

SUPPORTING STATEMENT

0572-0127

Broadband Grant Program

This is a revision of a currently approved collection. In response to the terms of clearance, the USDA Rural Development Utilities Programs has adapted the SF 424 as part of the application requirement and the application is available over the Internet.

A. Justification

1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development administers loan and grant programs through the Rural Utilities Service (Agency). The Agency is requesting approval for this collection in support of the Broadband Grant Program.

The provision of broadband transmission service is vital to the economic development, education, health, and safety of rural Americans. Congress has recognized the need to facilitate the deployment of broadband service in unserved rural areas. To further this objective, on July 28, 2004, 7 CFR 1729 Subpart A was amended with the publication of a final rule in the *Federal Register* (69 FR 44896) to administer the Community Connect Grant Program for the provision of broadband transmission service in rural America. See *Title III, Pub. L. 108-199, 118 Stat. 3.*

The Agency provides financial assistance in the form of grant to eligible entities that propose, on a “community-oriented connectivity” basis, to provide broadband transmission service that fosters economic growth and delivers enhanced educational, health care, and public safety services to extremely rural, lower income communities. The Agency gives priority to rural areas that it believes have the greatest need for broadband transmission services. Grant authority is utilized to deploy broadband infrastructure to extremely rural, lower income communities on a “community-oriented connectivity” basis. The “community-oriented connectivity” concept integrates the deployment of broadband infrastructure with the practical, everyday uses and applications of the facilities. This broadband access is intended to promote economic development and provide enhanced educational and health care opportunities. The Agency provides financial assistance to eligible entities that are proposing to deploy broadband transmission service in rural communities where such service does not currently exist and who will connect the critical community facilities including the local schools, libraries, hospitals, police, fire and rescue services and who will operate a community center that provides free and open access to residents.

2. Indicate how, by whom, and for what purpose the information is to be used. Except for a new collection, indicate the actual use the Agency has made of the information received from the current collection.

Applications will be submitted by entities to the Agency via electronic or hard copy. The applicant will submit a grant application that contains those items set forth in the NOFA and will enter into a Grant Agreement with the Agency. RUS will use the submitted information to determine the following:

- a) The broadband service in the area does not already exist and that the proposed service will meet the needs of the community; and
- b) That the funds needed to complete the project are adequate based on the grant amount requested, taking into consideration any additional funding proposed by the applicant from other sources.

3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology, e.g. permitting electronic submission of responses, and the basis for the decision for adopting this means of collection.

The Agency is committed to the E-Government Act, which requires Government agencies in general to provide the public the option of submitting information or transacting business electronically to the maximum extent possible. The Agency is participating in the Presidential Grants.gov initiative and this program is announced on www.Fedgrants.gov . Applicants are able to apply electronically through www.Grants.gov.

4. Describe efforts to identify duplication. Show specifically why any similar information already available cannot be used or modified for use for the purposes described in Item 2 above.

Each application will be for a new project and for new purposes; therefore, no existing data exists.

5. If the collection of information impacts small businesses or other small entities (item 5 of OMB Form 83-1), describe any methods used to minimize burden.

The Agency believes it has minimized the burden on both large and small entities and that the required information is the least amount needed to monitor the grant funds.

6. Describe the consequences to Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or conducted less frequently, as well as any technical or legal obstacles to reducing burden.

The submission of the required information is required at the time the application for the grant is made and is project specific and therefore, could not be submitted less frequently. Also, once funding for a specific unserved area has been made, no future funding for that particular area would be available again.

7. Explain any special circumstances that would cause an information collection to be conducted in a manner:

a. Requiring respondents to report information more than quarterly.

There are no such requirements.

b. Requiring written responses in less than 30 days.

There are no such requirements.

c. Requiring more than an original and two copies.

There are no such requirements.

d. Requiring respondents to retain records for more than 3 years.

There are no such requirements.

e. That is not designed to produce valid and reliable results that can be generalized to the universe of study.

This collection does not involve statistical information.

f. Requiring use of statistical sampling which has not been reviewed and approved by OMB.

This collection does not involve statistical information.

g. Requiring a pledge of confidentiality.

There are no such requirements.

h. Requiring submission of proprietary trade secrets.

There are no such requirements.

8. If applicable, identify the date and page number of publication in the Federal Register of the agency's notice soliciting comments on the information collection. Summarize public comments received and describe actions taken by the agency in response to these comments. Describe efforts to consult with persons outside the Agency to obtain their views on the availability of data, frequency of collection, the clarity of instructions and recordkeeping, disclosure, reporting format (if any), and on data elements to be recorded, disclosed, or reported.

In accordance with 5 CFR 1320.8(d), the Agency published a Notice and Request for Comments in the *Federal Register* on August 15, 2006, Vol. 71, No. 157, page 46891 (copy attached). One comment was received which briefly discussed the need for making broadband available in rural areas. However, no negative comment was offered on the collection of information, reporting, data, etc.

In addition to the published notice in the *Federal Register*, the agency has conducted outreach activities at which prospective applicants have been informed about the procedures and requirements of the program. Also, in the course of reviewing applications, program staff has received informal feedback from applicants on the process.

9. Explain any decision to provide any payment or gift to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.

No such decision has been made.

10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for the assurance in statute, regulation, or Agency policy.

No assurance has been made. Information submitted to the Agency by borrowers is covered by provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (5 U. S. C. 552).

11. Provide additional justification for any question of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior or attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private.

There are no questions of this nature.

12. Provide estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information.

The Agency estimates the hour burden on respondent to be 14,442 hours, determined as follows:

| | | |
|---|--------|-------|
| 90 grants X 160 hours = | 14,400 | hours |
| 21 grant agreements/Certificates of Authority X 2 hours = | 42 | hours |
| Total hours = | 14,442 | hours |

The Agency estimates the cost on respondents to be \$607,252.38, determined as follows:

| | |
|---|----------------|
| 90 grants X 160 hours X \$42.00 professional time | = \$604,800.00 |
| 21 grant agreements/Certificates of Authority X 2 hours X \$58.39 professional time | = \$ 2,452.38 |
| Total cost | = \$607,252.38 |

13. Provide an estimate of the total annual cost burden to respondents or recordkeepers resulting from the collection of information.

(a) Total capital and start-up cost component (annualized over its expected useful life); and

There are no capital or start-up costs involved with this collection.

(b) Total operation and maintenance and purchase of services component.

There is no operation and maintenance or purchase of services costs involved with this collection.

14. Provide estimates of annualized cost to the Federal Government.

The cost to the Federal Government to collect and evaluate this information is estimated to be \$49,165.44 based on the following calculations:

Preliminary Application review: 90 applications X 12 hours = 1,098 hours @ \$35.32 per hour = \$38,781.36

Final Application review and award: 21 applications X 14 hours = 294 hours @ \$35.32 per hour = 10,384.08.

15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments reported in items 13 or 14 of the OMB Form 83-1.

This is a revision of a currently approved collection. Fewer applications have been received than in the past resulting in an overall adjustment decrease of – 33, 568 burden

hours. The number of hours that staff spends reviewing applications has increased to reflect a more accurate time for reviewing applications and grants.

16. For collection of information whose results will be published, outline plans for tabulation and publication.

There are no plans for publications.

17. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons that display would be inappropriate.

There is no such approval requested.

18. Explain each exception to the certification statement identified in item 19 on OMB 83-1.

There are no exceptions.

B. Collection of Information Employing Statistical Methods.

This collection does not involve statistical methods.