. **Will applicants that are certified by the ADECA Office of Minority Business Enterprise or that are Disadvantaged Business Enterprises receive any credit or additional points?**

ADECA will award 10 points in each of the following situations:

* The applicant provides documentation that it has been certified by the ADECA Office of Minority Business Enterprise or otherwise as a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise. Note that documentation of certification does not include self-certification as provided in SAM.gov.
* The applicant provides documentation that it plans to use vendors and subcontractors that have been certified by the Office of Minority Business Enterprise or that are Disadvantaged Business Enterprises. Please be advised if an applicant chooses to claim consideration under this criterion, a quarterly report documenting activities will be required. Vendor and subcontractor self-certification of Minority, Female Owned, or Disadvantaged Business Enterprise status will not be accepted. Vendor/contractor certifications must be submitted to ADECA.

Please review the Grant Application and Guide for further information on the consideration of Minority Business Enterprises and Disadvantaged Business Enterprises and other information about points and application rating processes.

1. **Will applicants be required to provide their own funds for these projects? Are there other requirements for the mix of funding sources to support each project?**

Individual grant awards may not exceed the lesser of 80 percent of the project cost or $5,000,000. Any award under the ABAF, when combined with other forms of state or federal support or assistance dedicated to the project other than interest bearing loans may not exceed 90 percent of the total project costs. Loans, such as those from the USDA, are not considered a source of “federal funds” for the purpose of this grant program. The applicant is responsible for securing funding for all project expenses beyond the grant award. At least 20 percent of the project funds must be paid for with funds other than the ABAF grant.

**Note:** *This is a reimbursement program. Funds will not be disbursed until work is completed and all program requirements have been met.*

1. **Can a local entity contribute funding to these projects?**

Local entities that are not applicants may, but are not required to, contribute financial resources to these projects. To document a local entity’s funding, an application must include a resolution from the local entity committing specific funding amounts to the project. The local entity and/or the applicant should specify if the local entity’s match will rely on state or federal funding sources.

Separate from committed funding from local entities, applicants may also describe demonstrated community support for a project by including letters and other types of documented support from the local community and may also separately commit to additional public purpose projects for specific communities. Additional points may be given based on the demonstrated community support.

Please review the Grant Application and Guide for further information on this subject, including a template local entity resolution regarding the commitment of funding and examples of projects that would qualify as providing public benefit and community support to targeted areas within the project area.

1. **May an applicant submit an application for more than one project?**

Yes, an applicant may submit an application and receive funding for more than one project. Each project must have its own letter of intent, application, and budget and must stand alone in the described benefits and services proposed for the project area. Each project must be in compliance with the ABAF program requirements.

1. **Will this grant reimburse projects that are currently underway?**

Any activities that take place before the effective date of the grant agreement are ineligible for reimbursement. Additionally, while applicants may use this funding to expand or complement an existing project, each funded project must “stand alone.” To receive reimbursement, applicants must ensure that each project complies with all applicable ABAF criteria without reference to any other project and the funded project will be complete and in compliance with closeout requirements at the end of the grant period without reliance on any other project.

1. **How long does a recipient have to complete a project?**

An approved project normally must be completed within two years of being awarded the grant to receive funding. Applicants who demonstrate project complexity may request more than two years to complete the project. Recipients that demonstrate that the project is progressing may request an extension for up to one year for project delays beyond the recipient’s control. ADECA may rescind grants for projects not showing progress.

If a recipient fails to complete a project within the two-year deadline, or within the extended deadline, ADECA may revoke the grant in its entirety and rededicate the funds to a new recipient.

1. **What are the reporting and closeout requirements? When does a recipient receive funding?**

Recipients who are funded in program year 2022 or later will be required to report progressive completion quarterly until closeout. The recipient will be required to conduct testing and prepare a Project Closeout Report. Recipients will be responsible for obtaining the equipment, software, or any other applications necessary to conduct the required testing to validate speeds, latency, and other requirements identified in the application and grant agreement. Recipients should closely review the Program Guide to ensure compliance with the requirements at the end of the grant period. ADECA will provide grant funding as reimbursement to the recipient only after successful completion of the closeout requirements.

1. **Will the recipients’ normal procurement procedures be sufficient, or will public procedures be required?**

Recipients that are non-government entities are not required to follow or comply with Alabama Bid and Alabama Public Works Laws. However, recipients that are governmental entities are expected to be familiar with their procurement obligations and procedures under these laws that apply to the projects funded by this program. Similarly, recipients are expected to be familiar with the mix of funding for their projects and, if a project is relying on federal funding, to be familiar and comply with federal procurement requirements.

1. **Will recipients be required to follow environmental requirements and procedures?**

Compliance with federal, state, and local requirements for permitting, reporting, environmental review, or other approvals may be required. Applicants must familiarize themselves, and comply, with these requirements. If federal funds are used, federal regulations may apply to the entire project.

1. **Can a middle mile project be submitted without a project that also serves end users?**

A middle mile project is one that does not provide broadband service to end users or to end user devices. Generally, a middle mile application must demonstrate that the proposed project will connect other service providers eligible for grants under this program with broadband infrastructure further upstream in order to enable the providers to offer broadband service to end users. Middle mile projects may be in unserved areas or a rural area that does not meet the definition of and unserved area if the applicant demonstrates, by specific evidence, the need for greater broadband speeds, access, capacity, resiliency, or service not being offered by an existing provider.

To receive funding, a middle mile application generally must have a companion last mile project that is approved for funding. However, some middle mile projects may meet other eligibility requirements without a companion project. Therefore, applicants are encouraged to further review the Grant Application and Guide and contact ADECA for technical assistance.

1. **For the shapefile that is required in the letter of intent, does the applicant need to identify the addresses to be served or is only the polygon required?**

The shapefile only needs to show the polygon of the project area.

1. **Can you define what is meant by a polygon?**

For any technical assistance, please feel free to contact us by e-mail by writing to broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov.

1. **Could you explain how the “average pole attachment rate” is considered or weighed for an application?**

This does not apply to utilities and most other applicants but is required if the applicant charges pole attachment fees to unaffiliated entities. The average pole attachment rate is considered as part of the preliminary technical evaluation of the project certified by a licensed Professional Engineer.

1. **If an entity is a new provider, but has not turned up subscriber service as of the open application period, are they still eligible to apply for the ABAF? What if an entity has a service and track record in other states?**

An entity that is not a current broadband service provider in any state or territory is not eligible for funding under the 2022 ABAF.  If an entity currently provides broadband service outside of Alabama, the entity may be eligible for funding under the 2022 ABAF.  Such an entity must both (1) submit a certification that it currently does not provide broadband service in Alabama as part of the state’s mapping program and (2) provide documentation identifying its current broadband service areas and service performance outside of Alabama.

1. **Can a list and contact information for all ISP and applicants be provided?**

Letters of intent that are posted on the ADECA website will include the applicant’s contact information.

1. **If a provider contacts another provider to inform them that they will have a project launching, or a project has already started, how does ADECA handle the situation if the provider who is applying for funds continues to move forward?**

If an area is served or becomes served before the execution of the grant agreement, then the area is ineligible for funding. If a project has already been started by a provider and will not be finished by the time the grant agreement is executed, then the area could be eligible for funding.

1. **If an RDOF-awarded project will not reach the 100 Mbps/20 Mbps requirement, can an ISP apply for state funds for the RDOF-awarded area?**

Possibly, please contact ADECA for technical assistance.

1. **What is the total amount of the grant funding available?**

Approximately $27 million is available for funding through the ABAF in 2022.

1. **Is the letter of intent required?**

A letter of intent is required in order to be eligible for funding through the ABAF.

1. **Is there a list of the rating criteria available?**

The current rating criteria is available at <https://adeca.alabama.gov/grant-application-and-implementation/>.

1. **Will there be a challenge/protest process?**

With the availability of the Alabama Broadband Map, there will be no challenge/protest process.

1. **Will ADECA look at RDOF areas to contact the provider who was awarded RDOF funds if the area is being applied for by another provider through the ABAF?**

ADECA will contact a provider who was awarded RDOF funds if an application has been submitted for the awarded area.

1. **Can applicants provide address-level data of a proposed grant area prior to the letter of intent deadline and get feedback from ADECA on eligible areas?**

ADECA can provide technical assistance in completing the letter of intent or application, but it will not assist in writing the letter of intent or application.

1. **How often is the Alabama Broadband Map updated?**

The Alabama Broadband Map is updated on at least an annual basis, but the goal is to have an update every quarter.

1. **Are these funds (ABAF) related to the ARPA funds?**

The state 2022 ABAF funds are not related to the federal ARPA funds.

1. **Will the applications be posted on the ADECA website along with the letters of intent?**

ADECA will post the letters of intent.

1. **Will applications be allowed to be amended if part of the project area is in a served area?**

ADECA will allow applicants to amend or rescind applications containing project areas that are determined to be ineligible.

1. **If an applicant submits a letter of intent and then decides not to apply for that area, is that allowable?**

An applicant is permitted to rescind a letter of intent that has been submitted and not apply for the proposed area.

1. **Is it acceptable for an applicant to provide one resolution for match if each application and match amount is listed individually in that one resolution?**

As long as the resolution is from the same entity, you may submit that resolution with each application so long as it lists the project and match amounts individually.

1. **The Grant Application and Guide “strongly encourages” a field review. What does a field review entail and what does ADECA expect successful applicants to provide?**

A field review entails determining if there is current construction or other indications of new service in an area that would potentially change the classification of an area. If ADECA becomes aware that a previously unserved area becomes served prior to the execution of a grant agreement, the project will no longer be eligible for funding.

1. **What does ADECA view as sufficient supporting documentation to receive the maximum amount of allotted points for the “extension of existing infrastructure” referenced in the Grant Application and Guide?**

Evidence showing that the proposed project will be an extension of existing infrastructure may include documentation or other verifiable information showing that infrastructure is already in place and/or adjacent to the proposed project area. Such existing infrastructure may belong to the applicant or accessible to the applicant under a network lease, sharing, or other access arrangement. Publicly available information concerning current infrastructure in place, such as information submitted to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), could also be used to show that the proposed project is an extension of existing infrastructure.

1. **What are considered to be community anchors?**

Community anchors are typically considered to be libraries, schools, police and fire stations, hospitals, and other similar places. Please contact us at broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov to set up a technical assistance call for specific questions.

1. **Does the certification from a licensed professional engineer have to be made by an engineer specifically licensed in Alabama?**

In the Grant Application and Guide it says, “a preliminary technical evaluation of the project certified by a licensed Professional Engineer.” Please contact us to set up a technical assistance call for specific questions regarding the engineer certification requirement.

1. **What will the licensed professional engineer be attesting to when certifying a technical evaluation?**

The engineer will be certifying the preliminary technical evaluation that must include the elements listed on page six of the ABAF 2022 Grant Application and Guide.

1. **Do operating expenses include connect costs to the final premise (i.e. additional fiber routed from any route to the actual location)?**

Generally, construction and construction-related costs for broadband infrastructure are not operating expenses, but rather capital expenditures.  Capital expenditures may include expenditures to acquire capital assets or expenditures to make additions, improvements, modifications, replacements, rearrangements, reinstallations, renovations, or alterations to capital assets that materially increase their value or useful life.  If you have any additional questions regarding operating expenses and capital expenditures, please contact us for a technical assistance call.