

Broadband Ready Communities Grant Program FAQs

Updated 10/27/2023

County and Local Coordination

Q: If a city is eligible to apply for the grant, but the county is not, can the city proceed with the application?

A: If a city (or other political subdivision) with a Broadband Ready designation is in a county that does not have the designation, the city (or other political subdivision) may apply for funding on behalf of the county. The city (or other political subdivision) must submit written proof that the county and local governments agree to the arrangement. Grant awards will be made to the county; the city (or other political subdivision) is responsible for coordinating with the county government throughout the application process.

Q: What interaction is needed between cities and counties that are both Broadband Ready Communities? For example, the City of Henderson and Chester County are designated BRCs. Should both apply or just the county with recognition that the city will be participating in the deployment or dispersion of funds?

A: If the city and its parent county are designated Broadband Ready Communities, the County entity should submit the application, including a written agreement with the participating city.

Q: Where can I locate the list of counties and other localities with Broadband Ready Communities designation?

A: The counties and local governments (cities) currently with the Broadband Ready Communities designation status are listed on our website at [TNECD Broadband Communities page](#). If you believe that a county, local government, or other political subdivision is not reflected on this list but should be, please contact ECD.Broadband@TN.gov.

Project Information

Q: What best practices should entities observe when creating a project for the Broadband Ready Communities grant application?

A: Best practices when creating a project for the Broadband Ready Communities grant application is to ensure you include information about the community's need and demonstrated communication via letters or emails with the community, CAIs, and other entities. This could take several forms. For example, you may collaborate and engage with local libraries or school systems. Alternatively, if you have a relationship with your internet service provider, you may develop a public Wi-Fi zone in a downtown area or other common areas for the public. So far, we have seen some counties prioritize education and digital skills education for senior residents, while others focused on after-school coding programs.

Q: What kind of projects does TNECD expect to fund through this grant?

A: The Broadband Ready Communities grant may only be leveraged for the following types of projects:

- Digital skills training
- Education and workforce development
- Equipment/devices
- Marketing and public outreach for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)
- Public Wi-Fi
- Other costs relating to broadband readiness.

Q: Could the grant money be used with an ISP to expand internet into an unserved area of a county?

A: Yes, a maximum of \$50,000 can only be used for public Wi-fi projects (town squares, public facilities, etc.)

Q: Are programs for inmates allowed?

A: Yes, as long as these inmates are in county or state facilities.

Q: I've reviewed the Eligibility Requirements and Target Populations guidance on your website and my county does not automatically fit into any of the allowable categories. How will I verify that the individual end users of the proposed project satisfy the state and federal guidance?

A: Subrecipients will be required to verify that projects serve eligible individuals or households if they are not providing services in a qualified census tract or an eligible county. During the application process, subrecipients will be required to submit a description of how they will verify that projects serve eligible individuals or households if they are not providing services in a qualified census tract or an eligible county. This verification responsibility will be outlined in the subrecipient agreement and TNECD will monitor this verification process through the period of performance. TNECD will confirm funds are being deployed for eligible uses on an ongoing basis during quarterly reporting and a mid-point monitoring site visit or phone call. Qualified Census Tracts can be found at:

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/qct/1statetable.html?statefp=47.0&DDAYEAR=2023>

If the project is in a **Qualified Census Tract or an eligible county**, verifying the end user is eligible *is not* required.

If a project *is in the following counties*, subrecipients will have to verify projects serve eligible individuals:

- Cheatham, Davidson, Fayette, Knox, Loudon, Maury, Robertson, Rutherford, Sumner, Tipton, Williamson, Wilson

Budget

Q: Can we get a more detailed list of eligible expenditures?

A: The following are eligible expenditures of the Broadband Ready Communities grant:

- Supplies, telephone, postage and shipping, equipment rental and maintenance, and printing (devices, office equipment, telecommunications equipment, shipping, textbooks, broadband readiness materials, printing costs of fliers and other promotional materials, and more)
- Capital purchases (computer labs or classrooms with devices in place, assistive technology, adaptive technology, general purpose equipment, special purpose equipment, and equipment for hands-on learning activities)
- Construction (costs related to the construction, repair, rehabilitation, installation, and improvement of facilities as well as internal labor costs incurred as part of eligible project activities)
- Architect/engineering fees (costs related to engineering, architectural, and project management costs involved in designing and constructing the proposed project, such as designs of planned infrastructure builds completed by an engineer)
- Professional fees and grant and awards (legal and auditing fees, public feedback processes, equity assessments and planning, needs assessments, permitting, planning, architectural design, engineering design, and work related to environmental, historical, and cultural reviews)
- Other non-personnel (permits, required licenses, sales tax applicable to new equipment purchases and warehousing expenses, and miscellaneous minor material)
- Administrative expenses (administration (including performance accountability requirements), planning activities (excluding strategizing and implementation of developed plan), budgeting and accounting services to track grant and prepare reimbursement requests, environmental review, and federal grant compliance)

For more information about eligible costs, please review the “Budget Helptext” document available under the “Application Resources” tab for BRC. If you have additional questions about a specific cost that is not explicitly addressed on this document, please refer to the application guidebook, or contact ECD.Broadband@TN.gov.

Q: Do we have to estimate Project Contingency in our budget?

A: No, you do not have to reflect contingency costs in your budget for the Broadband Ready Communities Grant.

Q: Will the ineligible and eligible costs be posted online?

A: Yes, ineligible and eligible costs are listed on our website at <https://www.tn.gov/ecd/rural-development/broadband-office/grants.html> under the “Broadband Ready Communities” tab.

Other Requirements

Q: Are there additional requirements applicants should be aware of?

A: Yes, if and when they are awarded a grant. BRC will require all awardees to use a Professional Grant Administrator from your Development District across the grant cycle. The awardee will receive an initial drawdown of \$1,000 post completeness review and upon contract signing to pay to the Development District for application review. The remaining 5% - 6% will be paid out during the contract term to reimburse grant administrative activities performed by Development District staff through the administrative expense contract category.

Q: Will BRC have to submit quarterly reports if they receive a grant award? If yes, what information will be asked for during the quarterly reporting period?

A: In addition to expenditure and project progress, grantees will be required to report the number of individuals served and the demographic data of those served as well as outcomes of those served.

Key Dates

Q: When will the application launch?

A: The Broadband Ready Communities application portal launched on Monday, October 2, 2023, and will close on November 15, 2023.

Q: When is the grant expected to be awarded?

A: The Broadband Ready Communities grant is expected to be awarded in March 2024. More information will be provided when this period approaches.

Additional Information

Q: What is TNECD Broadband's website?

A: For more information regarding the Broadband Ready Communities Grant Program, please visit: <https://www.tn.gov/ecd/rural-development/broadband-office/grants.html> and click on the "Broadband Ready Communities" tab.

Q: Who can I contact for more information?

A: For more questions regarding the Broadband Ready Communities Grant Program, please contact one of the following individuals:

- Leah Mims | Broadband Grants Coordinator
leah.mims@tn.gov
- Codi Drake | Broadband Grants Coordinator – Digital Opportunity Coordinator
codi.drake@tn.gov
- Taylre M. Beaty | State Broadband Director
taylre.beaty@tn.gov

Q: Will the Broadband Ready Communities Grant Program webinar slides and recording be posted on TNECD's website?

A: To view the slides from or to watch a recording of the Broadband Ready Communities Grant Program webinar, please visit <https://www.tn.gov/e cd/rural-development/broadband-office/grants.html>. Click the "Broadband Ready Communities" tab and then the "Supplemental Materials" tab.