STATE OF ALABAMA

**Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs**

**Digital Expansion Division**

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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE APPLICATION

**Alabama Community Broadband Technical Assistance Program**

**Release Date**: July 1, 2022

**Due Date**: August 1, 2022

**The application is for technical assistance services. A technical assistance agreement will be executed. No financial award will be provided as part of this program.**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) applied for and received an American Rescue Plan Act Statewide Planning Award (ED22ATL3070004) from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) to fund the Alabama Community Broadband Technical Assistance Program (ACB TAP) for community broadband planning support services within the state. The EDA’s grant program is intended for communities to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the impacts of the pandemic.

In addition, the ACB TAP will help meet the goals described in the Alabama Connectivity Plan[[1]](#footnote-2)and in many of the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy or similar planning documents, primarily to improve the availability of adequate broadband service for as many Alabama residents and businesses as possible. ADECA understands from prior research completed during preparation of the Alabama Connectivity Plan and the Alabama Broadband Map that there exist many government and private entities who are not able to explore broadband planning, deployment, or expansion efforts because the burden is too great.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Many companies are embracing work from home and are promising to continue some type of remote work even after the COVID-19 pandemic ends. As a result, many workers have relocated or are seeking to relocate to remote areas. Students have been learning from home during the pandemic and, even before the pandemic, many students did not have connectivity for homework or other school activities.

The ACB TAP seeks to provide services to understand what broadband services are needed and will support studies and planning efforts to provide adequate broadband for residents, businesses, workers, and students. The services will also enable communities to effectively develop broadband plans that will provide new opportunities for businesses and employees to lift themselves out of economic crisis and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic with tools for business and employment response and resilience. Further, the services seek to develop the capacity necessary to support telehealth services and applications. The services also seek to improve broadband adoption in areas of applicant communities with low broadband investment. Specifically, this project meets the following EDA investment priorities: Recovery and Resilience and Technology-Based Economic Development.

## A. Purpose of Application Opportunity

The purpose of this application opportunity is to allow communities to present their needs for technical assistance for broadband planning and provide services to those communities receiving the highest scores through the application review and scoring process.

The following entities that are in need of broadband planning and capacity building are eligible for ACB TAP services:

* Cities and towns
* Counties
* Regional Planning and Development Commissions with consent from participating communities
* Collaborations between local governments, counties, incorporated municipalities, and Internet Service Providers (ISPs)

Communities are strongly encouraged to apply with other units of government in their region. Examples of collaborations include a municipality that partners with a neighboring municipality and a county that partners with the municipalities within its boundary. Collaborations between jurisdictions will be prioritized when selecting applications.

ADECA plans to provide ACB TAP services to eligible entities through its agent and contractor, CTC Technology & Energy—a broadband consultancy which focuses on public sector and nonprofit clients and assisted ADECA in developing the Alabama Connectivity Plan and the Alabama Broadband Map. ADECA believes the technical assistance support will cost-effectively produce the insights and data that the applicants need to build their broadband planning and deployment capacity. In addition to spurring economic development and creating jobs, these efforts will likely have an enormous impact on alleviating current connectivity challenges and provide a foundation for resilience against future crises.

## B. ACB TAP Objectives and Technical Assistance Services

### 1. Objectives

ADECA recognizes that each respondent represents a unique community and will need varying levels of support to develop planning. The intent is to customize support for a community’s needs accordingly. This support will be based on the applicant’s response to this application opportunity. Factors may include technical and business capabilities, and an initial discussion designed to determine the best course of action for the area and communities the applicant proposes to serve.

The following section outlines the types of technical assistance ADECA plans to offer applicants. Tasks include identifying broadband use and needs among the communities’ businesses (which includes home-based work), providing an overview of available broadband services, and developing potential technical and business solutions that may form the basis for grant or loan applications and/or future public-private partnership planning. ADECA may also conduct statistically valid market research to provide organizations exploring broadband deployment or expansion with important metrics for determining competition, feasibility, and sustainability.

### 2. Technical Assistance Services

The technical assistance may include some or all of the following tasks, depending on the applicant’s need:

* **Initiate project and confirm scope:** Each project will begin with a review of requested services from the applicant during a kickoff meeting. ADECA will work with the applicant to refine the project scope, and a more specific scope and schedule will be created to align with the agreed upon services for the project.
* **Identify and engage key stakeholders and identify relevant assets:** Broadband’s value and a sustainable broadband plan will be most impactful when it is integrated into a broader community development vision. To that end, a critical first step may be to engage key stakeholders from a variety of sectors (e.g., institutional partners like land-grant universities, community foundations, local business organizations). This engagement may be enhanced by identifying and engaging community digital inclusion and opportunity organizations (e.g., local organizations that distribute devices such as tablets or laptops or subsidize the cost of internet plans). A next step may be to identify physical resources as well as data, maps, and relevant documentation that identify relevant community demographic trends and broadband adoption that can be leveraged to grow and support a long-range, broadband-based economic development strategy for the community.
* **Educate community leaders:** While many community leaders understand that broadband is critical, there is still a gap in understanding the technical, financial, and policy aspects of planning and executing a sustainable broadband strategy. This service educates local leaders on these important considerations, the feasibility of different broadband deployment models, and lessons learned from other communities.
* **Assess the community’s current broadband infrastructure:** Drawing on the applicant community’s and available statewide data, this service seeks to identify current broadband infrastructure availability and adoption in a community. Included may be a general overview of available services and, by extension, an understanding of the locations in need of new or improved broadband service in the community. This task would look at services that were in place prior to the pandemic and broadband services that have been quickly deployed to provide telehealth and facilitate online learning for students not having access or who cannot afford connectivity.
* **Assess the community’s current broadband market (services):** Using available broadband market data, this service seeks to identify the residential broadband providers, packages, and costs in an applicant community. This task may also use survey methodologies to assess broadband adoption and costs and relevant community demographic trends in an applicant’s community.
* **Evaluate current and future demand for broadband (needs assessment):** Todevelop a high-level understanding of demand based on qualitative data, this task includes on-site and teleconferenced discussions with representatives of the community, the goal being to understand their broadband needs, constraints, and challenges, including affordability. It will include meeting with entities such as local governments, educational institutions, local businesses, business organizations, healthcare providers, ISPs, and regional stakeholders. Data collected may include specifics regarding the community’s response to the COVID-19 crisis, its efficacy and gaps that can be filled by more or better broadband. If appropriate, this task may consist of a statistically valid market study targeting demand using proven survey methods.
* **Assess digital inclusion and equity:** Using available data regarding an applicant community’s demographic and broadband adoption trends, this task seeks to assess the prevalence of low broadband investment in an applicant community to develop a strategy for digital inclusion and equity. This strategy may apply to other tasks such as assessments of broadband infrastructure, market, need, and potential deployment. This task may also incorporate local community digital inclusion and opportunity organizations into its strategy.
* **Prepare a high-level design and cost estimate for broadband deployment:** This service includes the development of a high-level candidate design and cost estimate for a network that might fill the broadband service gaps identified in previous tasks, identifying cost-effective infrastructure improvements appropriate to the terrain. The designs will reflect best practices with respect to resilience and survivability to improve the likelihood that critical services such as telehealth and treatment programs for substance abuse are not disrupted. The designs will be overlayed with data that captures relevant community demographic and broadband adoption trends. This system-level design may be suitable as the basis for a grant or loan application and/or a public-private partnership.

Of note, the output of this task will not provide a blueprint-level network design or cost estimate. Rather, it plans to provide an analysis of existing infrastructure, a conceptual design, high-level maps, and a system-level overview of the potential infrastructure, which can become a roadmap for financial analysis, business modeling, and future decisions (e.g., detailed engineering and contracting with private sector service providers).

* **Evaluate funding options and develop strategic approaches to grant applications and public-private partnerships:** This service evaluates funding options, develops a grant strategy, and evaluates partnership options in close consultation with the community using the high-level designs and cost estimates as well as data that illustrate relevant community demographic and broadband adoption trends. This analysis may consider partnerships with public, private, and membership-owned companies inclusive of existing public and private networks within the communities. This may include partnerships with pole owners that will facilitate connections with ISPs, accounting for local ordinances and procedures. For each strategy, we will consider, at a high level, issues related to risk, benefits, and control and will focus on determining what role the community and private sector may play in addressing broadband needs. The goal of this analysis will be to evaluate partnership approaches that minimize a community’s costs and risks while achieving its broadband goals.

Regardless of selected tasks, ADECA will provide a **Broadband Strategic Planning Guidebook** to the community. This Guidebook will capture the results of chosen activities and provide an actionable roadmap of next steps. If you have questions about the scope of ACB TAP services, please direct them to ADECA at [broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov](mailto:broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov).

## C. ACB TAP Outreach

To support outreach for the ACB TAP, ADECA will be holding the following sessions:

* A broadband 101 webinar that offers foundational broadband knowledge and a description of relevant technologies
* A comprehensive federal funding programs webinar for both ISPs and Alabama broadband stakeholders
* A stakeholder and ISP webinar to share more detailed information about the ACB TAP and answer questions

Information about the ACB TAP and presentation materials and recordings of these sessions will be available at: <https://adeca.alabama.gov/alabama-community-broadband-technical-assistance-program/>.

## D. Application Point of Contact

ADECA has designated the following Application Point of Contact who is responsible for the conduct of this application and whose name, telephone number, and email address are listed below:

Point of Contact:  **Maureen Neighbors, Division Chief**

Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs

Digital Expansion Division

Phone: (334) 353-0767

Email: [broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov](mailto:broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov)

# II. CONDITIONS GOVERNING THE APPLICATION

## Sequence of Events

The primary Application Point of Contact will make every effort to adhere to the following schedule:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Action** | **Responsible Party** | **Due Dates** |
| **1. Application Window Opens** | **ADECA** | **July 1, 2022** |
| **2. Applications Due** | **Applicants** | **August 1, 2022** |
| **3. Communities Selected** | **ADECA** | **September 2022\*** |

\*Date for selecting applicants is dependent on number of responses received.

## B. Explanation of Events

**1. Release of Application**

This application is being issued on the date indicated in the Sequence of Events, above, by ADECA.

**2. Application Deadline**

Applications are due by **12:00 PM Central Time** on the date indicated in the Sequence of Events, above. Applications should be submitted electronically to [broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov](mailto:broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov).

**3. Select Applicants**

ADECA will notify respondents of selection.

## General Requirements

Submission of an application constitutes acceptance of, and consent to, the following General Requirements. Additional terms and conditions will be included in the technical assistance agreements entered into by ADECA and successful applicants.

Submission of an application implies no obligation on ADECA to negotiate, enter into, or otherwise execute a technical assistance agreement with any applicant.

All technical service agreements will be contingent on available ACB TAP funding.

**1. Not to Constitute a Debt of the State**

**IT IS AGREED THAT THE TERMS AND COMMITMENTS CONTAINED HEREIN SHALL NOT BE CONSTITUTED AS A DEBT OF THE STATE OF ALABAMA IN VIOLATION OF ARTICLE 11, SECTION 213 OF THE CONSTITUTION OF ALABAMA, 1901, AS AMENDED BY AMENDMENT NO. 26.**

**2. Governing Law**

This application shall be governed by the laws of the State of Alabama, without regard for its conflict of laws provision.

**3. Clarifications**

All requests for clarifications must be directed to the Application Point of Contact identified in Section I.D.

**4. Application Preparation Cost**

Any cost incurred by the respondent in the preparation, transmittal or presentation of any response or material submitted in response to this application will be borne solely by the applicant.

**5. Use of Information**

The State of Alabama reserves all rights available to it by law. Respondents to this application are hereby notified that all information, documentation, and any specific content or approaches included in applications will be analyzed, may appear in various reports, and may be used in any solicitation that may result from this application. Therefore, do not submit any proprietary or confidential information. The State of Alabama cannot and does not guarantee the confidentiality of information submitted.

**6. Ownership of Materials**

Ownership of all data, material, and documentation originated and submitted to the State of Alabama, pursuant to the application, shall belong exclusively to the State of Alabama and be subject to public inspection in accordance with the Alabama Open Records Law, Alabama Code § 36-12-40 et seq.

**7. Acceptance**

The State of Alabama reserves the right to reject applications that arrive late or otherwise do not meet all the specified requirements.

# III. APPLICATION SUBMISSION AND ORGANIZATION

**ALL APPLICATIONS ARE DUE BY 12:00 PM CENTRAL TIME ON THE DATE INDICATED IN SECTION II.A, SEQUENCE OF EVENTS. LATE RESPONSES WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.**

To respond to this application, please answer the questions listed in Section IV.

Applications shall be submitted in pdf format and e-mailed as an attachment to the Application Point of Contact identified in Section I.D. Other supporting materials/documentation shall be submitted via email in an appropriate format. Please designate your response with the email subject line “[Applicant Name] Response to the Alabama Community Broadband Technical Assistance Program”. Please contact the Application Point of Contact if other supporting materials are too large to submit via email.

Please feel free to share this application with other potential respondents.

Respondents are encouraged to use the map resource prepared by ADECA to identify target areas for broadband deployment planning and answer questions. The map can be found at the following link: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/71ffa564c3b84dfdad588a5fb939cbed>.

This map includes layers that will be used to score responses, as described in Section IV. The map includes the following layers. Please contact ADECA at [broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov](mailto:broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov) if you have questions about the map.

* **Areas Unserved by 25/3 Mbps –** An area or address is ***unserved*** by 25/3 Mbps broadband if it cannot receive internet access with transmission speeds that, at a minimum and on a consistent and reliable basis, provide 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload, which aligns with current federal standards.[[3]](#footnote-4) Areas that have a percentage served by less than 25/3 Mbps are divided into the following categories:
  + Census Block where 80% to 100% of residents do not have access to 25/3 Mbps
  + Census Block where 50% to 80% of residents do not have access to 25/3 Mbps
  + Census Block where 1% to 50% of residents do not have access to 25/3 Mbps
  + Census Block where 100% of residents are served by 25/3 Mbps
* **Areas Unserved by 100/20 Mbps** – An area or address is ***unserved*** by 100/20 Mbps broadband if it cannot receive internet access with transmission speeds that, at a minimum and on a consistent and reliable basis, provide 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload. Areas that have a percentage served by less than 100/20 Mbps are divided into the following categories:
  + Census Block where 80% to 100% of residents do not have access to 100/20 Mbps
  + Census Block where 50% to 80% of residents do not have access to 100/20 Mbps
  + Census Block where 1% to 50% of residents do not have access to 100/20 Mbps
  + Census Block where 100% of residents are served by 100/20 Mbps
* **Grant-Funded Areas** – These layers show areas selected by the following grant programs:
  + State broadband-specific grants
  + ReConnect Loan and Grant Program
  + Community Connect Program
  + Connect America Fund Phase II Auction
  + Rural Digital Opportunity Fund
* **Economic Need of the Community** – This dataset contains the results of the U.S. Census Bureau’s Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (2020) program poverty estimates for all counties with a poverty percentage of 20 percent or higher.
* **Socially Vulnerable Communities** – This dataset contains Census Tracts with a Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) overall ranking of 0.75 or higher. The SVI determines the degree to which a given community may be unable to prevent human suffering and financial loss in the event of a disaster. The SVI ranks the Census Tracts on 15 social factors:
  + Socioeconomic Status
    - Below Poverty
    - Unemployed
    - Income
    - No High School Diploma
  + Household Composition & Disability
    - Aged 65 or Older
    - Aged 17 or Younger
    - Civilian with a Disability
    - Single-Parent Households
  + Minority Status & Language
    - Minority
    - Aged 5 or Older who Speaks English “Less than Well”
  + Housing Type & Transportation
    - Multi-Unit Structures
    - Mobile Homes
    - Crowding
    - No Vehicle
    - Group Quarters
* **Rural Areas** – Any area within the 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. ADECA’s analysis of these areas found that most of them have a serviceable address density of six serviceable addresses per square mile.

**Figure 1** is an example of a map view that may help answer some of the application questions.

**Figure 1: Example of web map showing clusters of unserved areas and priority areas**

Map

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# IV. QUESTIONS AND SCORING

To be considered, applicants are requested to respond to all questions below in narrative form; there are no page limits. Additional supporting information such as maps, reports, or other relevant documentation may be provided as attachments and referenced from the narrative response as appropriate.

ADECA will evaluate each applicant’s response to the following questions and determine which communities will receive technical assistance. Questions with point values will be used to evaluate applications while questions without point values will be informational. If you have any questions about these questions, please contact ADECA at [broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov](mailto:broadband.fund@adeca.alabama.gov).

1. What is the name of your entity or jurisdiction?
2. Who is the point of contact for this response?
3. What specific jurisdiction(s) would you like to target? Please provide a map outlining the boundary of your project area (see map in Section III). (5 points for completion)
4. Will you partner with other jurisdictions? Examples include a municipality that partners with another municipality or a county that partners with municipalities within its boundaries. If so, please list the other jurisdictions and explain. (Up to 10 points)
5. Will your project area connect anchor institutions such as schools, healthcare facilities, or government entities? If so, please name the community anchor institutions. (Up to 10 points)
6. What are your broadband needs or gaps as they relate to the following areas, as you understand them? (Up to 10 points)
   1. Access, availability, lack of services in area
   2. Affordability
   3. Devices
   4. Digital skills or literacy (the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills).[[4]](#footnote-5)
7. What business, economic, technical, and other objectives do you have for participating in this program? Please be specific regarding the targeted project area in your community. (Up to 5 points)
   1. Job creation/enablement for specific disciplines
   2. Recovery from the pandemic
   3. Resilience against future crises
   4. Supporting critical infrastructure
   5. Work from home provisions
   6. Distance learning – K-12, higher education, skills training
   7. Other specific economic objectives
8. Describe your organization’s ability to complete the proposed project related to the following areas: (Up to 5 points)
   1. Leadership or key management
   2. Meeting spaces
   3. Community engagement and communication
9. Have you already begun or completed broadband planning? If so, please attach any planning documents.
10. Have you already begun stakeholder engagement? If so, please name the stakeholders. (Up to 5 points)
11. Is there currently an ISP serving your community? If so, please name the ISP/ISPs.
12. Is there an existing collaboration between your community and a private entity with an interest in expanding broadband in the community? Please provide details and any supporting documentation (i.e., a Memorandum of Understanding or other agreement) of this collaboration. (Up to 5 points)
13. ADECA intends to select those applications that will result in plans that can be replicated in other communities and further the goals of the Alabama Connectivity Plan. Please provide any information you feel will be relevant in making this assessment. (Up to 5 points)
14. Which of the technical support services being offered by this program would you be seeking and why?
    1. Identify and engage key stakeholders and identify relevant assets
    2. Educate community leaders
    3. Assess the community’s current broadband infrastructure
    4. Assess the community’s current broadband market (services)
    5. Evaluate current and future demand for broadband (needs assessment)
    6. Assess digital inclusion and equity
    7. Prepare a high-level design and cost estimate for broadband deployment
    8. Evaluate funding options and develop strategic approaches to grant applications and public-private partnerships
    9. Other – please explain
15. Which service category (unserved, economic need of the community, socially vulnerable communities, and rural areas) do you anticipate your project area falling within (see map)? ADECA will calculate your project score for these criteria based on the proportion of households within each scoring criteria compared to the total number of households in the jurisdiction.
    1. Unserved by 25/3 Mbps and 100/20 Mbps (up to 105 points)
       1. Unserved by 25/3 Mbps
          1. Proportion of households where 80% to 100% of residents do not have access to 25/3 Mbps (percentage of households multiplied by 30 points)
          2. Proportion of households where 50% to 80% of residents do not have access to 25/3 Mbps (percentage of households multiplied by 25 points)
          3. Proportion of households where 1% to 50% of residents do not have access to 25/3 Mbps (percentage of households multiplied by 20 points)
       2. Unserved by 100/20 Mbps
          1. Proportion of households where 80% to 100% of residents do not have access to 100/20 Mbps (percentage of households multiplied by 15 points)
          2. Proportion of households where 50% to 80% of residents do not have access to 100/20 Mbps (percentage of households multiplied by 10 points)
          3. Proportion of households where 1% to 50% of residents do not have access to 100/20 Mbps (percentage of households multiplied by 5 points)
    2. Grant-Funded Areas (no points possible)
    3. Economic Need of the Community (percentage of total households multiplied by 15 points)
    4. Socially Vulnerable Community (percentage of total households multiplied by 15 points)
    5. Rural Area (percentage of total households multiplied by 10 points)
16. Is there anything else, not mentioned in this application, that you would like to share?

1. <https://adeca.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/Alabama-Connectivity-Plan.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. The Alabama Connectivity Plan can be found at <https://adeca.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/Alabama-Connectivity-Plan.pdf>; the Alabama Broadband Map can be found at <https://broadband.alabama.gov/broadband-maps/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. “Fourteenth Broadband Deployment Report,” Federal Communications Commission, <https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/reports/broadband-progress-reports/fourteenth-broadband-deployment-report> (accessed June 27, 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. "Digital Literacy," American Library Association, <https://literacy.ala.org/digital-literacy/> (accessed June 20, 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)