



Tennessee Emergency Broadband Fund

The COVID-19 pandemic has elevated the importance of critical broadband infrastructure to facilitating participation in telemedicine, distance learning, and telecommuting. Reliable, affordable broadband service is necessary to meet these needs in Tennessee's communities.

Program Description

- The *Tennessee Emergency Broadband Fund* utilizes a portion of the State of Tennessee's federal aid known as the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) to enhance broadband infrastructure and access to individuals and families affected during the COVID-19 pandemic by the lack of broadband access in their area.
- Projects must meet the CRF criteria, which is designed to address public health and safety by improving opportunities for telemedicine, distance learning, and public safety.
- The total amount of funding dedicated to this program will be determined by the TN Financial Stimulus Accountability Group, based on availability of funds and quality of applications received.

Eligible entities

- Entities legally are those authorized to provide broadband in the State of Tennessee including but not limited to cable providers, electric and telephone cooperatives, fixed wireless providers, municipal broadband providers, telecommunications providers, and satellite providers.

Eligible areas

- Unserved or underserved locations lacking all equipment necessary to provide a fixed, terrestrial 25mb/3mb broadband connection capable of supporting two-way video communication necessary to participate in telemedicine, distance learning, and telecommuting at the time of award.
- The Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) project completion timeframe requirement does not allow for the detailed service verification process employed with the Tennessee Broadband Accessibility grant program. Instead, providers are required to self-certify that existing service providing a fixed, terrestrial 25mb/3mb connection capable of supporting two-way video communication necessary for telemedicine, distance learning and teleworking is unavailable to locations.
- Grantees found to have falsely claimed area eligibility may be subject to the State's rescindment of grant funds.

Eligible expenses

- Eligible expenses are those necessary to provide broadband service supporting the needs outlined above to an end user where it was previously unavailable.
- Expenses will fall into the following categories.
 - o Complete project costs comprising of shovel-ready infrastructure deployment where planning and engineering design have been completed and necessary permits are executed. Expenses could include:
 - Construction
 - Materials

- Equipment
- Service delivery validation
- Partial project costs necessary to serve end users in areas where infrastructure already exists but service is not yet available to specific grant locations. Expenses could include but are not limited to:
 - Service drops
 - Optical network terminals, modems, and other end user equipment
 - Fixed wireless customer premise equipment and antennas
 - Satellite equipment
- Public wi-fi access. Expenses could include but are not limited to:
 - Construction of infrastructure necessary to provide Wi-Fi connection
 - Wi-Fi access points at community locations
 - Wi-Fi rangers for buses
- Note that expenses necessary to operate and maintain the network are solely the responsibility of the grant recipient.

Round 3 “Broadband Accessibility Grant” projects

- Given the expedited nature of awards, TNECD will prioritize unfunded applications from last year’s Tennessee Broadband Accessibility Grant only if they meet the CRF criteria outlined in these program guidelines.
- Previous applicants are allowed and encouraged to reduce the scope of unfunded applications to meet the new, expedited timeline. Projects unable to be completed by Dec. 15, 2020 should not be submitted.

Application

- Funds will be distributed through a grant application process through the Department of Economic and Community Development.
- Funds are available to cover 80% of the project costs with a required grantee cash match of 20%. Federal grant and in-kind funds do not qualify as grantee match.
- Application will be available at tn.gov/broadband from July 31 – August 6, 2020
- Scoring would include eligibility requirements, proposed grantee match, speed and scalability of the proposed technology, overall economic impact of the broadband project and consideration of how the project will support the community and its efforts to address challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Applications must be reviewed by a professional engineer (PE) or another qualified individual.

Project timeline

- Expenses must be incurred by grantees with service available to end users by Dec. 15, 2020. After certification of project completion, grantees will be fully reimbursed by the State by March 15, 2021. Currently the federal requirements of the funding do not permit project extension for any reason.

Public Comment Period

- To ensure transparency and best use of taxpayer funds, the application process will include a brief public comment period.
- TNECD will post a description of the applications received including the proposed service area.
- The online public comment period will last from August 11-12, 2020.

- All comments collected during the public comment period may be subject to public disclosure, except for the specific location of infrastructure assets.
- This period is designed to provide an opportunity for providers to inform us of any issues or concerns with an application or its proposed service area.
- Providers are highly encouraged to submit comments and corresponding documentation if all homes within the area proposed to be served already have service available.
- In order for comments regarding existing service to be considered when reviewing applications, compelling and detailed supporting evidence must be provided. Comments with insufficient evidence or documentation will not be considered.
- Where evidence demonstrates that individual households and businesses are currently served with a 25/3 fixed, terrestrial connection, that portion of the grant area will be disqualified.
- In order for a defined area to be considered served, service at or exceeding 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload must be generally available to all residential customers in the defined area.
- Providers who comment may be asked to provide additional information and/or work with TNECD to validate service availability.
- If a commenter is found to have submitted inaccurate information, all current and future comments from said commenter will be disregarded in the scoring process for this funding as well as future funding from the Tennessee Broadband Accessibility Grant program.

Funds Disbursement and Accountability

- ECD will award 100% of grant funds upon project completion as certified by a professional engineer (PE) or broadband consultant approved by TNECD.
- Grantees will be notified via award letter and will receive permission to begin project on that date.
- To ensure satisfactory progress is being made to meet the December 2020 deadline, projects will be monitored during the grant contract period and grantees will submit a progress report by October 30, 2020.
- Project locations will be posted publicly to ECD's Broadband Assistance [dashboard](#).
- ECD reserves the right to rescind the grant funds for reasons including but not limited to:
 - o Grantee fails to complete the project by December 15, 2020.
 - o Grantee knowingly falsifies self-certification regarding initial service availability to eligible grant households.