

2021
SUPPORTING STATEMENT
0572-0147

7 CFR 1700, Subpart D - Substantially Underserved Trust Areas (SUTA)

A. Justification

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

The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) makes loans (direct and guaranteed) to finance electric, telecommunications, and water and waste infrastructure in rural areas.

The RUS Electric Program is a leader in lending to upgrade, expand, maintain, and replace the vast rural American electric infrastructure while the Telecommunications Program make loans to furnish and improve telecommunications and services in rural areas. The Water and Waste program provides loans, grants and loan guarantees for drinking water, sanitary sewer, solid waste and storm drainage facilities in rural areas and cities and towns of 10,000 or less.

The Electric and Telecommunications programs are authorized by the Rural Electrification Act (RE Act) of 1936 (7 U.S.C. 901 et. seq.) and the Water and Waste program is authorized by the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (CONACT) (7 U.S.C. 1926).

The 2008 Farm Bill (P.L. 110-246, codified at 7 U.S.C. 906f) authorized the Substantially Underserved Trust Area (SUTA) initiative. The SUTA initiative gives the Secretary of Agriculture certain discretionary authorities relating to financial assistance terms and conditions that can enhance the financing possibilities in areas that are underserved by certain RUS electric, water and waste, and telecom and broadband programs. The SUTA initiative identifies the need and improves the availability of RUS programs to reach trust areas when they are determined by the Secretary of Agriculture (such authority has been delegated to the Administrator of RUS) to be substantially underserved. The RUS programs that are affected by this provision include: Rural Electrification Loans and Guaranteed Loans, and High Cost Energy Grants; Water and Waste Disposal Loans, Guaranteed Loans and Grants; Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans and Guaranteed Loans; Community Connect Program and Rural eConnectivity Program.

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.

The Agency has made the instructions to forms available on the USDA eForms website at: <https://forms.sc.egov.usda.gov/eForms/welcomeAction.do?Home>.

Applicants submit the required application package to the program area for which they are seeking funding. The burden for the application package is covered under other packages as follows:

- Electric Program – OMB No. 0572-0032
- Telecommunications Program – OMB No. 0572-0079
- Rural Broadband Loans, Loan/Grant Combination, and Loan Guarantees
OMB No. 0572-0154
- Water and Environmental Program – OMB No, 0572-0121

Burden specific to this collection consists of an eligible applicant notifying RUS in writing, at the time of application, that it seeks consideration under the requirements of 7 CFR 1700, subpart D, and identifying the discretionary authority it seeks to have applied to its application.

The written request must include the following:

1. A description of the applicant, documenting eligibility,
2. A description of the community to be served, documenting eligibility,
3. An explanation and documentation of the high need for the benefits of the eligible program, which may include:
 - (i) Data documenting a lack of service (i.e. no service or unserved areas) or inadequate service in the affected community,
 - (ii) Data documenting significant health risks due to the fact that a significant proportion of the community's residents do not have access to, or are not served by, adequate, affordable service.
 - (iii) Data documenting economic need in the community, which may include:
 - (A) Per capita income of the residents in the community, as documented by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis,
 - (B) Local area unemployment and not-employed statistics in the community, as documented by the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics and/or the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs,
 - (C) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program participation and benefit levels in the community, as documented by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service,

(D) National School Lunch Program participation and benefit levels in the community, as documented by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service,

(E) Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program participation and benefit levels in the community, as documented by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families,

(F) Lifeline Assistance and Link-Up America Program participation and benefit levels in the community, as documented by the Federal Communications Commission and the Universal Service Administrative Company,

(G) Examples of economic opportunities which have been or may be lost without improved service.

(H) Data maintained and supplied by Indian tribes or other tribal or jurisdictional entities on “trust land” to the Department of Interior, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Housing and Urban Development that illustrates a high need for the benefits of an eligible program.

4. The impact of the specific authorities sought under this subpart.

The applicant must provide any additional information RUS may consider relevant to the application which is necessary to adequately evaluate the application under this subpart.

The information will be used in order to determine eligibility and compare applications for high need to determine priority for funding.

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.

RUS is committed to meeting the requirements of 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.

Applicants will submit the required documentation supporting their SUTA eligibility with their application for loan and grant funds in accordance with the application procedures for each specific agency loan/grant program. All documents required for application are provided on the agency’s website for use by applicants. Grant applications may be filed electronically on www.Grants.gov in accordance with directions found in the Funding Announcement for each agency grant program.

In cases where an entity has already filed an application for loan/grant funds with the agency, the applicant could submit the required documents to the applicable program area via electronic mail.

RUS General Field Representatives (GFRs), who are located across the United States, will work closely with SUTA eligible applicants in developing loan applications and the required SUTA documentation. The Water and Environmental Program (WEP) work with eligible applicants and borrowers through the work of circuit riders and other technical assistance providers funded through the Technical Assistance and Training (TAT) Grant Program.

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 new purpose; therefore, information will be unique and will not be duplicated. Where an existing borrower requests a new loan, certain organizational information, maintained in RUS files, will not need to be resubmitted.

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 determine applicant eligibility and project feasibility. It is estimated that 100 percent of the respondents will be small entities located in substantially underserved trust areas, associated with NAICS code 517312 Wireless Telecommunications Carriers.

Trust area means a community in “trust land” as defined in section 3765 of title 38, United States Code. The term “trust land” means any land that—

- (A) is held in trust by the United States for Native Americans,
- (B) is subject to restrictions on alienation imposed by the United States on Indian lands (including native Hawaiian homelands),
- (C) is owned by a Regional Corporation or a Village Corporation, as such terms are defined in section 3(g) and 3(j) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, respectively (43 U.S.C. 1602 (g), (j)); or
- (D) is on any island in the Pacific Ocean if such land is, by cultural tradition, communally owned land, as determined by the Secretary.

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 required information is submitted at the time of application and is necessary in order for RUS to make a prudent loan decision; therefore, this information cannot be submitted less frequently.

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 is no requirement to respond more than quarterly.

b. Requiring written responses in less than 30 days.

Responses are required at the time of application.

c. Requiring more than an original and two copies.

There is no requirement for more than an original and two copies.

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

There is no requirement to retain records for more than 3 years.

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

This information collection does not involve statistical information.

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

The collection does not require the use of statistical sampling.

g. Requiring a pledge of confidentiality.

There is no requirement for a pledge of confidentiality.

h. Requiring submission of proprietary trade secrets.

There is no requirement for the submission of proprietary trade secrets.

8. If applicable, identify the date and page number of publications 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.

As required by 5 CFR 1320.8(d), a Notice to request comments was published on in the *Federal Register* on September 27, 2021; Docket#: RUS-21-SFH-0007; Vol. 86; No. 178; Page number 51860. The public was given until November 16, 2021 to submit comments on this collection. Suggestions and comments are always considered by the Agency, and RD remains committed to pursuing further reductions in both the burdens placed upon our borrowers/customers and the total volume of regulations imposed. The Agency did not receive any comments.

The SUTA provisions amended the Rural Electrification Act of 1936 to make funding available to areas that historically have had difficulty receiving federal assistance. RUS in conjunction with the Office of Tribal Relations (hereinafter OTR), continuously works to identify issues that impact both the Trust areas who seek better access to RUS programs, and the federal agencies who have similar yet sometimes competing interests in these areas. In New Mexico, Mescalero Apache Telecom received a \$5.4 million loan to upgrade portions of its system and provide fiber service to approximately 50 percent of its territory. This is the first loan that RUS made under the Substantially Underserved Trust Area (SUTA) provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill. On a regular basis, RUS participates in outreach events and features the SUTA initiative in presentations and is responsive to requests for consultations throughout the year. Over the past five years, a total of three loan applications requesting SUTA consideration have been submitted to the Telecommunications Program.

For this renewal submission, the following individuals were contacted. Due to only one application during this period, Hopi Telecommunications, Inc. had to be used in consecutive submissions, the other two individuals were Electric participants:

No.	Company	Position
1	Hopi Telecommunications, Inc.	President/General Manager
Response: Estimated total hours to be 30. About 25 hours for research, information gathering, and SUTA documentation. An additional 5 hours for management meetings, accountant's time, etc.		
2	Alaska Village Electric Cooperative	Manager Project Development
Response: Estimated total hours to be 30. About 25 hours for research, information gathering, and SUTA documentation. An additional 5 hours for management meetings, accountant's time, etc.		
3	Gary Stassel Engineering	Principal
Response: Estimated total hours to be 30. About 25 hours for research, information gathering, and SUTA documentation. An additional 5 hours for management meetings, accountant's time, etc. Additionally, as the process becomes more standardized, it should become more efficient, therefore		

requiring less time to complete.

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

There has been no decision to provide payment or gifts to respondents.

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

No assurances of confidentiality have been provided to respondents.

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 a sensitive nature.

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

2 respondents, (1 from Telecommunication, and 1 from Electric) at 30 hours per response for a combined total of 60 burden hours. See attached spreadsheet.

There were no burden estimates submitted for the Water and Environmental Programs Division of Rural Utilities Service. Due to the Section 306C program, which currently only has grant funding, they did not receive any customer applications under 7 CFR 1700, Subpart D. Therefore, the Water and Environmental Program is reporting a Zero Burden estimate. See attached spreadsheet.

The hourly wage was calculated using the BLS May 2019 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates for Business and Financial Operations occupations 13-0000. An additional 29.4% in benefits was added to account for benefits and overhead for a total of \$48.45/hr. See attached spreadsheet.

(a). Water and Environmental Program Division

The Agency cost estimate is zero as follows:

Regulation	Number of Respondents	Total Person Responses	Hours per Response	Total Person Hours	Wage Class	Total Costs
7 CFR 1700-D	0	0	0	0	0	0

(b). Telecommunication Program

The Agency estimates the cost to respondents for the Telecommunication Program will be estimated at \$1,880.83 annually, computed as follows:

Regulation	Number of Respondents	Total Person Responses	Hours per Response	Total Person Hours	Wage Class	Total Costs
7 CFR 1700-D	1	1	30	30	\$48.45	\$1,880.83

The cost estimate is based on 1 organization filing a request. RUS used a labor rate of \$48.45 per hour plus 29.4% in benefits. The primary individual for a respondent would normally be a general manager. Data source: May 2019 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, United States; Bureau of Labor Statistics, http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm.

Management review:

\$48.45 wage X 1 response X 30 total person hours X 1.294 benefits = \$1,880.83.

Explanation of changes from the 2018 submission of the Supporting Statement:

The number of requests for SUTA consideration per year remained 1 based on activity in the recent fiscal years, and the equation provided in the 2018 submission has been corrected.

(c). Electric Program

The Agency estimates the cost to respondents for the Electric Program will be estimated at \$1,880.83 annually, computed as follows:

Regulation	Number of Respondents	Total Person Response	Hours per Response	Total Person Hours	Wage Class	Total Costs
7 CFR 1700-D	1	1	30	30	\$48.45	\$1,880.83

The cost estimate is based on 1 organization filing a request for this collection cycle. RUS used a median labor rate of \$48.45 per hour plus 29.4% in benefits. The primary individual for a respondent would normally be a general manager. Data source: May 2019 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, United States; Bureau of Labor Statistics, http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm.

Management review:

\$48.45 wage X 1 response X 30 total person hours X 1.294 benefits = \$1,880.83.

Explanation of changes from the 2015 submission of the Supporting Statement:

The number of requests for SUTA consideration per year has been reduced to 1 based on activity in the recent fiscal years, and the equation provided in the 2015 submission has been corrected. Additionally, the number of total person hours increased from 6 to 30, for the Electric Program, based on the responses gathered for this renewal.

The combined burden hours for the **Telecommunication** and **Electric Program** is **60 hours** and the cost to respondents is estimated at: **\$3,761.66**

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

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

There are no capital or start-up costs, nor operation and maintenance costs associated with this collection of information.

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

(a). Water and Environmental Program Division

The Agency cost estimate is zero as follows:

Regulation	Number of Respondents	Total Person Response	Hours per Response	Hourly Wage for staff time	Cost to Federal Government
7 CFR 1700-D	0	0	0	\$0	\$0

(b) Telecommunication Program Reporting:

Cost of total benefits as a percentage of total hourly compensation for Federal Government employees has been calculated by multiplying 36.25% by the hourly OPM wage* in accordance with OMB Memorandum M-08 13. The cost to the Federal Government to collect and evaluate this information is estimated to be approximately \$484.29 annually based on the following calculations:

Loan Analyst review of eligibility request and high need:

Regulation	Number of Respondents	Total Person Response	Hours per Response	Hourly Wage for staff time	Cost to Federal Government
7 CFR 1700-D	1	8	1.3625	\$47.35	\$170.32

\$47.35 wage X 1 response X 8 total person hours X 1.3625 benefit = \$170.32

* 2021 Salary rate for a GS-12, step 5

(c) Electric Program Reporting:

Cost of total benefits as a percentage of total hourly compensation for Federal Government employees has been calculated by multiplying 36.25% by the hourly OPM wage* in accordance with OMB Memorandum M-08 13. The cost to the Federal Government to collect and evaluate this information is estimated to be approximately **\$613.78** annually based on the following calculations:

Loan Analyst review of eligibility request and high need:

Regulation	Number of Respondents	Total Person Response	Hours per Response	Hourly Wage for staff time	Cost to Federal Government
7 CFR 1700-D	1	8	1.3625	\$56.31	\$613.78

\$56.31 wage X 1 response X 8 total person hours X 1.3625 benefit = \$613.78

* 2021 Salary rate for a GS-13, step 5

The combined cost to the Federal Government for the **Telecommunication** and **Electric Programs** reporting is estimated at: **\$784.10**.

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

This renewal submission remains at 1 in the number of SUTA respondent, as demonstrated by the number of total SUTA requests that the Telecom Program has received since the previous submission, and 1 submission in the number of Electric respondents which resulted in an increase in the number of annual responses from 1 to 2 respondents, and an increase in the number of burden hours from 30 hours to 60 hours.

The Water and Environmental Programs Division reported zero number of responses, respondents, and burden hours, for the SUTA Program. The SUTA program, authorized under the 2008 Farm Bill, provides the Administrator additional flexibilities when lending to Tribes and other communities located in “Trust Lands.” The Water and Environmental Programs provides financing to customers located on Trust Land under the Section 306C Program, as a result, there were no applications received from applicants under 7 CFR 1700, Subpart D of the SUTA Program.

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

The agency is required to make annual reports to Congress on (a) the progress of the SUTA initiative, and (b) recommendations for any regulatory or legislative changes that would be appropriate to improve services to substantially underserved trust areas. It is

anticipated that the agency would include information in the annual report regarding the number and type of requests that are received.

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 are no forms associated with this collection.

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

There are no exceptions to the certification statement.

B. Collection of Information Employing Statistical Methods.

This collection does not involve statistical methods.