Alabama Broadband Accessibility Fund

2023 Grant Application Guide



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**2023 Grant Application Guidelines**

An Alabama Broadband Accessibility Fund (ABAF) application workshop will be held at 401 Adams Avenue, Montgomery, Alabama in the 7th Floor Auditorium on October 4, 2022, at 10:00 AM, CST. The meeting will be held both in-person and virtually. To be notified of the meeting, please make sure that you have signed up to be on the Broadband Alabama Mailing List, which can be found at <https://adeca.alabama.gov/broadband-alabama-mailing-list/>.

An online version of the workshop and questions and answers from the workshop will be posted on the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) website after the workshop at <https://adeca.alabama.gov/broadband-webinars-and-workshops/>.

ABAF applications shall be submitted in PDF format by email to broadband.fund@adeca. alabama.gov. **Applications will be accepted starting on October 6, 2022. Completed applications must be submitted by 12:00 PM (Noon), CST, on January 3, 2023**. Any applications received after the deadline will not be considered. All applications must be complete; however, ADECA reserves the right to contact applicants for additional information and/or clarifications.

Prior to submitting applications, *applicants are required to provide a letter of intent* to submit an application by 12:00 PM (Noon), CST, on November 3, 2022. The letter of intent shall include the applicant’s contact information and the proposed project area in a 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. Additionally, if an applicant intends to apply for funds under the eligibility defined under Alabama Code Sections 41-23-213(h)(2)-(3), the applicant shall include that information in the letter of intent.

The letters of intent will be posted on the ADECA website and publicly available to promote coordination between applicants and with existing Internet Service Providers (ISPs) regarding potentially overlapping service areas. Applicants and existing 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 to ensure compliance with the grant program deadline.

**Note:** *A sample letter of intent and ISP contact and communication form are included here as Appendix A. Minor changes to the project area between the time the letter of intent is submitted and the final application is submitted are allowed; however, applicants are instructed to clearly identify any changes in the final application map and narrative. An applicant may reduce the project area that was referenced in the letter of intent, but may not increase the size.*

**Applicants should not include confidential information in their ABAF applications. All applications are subject to public records requests in accordance with the Alabama Open Records Law.**

An applicant may submit more than one application; however, each project must have a separate application and budget. Each project must stand alone in meeting the ABAF program requirements. Projects may include multiple non-contiguous proposed service areas.

Eligibility

Eligible applicants are entities that are cooperatives, corporations, limited liability companies, partnerships, other private business entities, or units of government, which provide broadband services. An entity is not eligible for a 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.

If an entity currently provides broadband service outside of Alabama, the entity may be eligible for funding in the 2023 ABAF grant cycle. 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.

Funding

The grant will be in the form of a reimbursement of eligible costs up to the award amount and/or percentage in the grant agreement. Reimbursement will be conditioned on the following:

* Project completion within two years of awarding of the grant. Applicants who demonstrate project complexity may request more than two years to complete the project. Recipients who demonstrate that the project is progressing may request an extension for up to one year for project delays beyond the recipient’s control. 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.
* The progressive completion, as measured on not more than a quarterly basis, of the approved project. Grants for projects not showing progress may be rescinded.
* Operational testing, when possible, to confirm the level of service proposed in the grant application. Such regulations shall not exceed in degree or differ in kind from testing and reporting requirements imposed on the grant recipient by the Federal Communications Commission, as adjusted for the service specifications in the ADECA grant agreement.
* Continued participation in Alabama’s broadband mapping program throughout the entire project period.

All projects will be scored based on the rating criteria established by ADECA (more information about the grant process and the criteria can be found at <https://adeca.alabama.gov/grant-application-and-implementation/>.) Those eligible projects receiving the highest scores will be selected for funding. The number of projects funded will be determined by the funds available and the total amount of requests made. ADECA may request amended projects and/or offer reduced grant participation.

**Note:** *Previously unsuccessful ABAF applicants that have received technical assistance from ADECA regarding their 2023 ABAF application will receive additional consideration for the 2023 program year. Additionally, grant recipients receiving bonus points in the application will be subject to further reporting and/or documentation requirements to demonstrate achievement of the outcomes for which the bonus points were awarded (e.g., demonstrated community support, use of vendors/subcontractors that have been certified by the Office of Minority Business Enterprise or that are Disadvantaged Business Enterprises).*

Individual grants awarded by ADECA normally may only be awarded for projects in unserved areas. Customers served as a result of an awarded project must have access to an internet connection and at least one service offering that is capable of transmitting broadband signals at or above 100 megabits per second of download speed and 100 megabits per second of upload speed (100/100 Mbps).

In addition, eligible projects under ABAF may also include:

* Middle mile projects, where the applicant demonstrates that the project will connect other service providers eligible for grants under ABAF with broadband infrastructure further upstream in order to enable the providers to offer broadband service to end users; provided that such eligible projects may include projects in an unserved area or a rural area that does not meet the definition of an unserved area but otherwise meets the requirements for an eligible project, for which the grant applicant demonstrates, by specific evidence, the need for greater broadband speeds, access, capacity, resiliency, or service which is not being offered by an existing service provider.
* Projects to provide broadband service to a specific hospital, health care facility, public school, public safety, or economic development site in a rural area that does not meet the definition of an unserved area but otherwise meets the requirements for an eligible project, for which the grant applicant demonstrates, by specific evidence, the need for greater broadband speeds, access, capacity, resiliency, or service which is not being offered by an existing service provider.

ABAF grants awarded for middle mile projects or projects to provide broadband service to a specific hospital, health care facility, public school, public safety, or economic development site will not exceed 40 percent of the total ABAF funds appropriated for grants on an annual basis. ADECA will ensure that not less than 40 percent of ABAF funds appropriated for grants will be utilized in unincorporated areas of the state.

Individual ABAF grant awards may not exceed the lesser of 80 percent of the project costs or $5,000,000. Any ABAF grant award, 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.

Definitions

END USER. A residential, business, institutional, or government entity that uses broadband services for its own purposes and does not resell the broadband services to other entities. An Internet Service Provider (ISP) and mobile wireless service provider are not an end user.

MIDDLE MILE PROJECT. A broadband infrastructure project that does not provide broadband service to end users or to end-user devices.

MINIMUM SERVICE THRESHOLD. A connection to the Internet that provides capacity for transmission at an average speed per customer of at least 100 megabits (100 Mbps) per second downstream and at least 20 megabits (20 Mbps) per second upstream.

RURAL AREA. Any area within this state 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 AREA. 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) 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.

**Note:** *Terrestrial broadband service includes wireline or fixed wireless service and does not include cellular or satellite service.*

**Appendix A**

Letter of Intent Template

ISP Contact and Communication Form Template

**Letter of Intent Template**

Applicant Logo/Letterhead

Applicant physical address

Applicant email address

Date

Maureen Neighbors

Chief, Digital Expansion Division

Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA)

Via email: broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov

Dear Ms. Neighbors,

[Applicant] intends to submit an application for funding from the Alabama Broadband Accessibility Fund grant program. Attached to this letter of intent, as Attachment A, is a shapefile that represents our proposed funded service area. [Applicant] consents to ADECA posting this letter and its attachments to ADECA’s public website.

For additional questions or inquiries about this letter of intent and our proposed funded service area, please contact [Name, title] at [email and phone number].

Sincerely,

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[Signature of Authorized Representative of Applicant]

Name

Title

Applicant

Email

Phone Number

Attachment A: [Title of document illustrating proposed service area in a shapefile format.]

**ISP Contact and Communication Form Template**

To: Alabama Broadband Accessibility Fund Applicant

cc: broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov

Email subject: Letter of Intent for Alabama Broadband Accessibility Fund grant application

Body of email:

We have reviewed your letter of intent submitted to the Alabama Broadband Accessibility Fund. As a service provider in the area, we are sending you this communication to inform you of our current service and/or future plans for providing service in portions of the proposed service area identified in your letter of intent. We are providing the following (select all that apply):

**□ Information on our current broadband service area.** We currently provide broadband service of at least 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload (100 Mbps/20 Mbps) within the proposed service area identified in your letter of intent. We have attached a GIS file for the portion(s) of your project where we provide this service.

**□ Information on our current broadband construction efforts.** We currently have construction underway to improve or expand our broadband service to provide at least 100 Mbps/20 Mbps in the proposed service area identified in your letter of intent. This construction began on [insert date construction began] and is estimated to be completed by [insert estimated end date for construction]. We have attached a GIS file showing the portion(s) of your project where this construction is occurring.

**□ Information on our broadband deployment plans:** We have substantial plans to improve or expand our broadband service to provide at least 100Mbps/20 Mbps in a portion(s) of the proposed service area identified in your letter of intent by [date]. We have attached a GIS file showing the portion(s) of your project where we have substantial plans to expand or improve our service.

If you would like to have further discussions regarding this information, please contact [Name, title, phone & email].

[Signature block]

[Attach map files in a shapefile format or place in a shared location and provide a link to that location if file(s) is too large for email transmission.]

cc: broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov