

Final Mile Rural Community Program

Guidelines and Criteria

Objective

The *Final Mile Rural Community Program* consists of a \$5 million initiative to fund projects that enable high-speed Internet access to unserved locations in rural Alberta.

Program Description and Eligible Activities

This funding program is part of the Government of Alberta's Final Mile Rural Connectivity Initiative to extend high-speed Internet connectivity to the vast majority of Albertans.

The program will consider projects that deliver high-speed Internet connectivity to unserved locations in rural communities in Alberta. Unserved locations are areas that include Alberta households that do not have access to high-speed Internet service at a minimum speed of 1.5 Mbps download.

Eligible projects must align with the Government of Alberta's priorities and mandate, and ensure fair and equitable treatment among stakeholders. In addition, project applicants must outline the outcomes, benefits, and impacts of their project on Albertans, their rural community and local businesses. Specifically this should outline the number of unserved households that will have access to high-speed internet in the rural community, as defined, as a result of this project.

Service Alberta, Agriculture and Rural Development, AAMDC, and AUMA completed a coverage analysis of unserved locations across the province in 2011. These locations will assist in validating project proposals under this program.

Eligible applicants

The following are eligible to apply for funding from the program:

- Municipality, as defined in the Municipal Government Act
- Band, as defined in the Indian Act
- Metis Settlement

Not-for-profit organizations and for-profit businesses/ventures are not eligible for funding but are encouraged to partner with an eligible applicant on a project.

Rural Communities

For the purposes of this program, projects must occur in a rural community defined as any Alberta community outside of the 27 urban centres that make up the Alberta Supernet base area communities.

All applicants must demonstrate the ability to lead the high-speed Internet initiative and contribute resources to the project in their community.

Eligible costs

Eligible costs under this program include:

- High-speed Internet related infrastructure such as towers, equipment and technology, fibre optic cable, wireless equipment, installation costs and radio license fees

- Network development and design costs, including consulting fees and professional services related to the project outcome
- Project management costs
- Temporary staff costs directly related to the high-speed Internet project
- Software, materials and supplies
- Other costs approved by the Government of Alberta that are directly related to the project

Ineligible costs

- Purchase of land, buildings and vehicles
- Consumer/ end-user equipment, transmission, and installation/ hook-up costs
- Goods and services tax (GST), and cost of borrowing
- General office equipment and overhead costs
- Stand-alone feasibility study costs
- Membership fees, dues, and contributions
- Ongoing operational, lease and maintenance costs
- Project costs incurred prior to project approval
- Costs that have been paid by another Government of Alberta or Government of Canada program or agency
- Any other costs deemed ineligible by the Government of Alberta

Funding levels

The program will provide up to a maximum of 75 percent of eligible project costs per community project.

Successful applicants must provide a minimum of 25 percent of approved project costs. In-kind contributions may be considered. Applicants are encouraged to leverage this grant program with others, where eligible.

Other funding and assessment criteria

- Complete analysis of the number of unserved households that will have access to high-speed Internet service and the site location(s) of the infrastructure as a result of the project
- Degree and ways in which a project leverages other government initiatives and existing infrastructure, as feasible
- Integration into a comprehensive rural community plan
- Demonstrated infrastructure scalability to offer services at 3.0 and 5.0 Mbps speeds
- Level of community/regional engagement, support, collaboration and partnership
- Capacity to successfully complete the project
- Demonstrated availability of funding sources and partnerships
- Demonstrated service sustainability in the long term

Successful applicants must retain majority ownership of the assets related to the project for a minimum of five years following the completion of the project. In addition, the applicant must ensure continuous access to high-speed Internet services for a minimum of five years following project completion, and continue to demonstrate long-term sustainability.

Funding must be approved before projects are initiated.

Program term

Program funding will expire on March 31, 2013 or earlier depending on availability of funds.

Application and selection process

Applicants are required to complete and submit a program application form on or before March 31, 2012.

Only those declared applicants will be screened for eligibility and asked to submit a full project proposal for review against the program requirements and criteria. The final date for receipt of proposal documents will be December 31, 2012.

Applications will be evaluated by a Cross-Ministry Program Committee that will make project funding recommendations for consideration by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Only those project applications best meeting the program criteria will be considered for funding.

Other

Applicants whose projects are approved must enter into a funding agreement with the Government of Alberta in order to receive funding. The funding agreement will contain all the terms and conditions of the funding.

Successful applicants will be required to provide co-location opportunities, at reasonable rates, to all publically-supported high-speed Internet access points.

Successful applicants must demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the Province, that an open, fair, and transparent process will be used in selecting all new construction, management, and/or operating (i.e. service provider/ISP) contracts for the rural community.

Successful projects may be documented and used for other outreach programs for the purpose of further developing broadband deployment initiatives in rural communities, and to encourage a culture of broadband use.

Contact Information

For further information on this program, please contact:

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