USDA Rural Development
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Together, America Prospers

USDA Rural Development | Rural Utilities Service

Broadband Technical Assistance

Application Guide for Fiscal Year 2023

Executive Summary

The Broadband Technical Assistance (BTA) Application Guide provides a detailed explanation of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Utilities Service's (RUS) policies and procedures for submitting an application for Fiscal Year (FY) 2023.

We divided this guide into three sections:

1. **Program Summary:** This section describes BTA requirements and features. Chapters include:
    - Eligibility requirements
    - The application and award process
    - Program and reporting requirements
2. **Application Instructions**: This section provides step-by-step instructions on how to submit your application.
3. **Appendix:** This section contains definitions and acronyms used in the guide.

Note: This application guide is optimized for digital delivery and usability. If you need assistance using this guide, please contact the Rural Utilities Service team using the "contact us" link available at https://tinyurl.com/ysr6kann.

Last updated April 2023

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 1
Table of Contents 2
Section 1: Program Summary 4
- Introduction to Broadband Technical Assistance 4
- Authorization 4
- Available Funding 4
- Applicant Eligibility 5
- Eligible Project Purposes 5
- Ineligible Project Purposes 7
- Scoring Criteria 7
  - Project Work Plan (Up to 30 points) 7
  - Organizational Capacity (Up to 20 points) 8
  - Targeted Communities (20 points) 9
  - Rurality (Up to 20 points) 9
  - Economic Need (Up to 20 points) 11
  - Performance Measures (Up to 10 points) 11
- Program Resources 12

Section 2: Application Instructions 12
- Application Requirements 12
- Sample Budget Worksheet 13
  - Instructions for Using the Sample Budget Worksheet 13
- Sample Communities Worksheet 13
- Determining Rurality 15
- Determining Targeted Communities 22
- Registration Requirements 26
  - System for Award Management (SAM) and Grants.gov Registration 26
  - Unique Entity Identifier 26

Application Submission 27
Application Review and Selection Process 28
Application Submission 28
Incomplete Applications 28
Scoring 28
Ineligible Applications 28
Selection Process 28
Legal Documents 28
Award Receipt 28
Post-Award Reporting Requirements 29
Using Form SF-270 29
Performance Reporting 29
Compliance with Other Federal Policies 29
Recipient and Sub-Recipient Reporting 30
Section 3: Appendix 30
Definitions 30

Section 1: Program Summary

Introduction to Broadband Technical Assistance

USDA Rural Development's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) administers federal programs that support the development and improvement of infrastructure in rural areas. To further the mission of expanding economic opportunities and improving the quality of life for rural residents, we invest across a broad range of sectors, including electric, renewable energy, and telecommunications.

The purpose of broadband technical assistance (BTA) is to encourage the expansion of broadband services in rural areas by awarding cooperative agreement funding to eligible entities. This funding supports the delivery of technical assistance and training to rural communities in need of broadband and rural broadband providers.

The types of activities BTA funding supports include project planning and community engagement, financial sustainability, environmental compliance, construction planning and engineering, accessing federal resources, and data collection and reporting.

Authorization

The 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act (Public Law 115-141 – available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/bdcpa4v6 - PDF) authorizes broadband technical assistance. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Public Law 117-58 – available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/2p9hcpww - PDF) supports the authorization.

Available Funding

There is $20 million in funding available for FY 2023. At our discretion, we can increase the total level of funding from any available funding source. Awards must meet the statutory requirements of the program from which RUS pulled additional funding. Minimum and maximum award amounts vary depending upon the funding category the applicant selects. Applicants must choose **one** funding category for consideration.

- Up to $7.5 million is available for **technical assistance providers.** The minimum award is $50,000, and the maximum award is $1 million. Those applying under this funding category must propose to deliver broadband technical assistance that will benefit rural communities.
- Up to $7.5 million is available for **technical assistance recipients.** The minimum award is $50,000, and the maximum award is $250,000. Those applying under this funding category must be beneficiaries of broadband technical assistance.

- Up to $5 million is available for **projects supporting cooperatives.** The minimum award is $50,000, and the maximum award is $1 million. Those submitting an application under this category must propose a project supporting the establishment or growth of broadband cooperatives that will benefit rural communities.

Note: None of these funding categories require cost share or matching funds.

Applicant Eligibility

The following entities can apply for BTA:

- Federally recognized Tribes and Tribal entities
- State or local governments, including their agencies, subdivisions, instrumentalities, or political subdivisions
- Territories or possessions of the United States
- An institution of higher education, including 1862, 1890 (Historically Black Colleges and Universities – HBCUs), and 1994 (Tribal Colleges and Universities – TCUs) Land Grant Institutions, and Hispanic-serving Institutions
- Nonprofit organizations with 501(c)(3) Internal Revenue Service status
- Cooperatives or mutual organizations
- Corporations
- Limited liability companies or limited liability partnerships

Note: Individuals are not eligible for BTA funding.

Eligible Project Purposes

Broadband technical assistance provides financial assistance to technical assistance providers and rural communities to promote the expansion of broadband service into eligible rural areas.

For the purposes of BTA, we use the following criteria to define a rural area:

- Any area **not** located within a city, town, or incorporated area that has a population greater than 20,000 inhabitants
- An urbanized area adjacent to a city or town with a population greater than 50,000, as confirmed by the most recent decennial U.S. Census.

Rural areas exclude certain populations as noted in 7 U.S.C. 1991(a)(13)(H) and (I), (available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/22ndu5ck - PDF). An “urbanized area” means a densely populated territory as defined in the most recent decennial U.S. Census.

Recipients must use funds to support BTA activities, which include:

- Helping rural communities, cooperatives, consultants, or other entities identify and plan for delivering broadband service to rural areas
- Identifying public and private resources to finance broadband facilities
- Preparing feasibility studies, financial forecasts, market surveys, environmental studies, and technical design information to support broadband services
- Preparing reports and surveys necessary to document the need for broadband services, determine price ranges, and request financial assistance
- Analyzing and improving broadband facilities management and operations, including implementing automation, adopting new software, conducting training, and determining efficiency

Your proposed project must include a component that allows for active participation and substantial involvement by USDA RD staff. Your application must contain examples of measurable, substantial involvement including:

- Development of training sessions and outreach materials
- Joint gatherings of community members, partners, and stakeholders
- Joint delivery of training for USDA RD programs
- Joint efforts to form new broadband cooperatives and support existing cooperative efforts to expand broadband service into rural areas

You must show intent to engage USDA RD staff in broadband technical assistance activities. As such, it is your responsibility to identify specific tasks where RD staff can provide measurable, substantial involvement in your project. **If you do not identify such tasks, your application will not be considered to receive funding.**

You also must obtain certification from the appropriate Tribal officials for any projects proposed by a non-Tribal applicant that crosses over – or is located on – Tribal lands. Appropriate officials include the Tribal Council of the Tribal Government with jurisdiction over the Tribal lands in question**. We will not consider non-Tribal applications that fail to provide Tribal certification to administer a project on Tribal lands.**

To determine if your proposed project crosses – or is located on – Tribal lands, use the Tribal lands geographic information system (GIS) layers available on USDA RD's BTA map (available on the BTA website at this link: https://tinyurl.com/2p95jduf.)

Ineligible Project Purposes

Applications requesting funds for ineligible project costs will be disqualified. A complete list of ineligible costs can be found in 2 CFR Part 200 (available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/k2rwavza). For example, you cannot use BTA award funds to pay for:

- Construction in any form
- Activities serving nonrural communities
- Activities supporting communities with existing broadband access
- Duplicative projects funded by another award
- Indirect costs

  Note: Indirect costs are defined as "those not readily identified with a particular grant, contract, project function, or activity." Indirect costs are those necessary for the general operation of the organization and the activities it performs.

Scoring Criteria

We will evaluate each eligible, complete application based on the criteria identified in this section. A maximum of 120 points is possible.

A written narrative proposal is required and must address criteria in this order:

- Project Work Plan: Up to 30 points possible
- Organizational Capacity: Up to 20 points possible
- Targeted Communities: 20 points possible
- Rurality: Up to 20 points possible
- Economic Need: Up to 20 points possible
- Performance Measures: Up to 10 points possible

Project Work Plan (Up to 30 points)

Your work plan should address the soundness of your proposed broadband technical assistance approach.

Here is how we will score this section:

Work Plan Approach

- Clearly defines and describes project objectives and key goals, rural communities served, existing and potential partnerships, and anticipated deliverables.
- Lists all rural communities that will benefit from the project.

- Describes the characteristics of the communities served, including information such as population size and density, poverty rate, and other economic indicators.

Work Plan Implementation

- Describes in detail how the project will provide technical assistance, and how it will lead to expanded broadband service in rural areas.
- Outlines major tasks, key personnel involvement, the time required for each task, any substantial involvement from USDA RD staff, and the expected deliverables.

Alignment of Budget to Work Plan

- Aligns the budget justification with the tasks detailed in the workplan.
- Discusses how the budget supports the proposed activities described in the project's key tasks.
- Provides the budget narrative in a chart, spreadsheet, table, or similar format.
- Ensures the budget narrative is easily readable on letter-size, printable pages.
- Presents the information in such a way that reviewers can readily understand what expenses the project will incur.
- Includes statements of work for any subcontractors and consultants.

We created a sample budget worksheet (available on the BTA website at this link: https://tinyurl.com/2p95jduf) to help you develop your budget and alignment justification. You will find instructions on how to complete this worksheet in the **Budget Worksheet** section of this guide on page 13

Organizational Capacity (Up to 20 points)

You must demonstrate the capacity to deliver and support broadband technical assistance activities.

In this section, we will evaluate how well your application:

- Specifies the number of years of experience the technical assistance provider has in providing broadband technical assistance to rural communities.
- Details the technical assistance provider's experience in providing this assistance to rural communities.
- Identifies the types of rural communities previously served.
- Explains the technical assistance provider's experience in performance evaluation.

- Demonstrates that you have identified appropriate key personnel, both in terms of the number of personnel and their qualifications.
- Provides specific detail regarding the qualifications of key personnel relating to broadband technical assistance.

  We also will assess project personnel's ability to access data for needs assessments, as well as evaluate their access to planners and other technical experts.

Targeted Communities (20 points)

You must describe how your proposed technical assistance activities will benefit targeted communities. You should detail how your proposed project will promote the expansion of broadband within the targeted communities. You also should describe how the plan will help others plan for – and access – broadband funding opportunities.

You will receive 20 points if at least 50 percent of the rural communities benefiting from your proposed project consists of:

- Tribes and Tribal entities
- Colonias
- Persistent poverty counties
- Distressed energy communities

A GIS layer of the types of communities noted above can be found on the BTA Map available on the BTA website at this link: https://tinyurl.com/2p95jduf.

Reminder: If you are a non-Tribal applicant, you **must** obtain certification from the appropriate Tribal official if your proposed project crosses over – or on – Tribal lands.

You can use the sample communities worksheet to note which targeted communities your project will serve. For instructions on how to complete the sample worksheet, see the **Sample Communities Worksheet** section of this guide on page 13

Rurality (Up to 20 points)

We will award rurality points for projects serving the least dense rural areas as measured by the population of the communities served. The overall rurality score is determined by the **average** of the scores for all communities served by the project.

Here is how we will score this section:

Exceptionally Rural: An area with a population of **5,000 or fewer** will receive **20 points.** This means:

- Any area of the United States **not included** within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough with a population of more than 5,000
- Any area **not** part of an urbanized area adjacent to a city or town with a population of more than 50,000

Rural: An area with a population of **5,001 – 10,000** will receive **15 points**.

- Any area of the United States **included** within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough with a population of more than 5,000, but not more than 10,000
- Any area **not** part of an urbanized area adjacent to a city or town with a population of more than 50,000

Mid-Rural: An area with a population of **10,001 – 20,000** will receive **10 points**.

- Any area of the United States **included** within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough with a population of more than 10,000, but not more than 20,000
- Any area **not** part of an urbanized area adjacent to a city or town with a population of more than 50,000

Urban: Areas with population of **more than 20,000** are **ineligible for BTA funds**.

- Any area of the United States **included within the boundaries** of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough with a population of more than 20,000
- Any area **part** of an urbanized area adjacent to a city or town with a population of more than 50,000

If a community is **not within** the boundaries of a town or place identified by the 2010 U.S. Census, there is a possibility the community is so rural that it is not associated with any Census-recognized community. If this is the case, we will consider the location "Census Rural." You should report such communities as "Exceptionally Rural" areas unless they are adjacent to a city or town with a population of more than 50,000.

To streamline your application process, you can use the Sample Communities Worksheet detailed on page 13 to determine the rurality score of your project.

For instructions on how to find the U.S. Census data for your community, and how to use the BTA map to determine the rurality of communities, see the Determining Rurality section on page 15

Economic Need (Up to 20 points)

Economic need is based on the **county** poverty percentage of the communities proposed within your project. U.S. Census Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE – available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/8w49cvrw) program data determines these percentages.

In geographic areas for which no SAIPE data exists, we will use an average SAIPE poverty percentage of 30 percent. Please review SAIPE data available on the BTA program website at https://tinyurl.com/2p95jduf.

We will determine the Economic Need Score percentage by calculating **the average** scores for all communities to be served by the proposed project.

Each community will receive points as follows:

- County poverty percentage **greater than or equal to** 30 percent: **20 points**
- County poverty percentage **greater than or equal to** 20 percent **but less than** 30 percent: **15 points**
- County poverty percentage **greater than or equal to** 10 percent **but less than** 20 percent: **10 points**
- County poverty percentage **less than** 10 percent: **0 points**

Performance Measures (Up to 10 points)

You can receive up to 10 points based on your identified performance measures to evaluate the progress and impact of your proposed project.

We will base these performance measures on your proposal. It must include a description of how your proposed project will measure the results of the technical assistance provided. In addition, the proposal must include the benchmarks your project will use to measure effectiveness. You should use specific, quantifiable indicators.

Program Resources

- Broadband Technical Assistance Website (available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/2p95jduf)
- Broadband Technical Assistance Mapping Tool (available on the BTA website). The map includes a GIS layer to identify targeted communities and nonrural areas.
- Grants.gov website (available at https://www.grants.gov/)

If you have questions about the BTA program or application process, fill out the "Contact Us" form at this link: https://tinyurl.com/ysr6kann, and choose "Broadband Technical Assistance" from the dropdown menu.

Section 2: Application Instructions

Application Requirements

Please submit applications electronically through https://www.grants.gov. We will not accept paper or email submissions. To be considered for funding, your complete application must include all required forms, information, and supporting documentation described below.

Written Narrative Proposal

- Assemble your written narrative into one or more Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) files.
- Limit your written narrative section to 25 pages.

  Note: The scoring panel will not consider information exceeding 25 pages.
- Include the elements described in the Scoring Criteria section on page 7
- Clearly identify the funding category you are choosing.
- Upload the completed PDFs as attachments to your application on the Grants.gov website (available at https://www.grants.gov)

Standard Form 424: Application for Federal Assistance (non-construction)

- Available on the BTA website at this link: https://tinyurl.com/2p95jduf.

Standard Form 424B: Assurances: Non-Construction Programs

- Available on the BTA website at this link: https://tinyurl.com/2p95jduf

Form RD 400-4: Assurance Agreement

- Available on the BTA website at this link: https://tinyurl.com/2p95jduf

Note: We may contact you to request additional information or seek clarification on materials you submit.

Sample Budget Worksheet

In your project budget, you must include all budget items to be funded by the award. The budget must **only** include eligible project costs. Please review the BTA Funding Opportunity Announcement (available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/fhmmx5d8) for a list of eligible and ineligible project costs.

Instructions for Using the Sample Budget Worksheet

1. **Applicant Name**: Enter the name of the applicant at the top of the worksheet.
2. **Item Category**: Select the appropriate category from the dropdown menu. If selecting "other," please clearly explain the category in the "Item Description" column.
3. **Item Description:** Explain in further detail the line-item you added to the worksheet.
4. **Item Cost:** List the total cost for the line-item.
5. **Communities Served:** List all the communities the line-item will serve. Communities should match those listed in your Sample Communities Worksheet.
6. **Work Plan Alignment and Item Justification:** The detailed budget justification should align with the tasks identified in your workplan. Discuss how the budget line-item specifically supports the proposed activities discussed in the project's key tasks.

Sample Communities Worksheet

We created a Sample Communities Worksheet to help you identify:

- The areas your project proposes to serve
- The rurality of those communities
- The targeted communities served in each area

Please follow the instructions below to complete the worksheet located on the BTA website.

1. **Applicant Name**: Enter the name of the applicant at the top of the worksheet.
2. **Communities Served:** Enter the city, town, **and** county you propose to serve.

3. **Targeted Communities Served**: Select all targeted communities served.
    a. Applicants can locate targeted communities on the BTA map.
    b. Review the BTA map to determine if your project overlaps a targeted community.
    c. Review the Scoring Criteria section on page 7 of this guide and in the FOA for more information on targeted communities.
4. **Census Population**: Enter the community's U.S. Census population.
    a. Review the Determining Rurality section on page 15 for detailed instructions on how to find the population using the U.S. Census website.

5. **Is the community adjacent to a city or town with a population greater than 50,000?** (Select "yes" or "no" from the dropdown menu.)
    a. You can use the map available on the BTA website to determine if the community identified in Column A is adjacent to a city or town with a population greater than 50,000 (a nonrural area).
    b. Review the Determining Rurality section on page 15 for detailed instructions on how to determine if your community falls within a nonrural area.
6. **Name of Adjacent City or Town**: If the community listed in Column A is determined to be adjacent to a city or town with a population greater than 50,000, list the name of the adjacent city or town in this column.

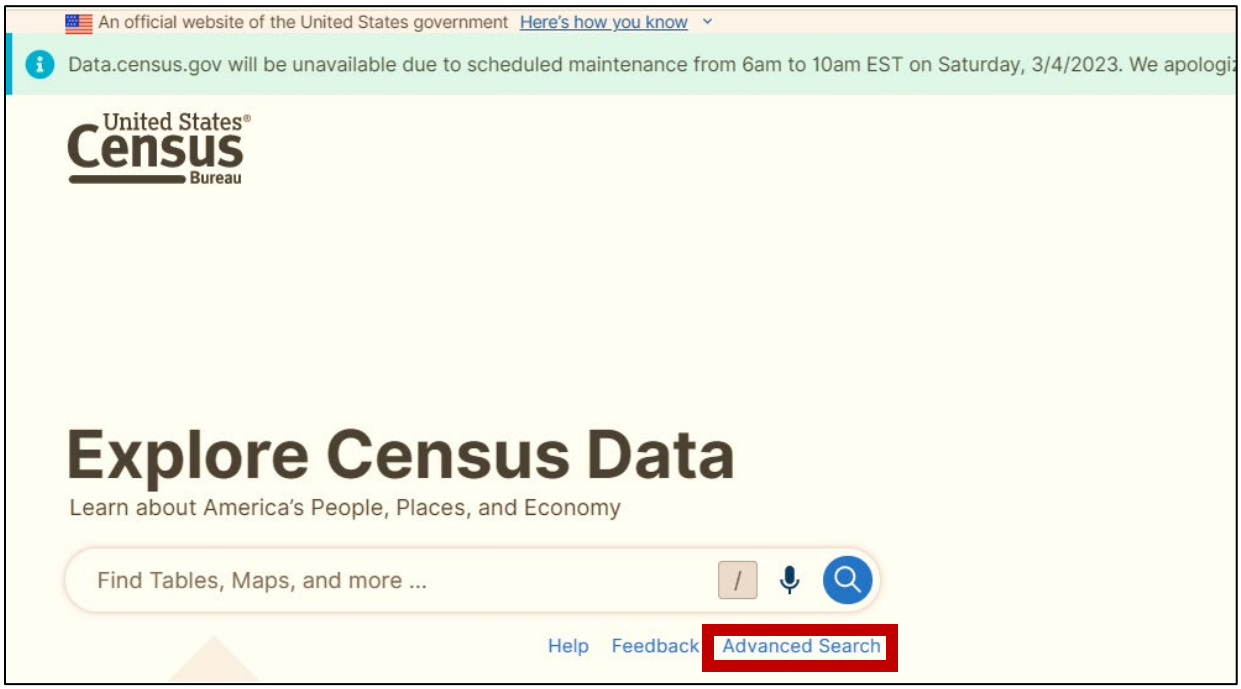
Determining Rurality

To determine the rurality score of a community in the proposed project, you should use **both** U.S. Census website data and the nonrural areas GIS layer available on the BTA map.

Follow these steps to determine rurality:

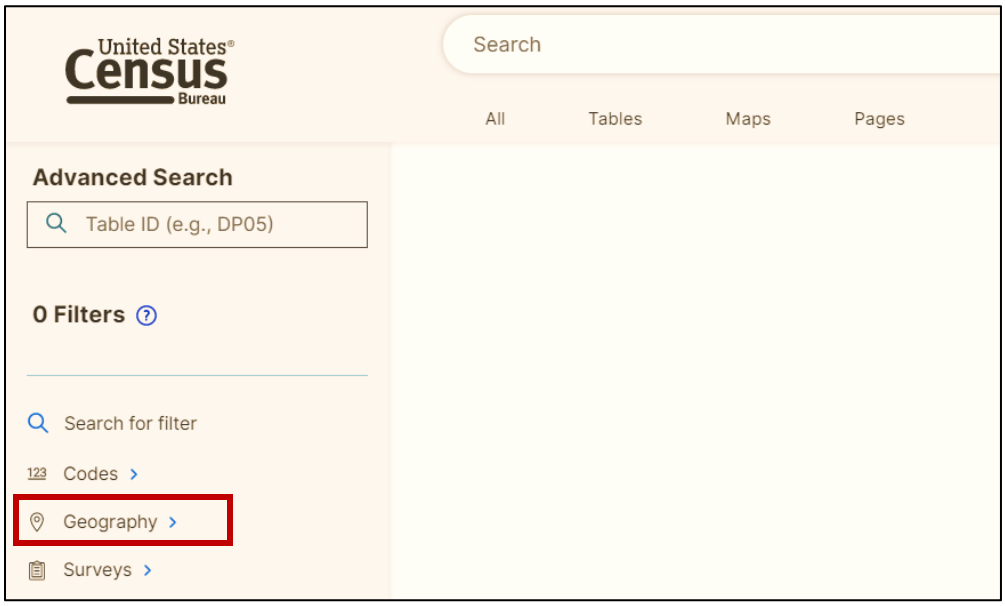
1. Visit https://data.census.gov/ and select the “Advanced Search” option just below the search bar as shown in the Figure1, below.

Figure 1. Select Advanced Search on the Census Data Homepage.



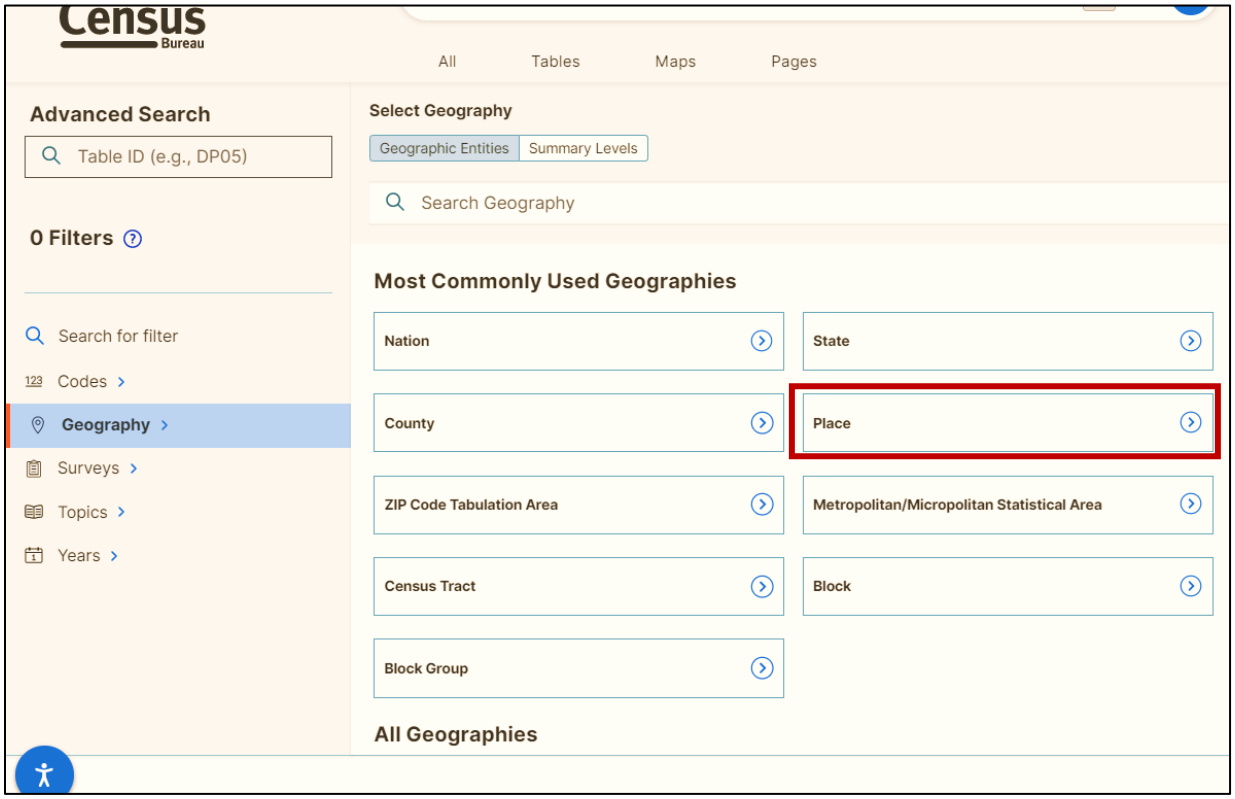
2. On the Advanced Search screen, select “Geography.”

Figure 2. Select Geography from the List of Filters.



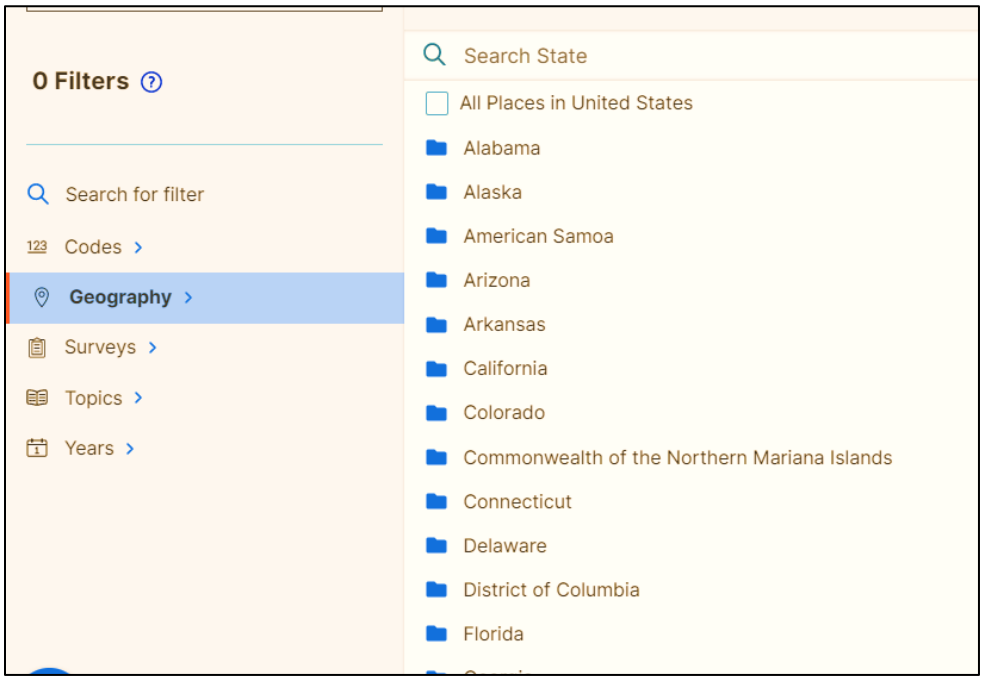
3. Then, select “Place.”

Figure 3. Select "Place."



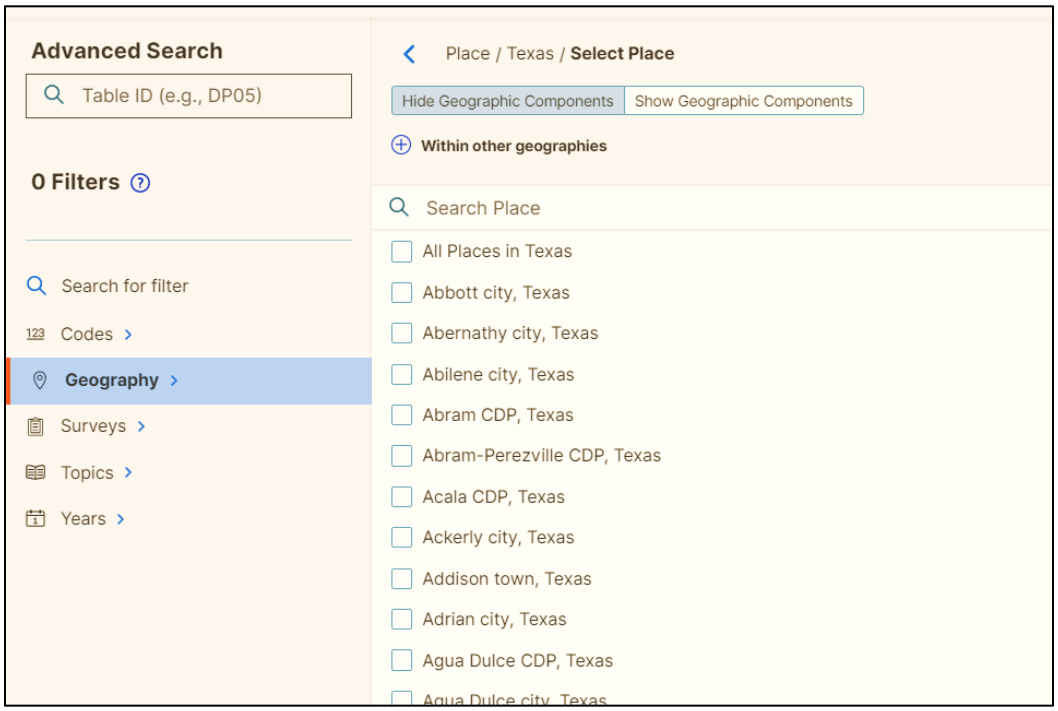
4. Select the state or territory in which your project's community is located.

Figure 4. Select the Appropriate State or Territory from the List.



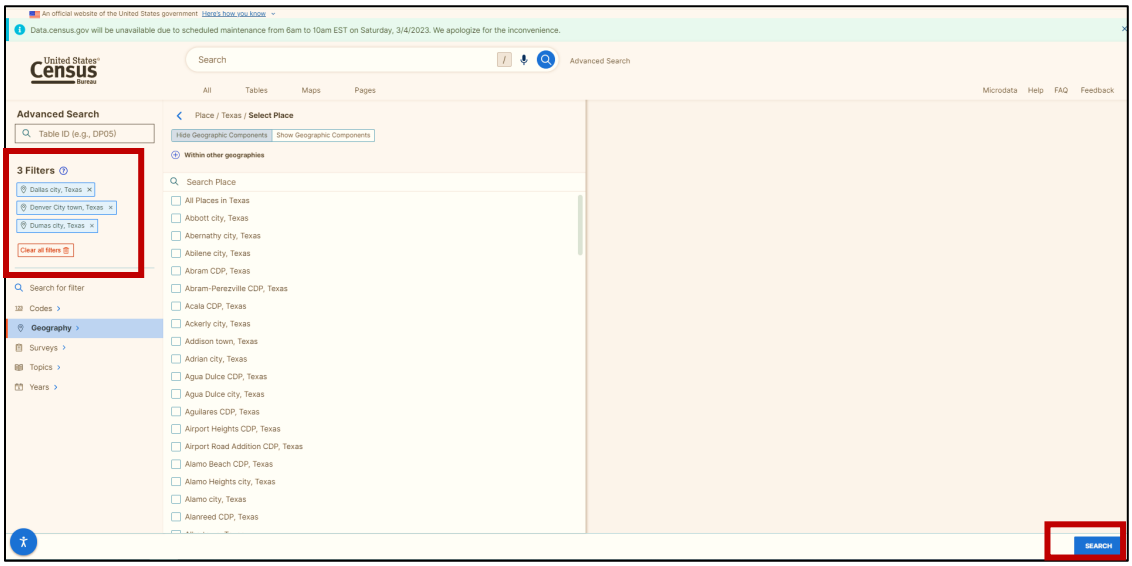
5. Select or search for the city, town, or place in which your project is located. In this example, we selected Dallas, Dumas, and Denver City, Texas.

Figure 5. Select the Appropriate Locations for Your Project.



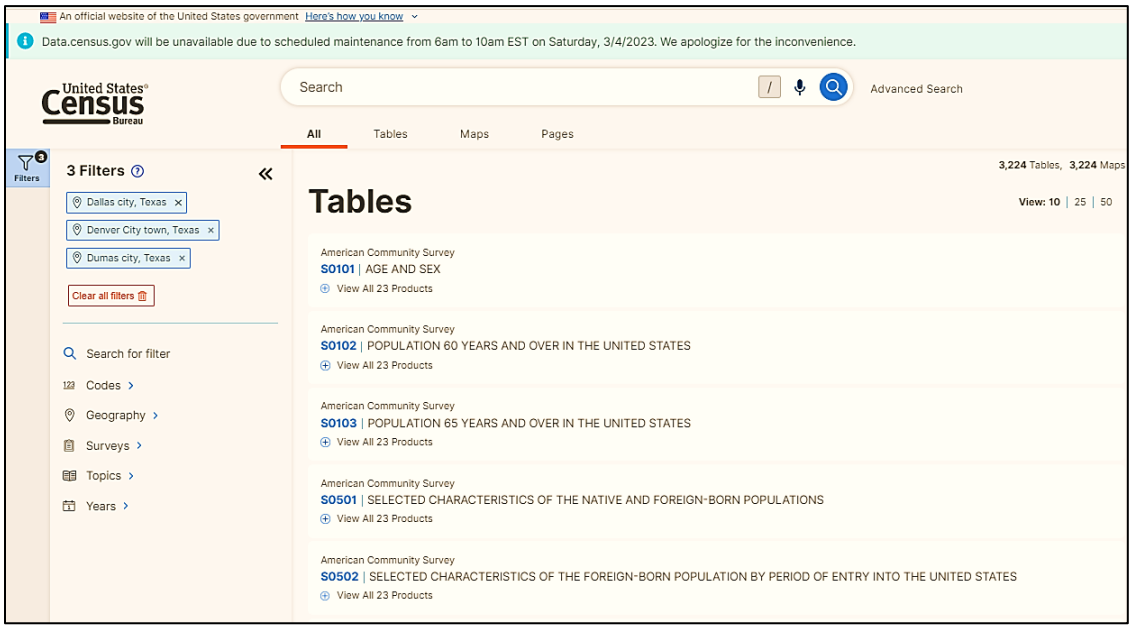
6. Once you select the appropriate location(s), click “Search.”

Figure 6. Click "Search."



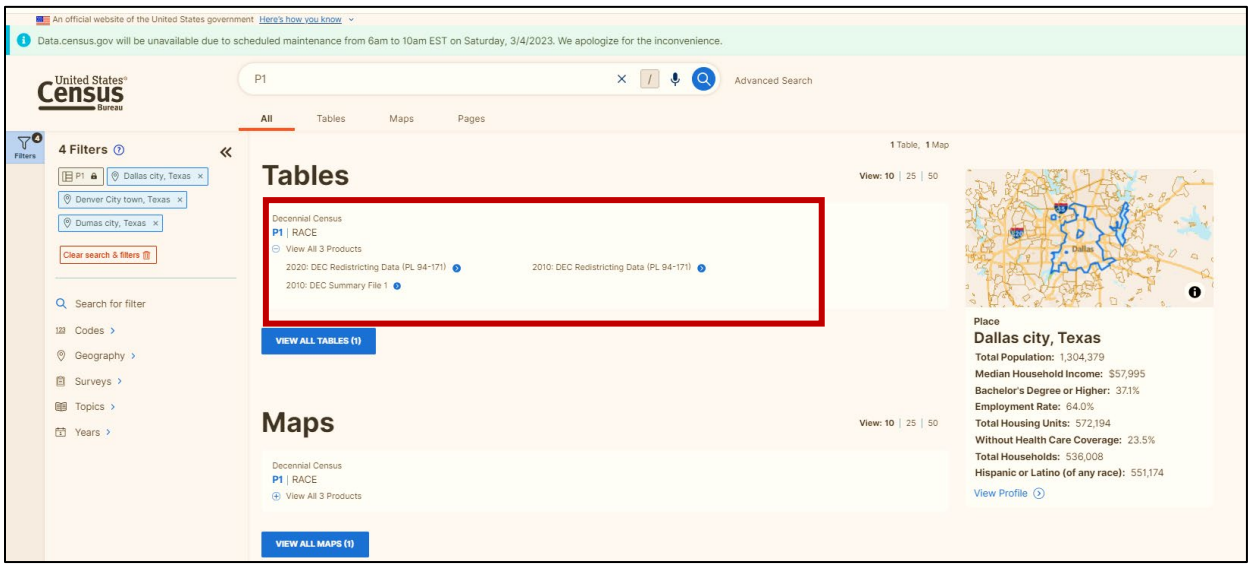
7. The page will populate with a list of data tables available. (The “P1: Race” table is the appropriate table to use.)

Figure 7. Page Populates with All Available Tables.



8. Type “P1” in the search bar at the top of the page. Then select the plus icon to “view all three products” associated with the “P1: Race” table. Next, select “2010: DEC Summary File 1.”

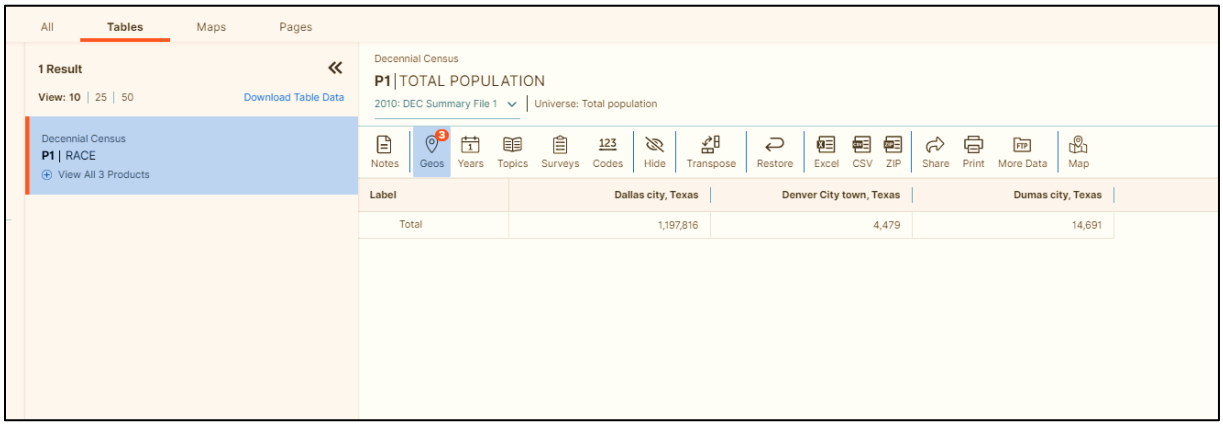
Figure 8. Search for the "P1" Table.



9. This file will bring up the populations of all the places you selected.

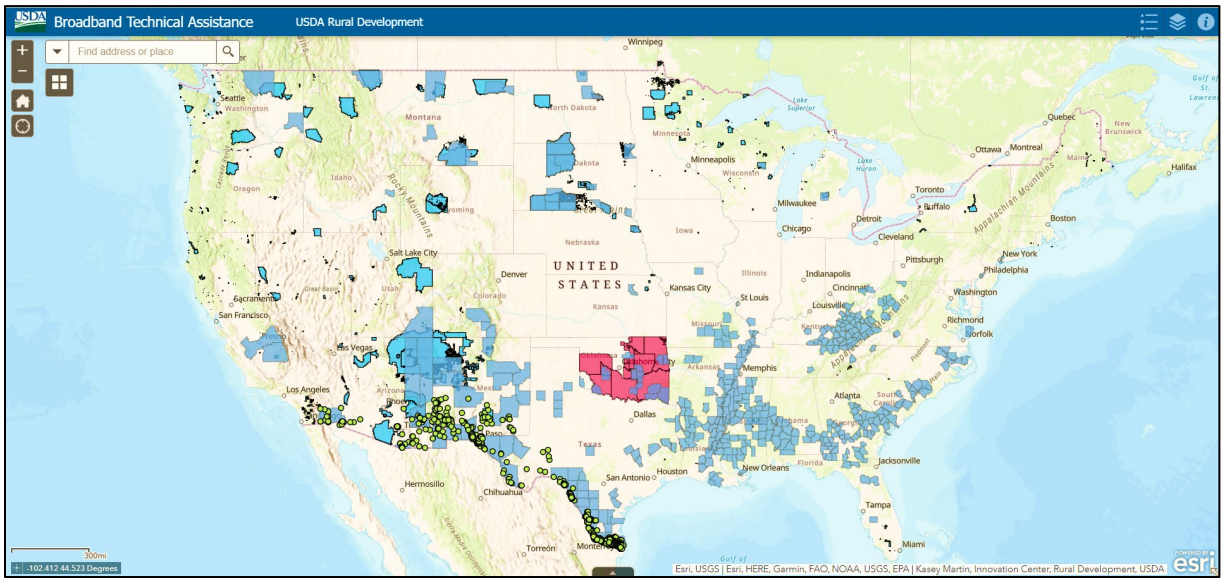
In this example – based on the rurality scoring criteria and the populations of Dallas, Denver City, and Dumas – these communities would receive **preliminary** rurality scores of 0, 20, and 10, respectively. Additionally, based its population, Dallas, Texas, would **not** be eligible for BTA funding.

Figure 9. Population Tables.



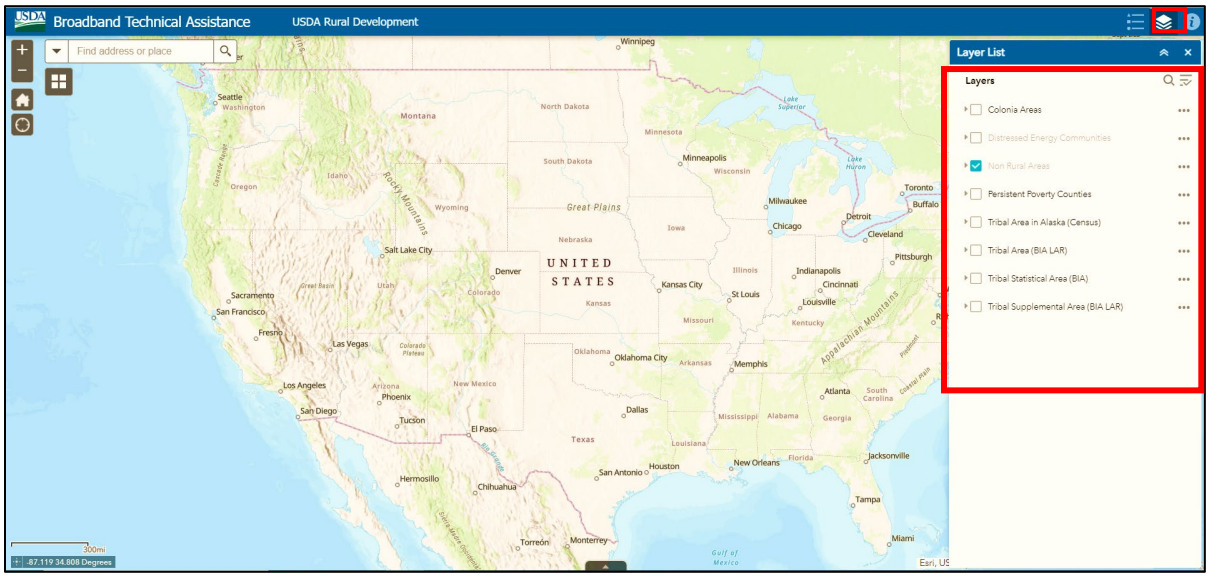
10. Next, use the BTA map to ensure your communities are not within a nonrural area (which would mean they are ineligible for the BTA program).

Figure 10. BTA Map.



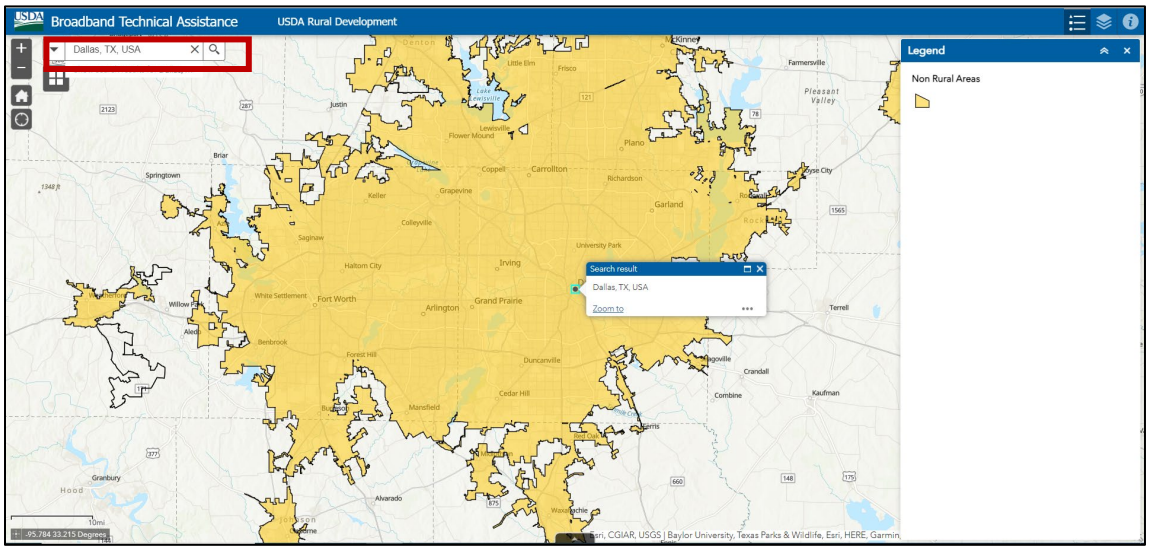
11. Once you open the map, turn off all the available layers except the “Nonrural Areas” layer to decrease clutter on the map.

Figure 11. Turn Off All Layers Except Nonrural Areas.



12. With the Nonrural Areas layer selected, search for the name of the city or town in which your project is located. This should be the same city or town you viewed on the U.S. Census website. In this example, we typed “Dallas” into the search bar.

Figure 12. Search for Your Project Location.

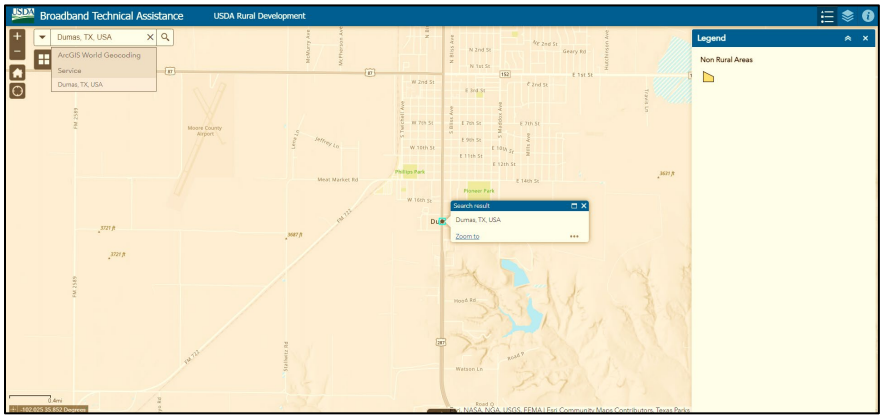


The map will automatically zoom to the selected location. To meet BTA eligibility requirements, the project cannot serve nonrural areas. If your location falls within the nonrural areas layer seen in yellow on Figure 12, it is ineligible. As you can see in the illustration above, Dallas is in a nonrural area. Therefore, it is ineligible for BTA funding.

13. Next, we will search for Dumas, Texas.

When the map zooms to this location, we can see that it is **not** located in a nonrural area. Therefore, the area is eligible and the preliminary score we gave this location based on U.S. Census population data is the correct score for this area.

Figure 13. Example of a Location in a Rural Area.

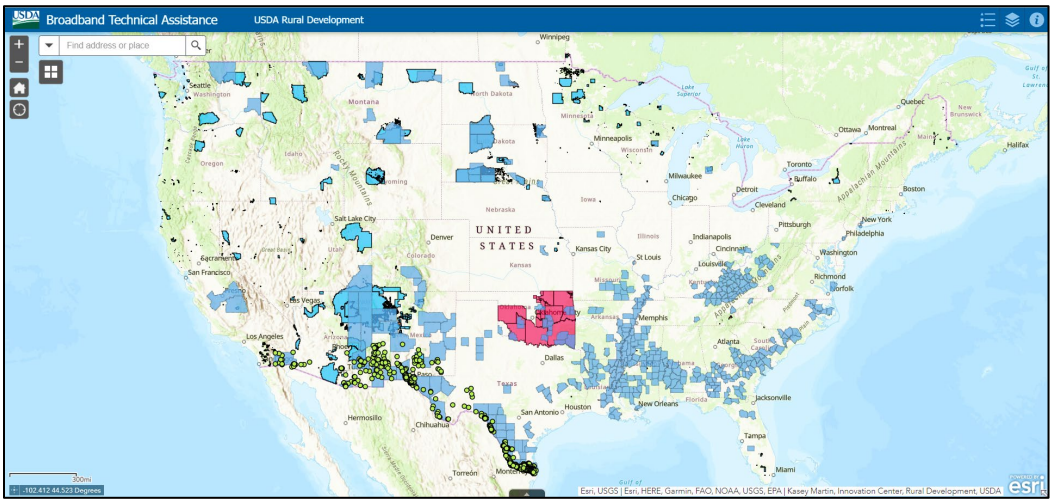


Determining Targeted Communities

As detailed in the Scoring Criteria section on page 7, applicants can receive points for serving targeted communities with their BTA project. Please follow the steps below to determine if your project will serve a targeted community.

1. Navigate to the BTA map available on the BTA website.

   Figure 14. BTA Map.

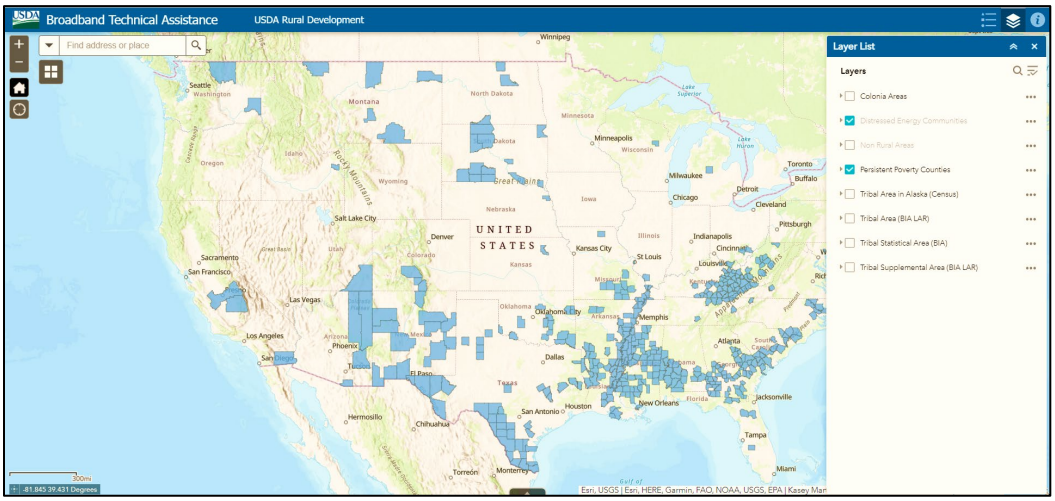


2. Select the GIS layer of the targeted community in question from the layer list.

   In this example, we viewed Distressed Energy Communities and Persistent Poverty Counties.

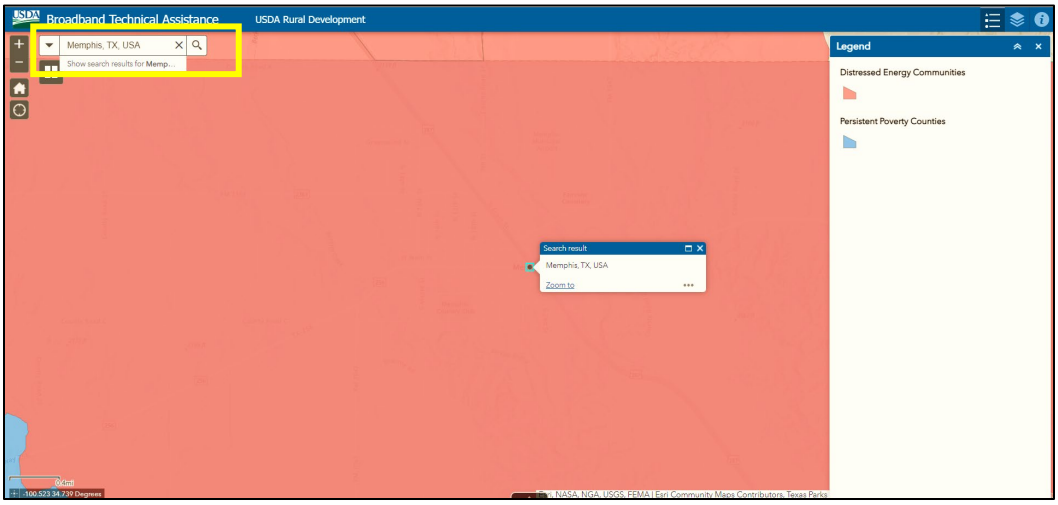
   Note: If the name of the layer appears greyed out, you will need to zoom in to activate the map, as seen by the Distressed Energy Communities layer below.

Figure 15. Turn on relevant map layers.



3. Type the city or town name into the search bar and hit enter on your keyboard. Or, select the magnifying glass icon to search for the location on the map. The map will zoom to the selected location.

Figure 16. Search for the Relevant City or Town.



4. If the selected project location is within a targeted community, you will see the GIS layer(s) overlapping the area, as shown below. Click on the map where your project is located. If your project is within multiple targeted communities, you can select the arrows on the pop-up to view all layers that overlap the selected area.

Figure 17. Click on the Map to View Overlapping Layers.

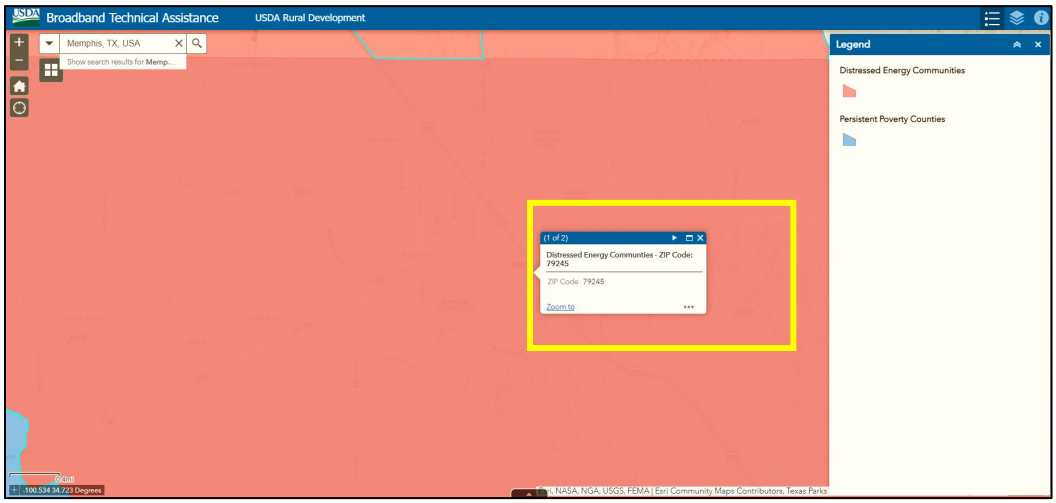
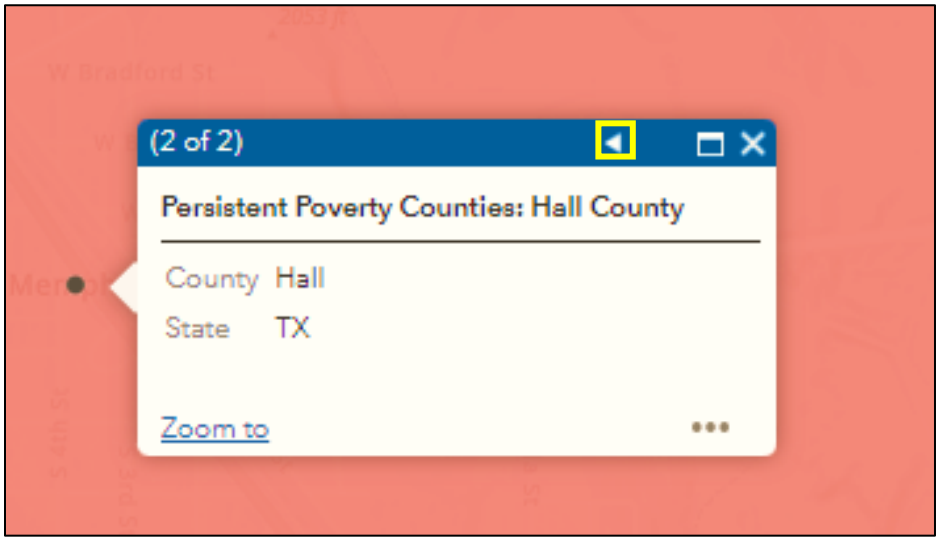
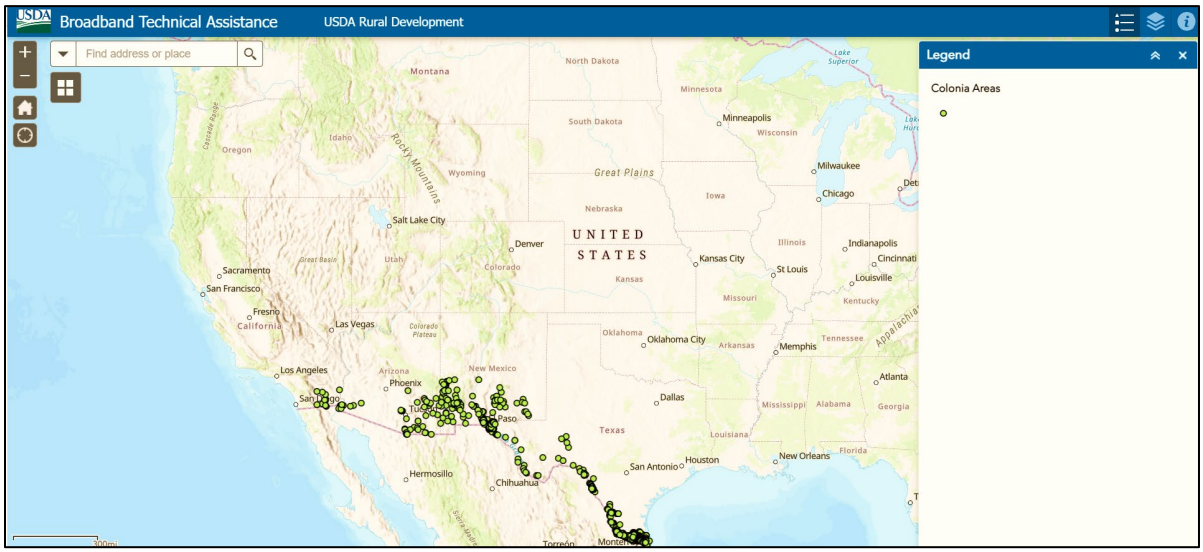


Figure 18. Use the toggle arrow to view multiple overlapping layers.



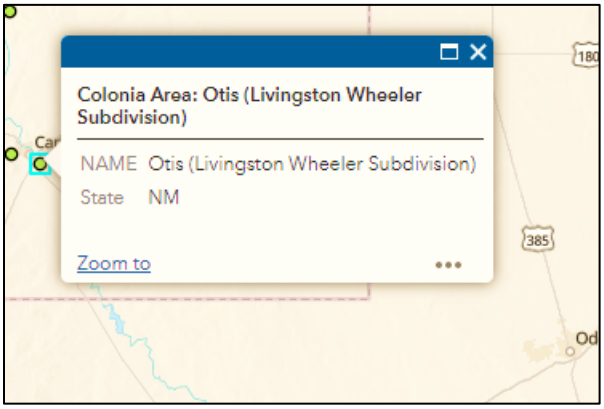
5. It is important to note that Colonias appear as point locations on the BTA map, as shown in the figure below.

Figure 19. Broadband Technical Assistance Map with Colonia Areas Layer.



6. Clicking on a Colonias area will allow you to view more information, including the name of the Colonia and the state in which it is located. Your project must serve one of these locations to receive Targeted Communities points for serving colonias.

Figure 20. Colonia Areas Map Pop-Up.



7. Once you determine the targeted communities that overlap your project location, record them on the Sample Communities Worksheet detailed on page 13.

Registration Requirements

System for Award Management (SAM) and Grants.gov Registration

You must register in the System for Award Management (SAM) **prior** to registering on Grants.gov. You must also complete the Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications required of entities applying for – or receiving – funding under any federal financial assistance project or program.

Note: Your application will be ineligible if the SAM registration lacks the Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications.

SAM registration is free and available at https://sam.gov/content/home. Keep in mind that registration can take 12 – 15 business days. It also takes an additional 24 hours for Grants.gov to recognize your SAM information. You should plan accordingly, and begin these processes well in advance of the application deadline.

Your SAM registration with Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications must remain active and current from the time of your application submission, through application review, and throughout the active federal grant funding period.

To maintain active SAM registration, review and update the information in the SAM database annually from the date of initial registration (or from the date from which you performed the last update). You must ensure the information in the database is current, accurate, and complete.

Even if your SAM registration is current, be certain to add the Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications information before you submit your application. **Note**: It can take 10 business days for SAM to recognize registration updates. Please review your SAM registration for accuracy before you submit your application.

Unique Entity Identifier

In April 2022, the federal government replaced the DUNS number with the unique entity identifier (UEI) as the authoritative identifier for organizations applying for federal contracts or financial assistance. You must provide a UEI when applying for BTA funding.

You can obtain your organization's UEI when you create or update your SAM registration. You can obtain your UEI at https://sam.gov/content/home even if you have made no updates to your record.

If your organization has either an active or inactive SAM registration, the system has already assigned it a UEI. Your UEI can be found on your entity's registration record. **Note**: The UEI must belong to the **applicant**; not an affiliate, subsidiary, or parent company.

If you do not comply with all SAM requirements – including providing a UEI – you will not be eligible for BTA funding.

Application Submission

Applicants must submit applications by 11:59 p.m. eastern time on

June 20, 2023

You must submit your application **electronically** using Grants.gov. We will not accept paper or email applications.

We strongly encourage you to obtain all necessary credentials and authorizations well in advance of the deadline, including the required SAM.gov registration and Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications.

Grants.gov requires some one-time credentialing and online authentication procedures. These procedures can take several business days to complete. Additionally, some information on both Grants.gov and SAM.gov requires annual updates. Please be sure to maintain up-to-date credentials and authorizations.

Note: If several federal grant programs have the same application deadline, the Grants.gov site can experience periods during which the site becomes inaccessible. Please plan accordingly. USDA has no oversight on the Grants.gov website. If you experience a technical problem retrieving or submitting your electronic application, contact Grants.gov customer support resources.

However, we are available to answer questions about the BTA program and application process. If you need assistance, contact the USDA Rural Development Rural Utilities Service team using the “Contact Us” link available at https://tinyurl.com/ysr6kann. Select “Broadband Technical Assistance” from the subject dropdown menu.

Reminder: You must submit your BTA application through Grants.gov no later than 11:59 p.m. eastern time on the closing date.

Application Review and Selection Process

Application Submission

To be considered for funding, you must submit your complete BTA application through Grants.gov no later than 11:59 p.m. eastern time on the closing date.

Incomplete Applications

We will not consider late or incomplete applications.

Scoring

We will score all complete applications in accordance with the BTA FOA. See the Scoring Criteria section on page 7 for additional information.

Ineligible Applications

We will notify you in writing if your application is determined ineligible.

Selection Process

We will select applications based on scores and the availability of funds. To increase the range of successful applicants, only **one** application per applicant is eligible for approval.

If you submit more than one application **for different projects**, we will only consider the application with the highest score. If you submit more than one application **for the same project**, we will consider the latest submission.

Additionally, regardless of the number of points an application receives, the Rural Utilities Service Administrator may:

- Limit the number of applications selected for projects located in any one state during a fiscal year
- Select an application based on availability of funds in a particular funding cycle

Legal Documents

We require all awardees to execute a standard legal agreement. The agreement will be available on the BTA website under the “To Apply” tab.

Award Receipt

Projects selected for awards will receive an award letter by mail or email. **Note:** Receiving an award letter does **not** mean an awardee can begin performance.
The letter will include all terms and conditions required of the cooperative agreement. Awardees must execute and return the agreement – and any other required items – by the date specified in the selection notice letter.

Post-Award Reporting Requirements

Awardees must comply with the following reporting requirements.

Using Form SF-270

Awardees must use Form SF-270 (Request for Advance or Reimbursement) to request reimbursements. We may also require awardees to submit expenditure receipts and other documentation to support the request for reimbursement.

Performance Reporting

All financial assistance recipients must provide annual performance activity reports to USDA RD's Rural Utilities Service. Recipients must submit activity reports no later than January 31 of the year following the year in which all or any portion of the award is first advanced. Activity reports are due until the recipient completes the project and expends all funds.

We also require a final performance report no later than 120 days after the expiration or termination of the award, the project completion, or final disbursement of the award, whichever occurs last.

The final report can serve as the last annual report, and must include an evaluation of the success of the project in meeting program objectives.

All project performance reports should include:

- A comparison of actual accomplishments to the objectives established for that period
- A description of any problems, delays, or adverse conditions that occurred or are anticipated. These situations could affect the accomplishment of project objectives, prevent meeting time schedules or objectives, or prevent completion of project work elements during established time periods.
- A statement of action taken or planned to resolve any situations listed above
- A timetable with objectives for the next reporting period
- Activities demonstrating coordination with the State Broadband Office

Compliance with Other Federal Policies

Recipients must comply with the policies, guidance, and requirements described in the following Codes of Federal Regulations (CFR):

- 2 CFR Part 200 (available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/k2rwavza): Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards

- 2 CFR Part 400 (available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/23cy656f): Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards
- 2 CFR Part 180 (available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/3jmbwt36): Office of Management and Budget Guidelines to Agencies on Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Non-procurement)
- 2 CFR Part 417 (available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/bdh3eptk): Non-procurement Debarment and Suspension
- Executive Order 13166 (available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/bdh376ux): Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency
- 7 CFR 1901 Subpart E (available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/bd5eepdm): Civil Rights Compliance Requirements

Recipient and Sub-Recipient Reporting

The awardee must have the necessary processes and systems in place to comply with the reporting requirements for first-tier sub-awards and executive compensation under the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 (2 CFR Part 170 – available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/2e2rdach). Reporting exceptions to these reporting requirements can be found in 2 CFR 170.110(b) – available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/2p8jdvj8.

Section 3: Appendix

Definitions

Applicant means an entity applying for funding under the Broadband Technical Assistance (BTA) Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA).

Award: In this instance, a cooperative agreement created under the BTA FOA.

Broadband Technical Assistance (BTA): Activities that support broadband expansion in eligible rural areas. This assistance can include project planning and community engagement, financial sustainability, environmental compliance, construction planning and engineering, accessing federal resources, and data collection and reporting.

Colonia Areas: Refers to the Geographic Information System (GIS) layer identified in the mapping tool found on the BTA website (available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/2p95jduf).

Cooperative: A user-owned and controlled business from which benefits are derived and distributed equitably on the basis of use. Put more simply: a business owned and controlled by the people who use its services. Members democratically control cooperatives, and each member holds one vote in electing its board of directors.

Cooperative Agreement: The instrument used to fund support of USDA Rural Development's goal to increase rural economic growth. In a cooperative agreement, federal employees participate more closely in project activities and often work side-by-side with the cooperator.

Distressed Energy Communities: Communities identified as fossil fuel dependent, and whose economic well-being falls in the most distressed tier of the Distressed Communities Index (available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/ycxhwnyd). Fossil fuel dependence includes coal, oil, gas, and power plant communities. The *Initial Report to the President on Empowering Workers Through Revitalizing Energy Communities* (available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/e5czjdt2 - PDF) defines energy communities. A GIS layer of distressed energy communities is located on the BTA website.

Indirect Costs: Expenses not readily identified within a particular grant, contract, project function, or activity. Indirect costs are those necessary for the general operation of the organization and the activities it performs.

Persistent Poverty County: Any county, territory, or possession of the United States with 20 percent or more of its population living in poverty over the past 30 years. The 1990 and 2000 decennial censuses and the 2007-2011 American Community Survey's 5 – 6 year average define poverty levels. A GIS layer identifying persistent poverty counties can be found on the BTA website.

Rural Area*: For purposes of BTA, and using the most recent decennial Census of the United States, "rural area" is defined as any area **not** located within:

- A city, town, or incorporated area that has a population greater than 20,000
- An urbanized area adjacent to a city or town that has a population greater than 50,000

*Rural areas exclude certain populations as noted in 7 U.S.C. 1991(a)(13)(H) and (I), (available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/22ndu5ck - PDF). An "urbanized area" means a densely populated territory as defined in the most recent decennial U.S. Census.

Tribe: As defined in the Federally Recognized Indian Tribe List Act of 1994.(available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/yc27upk5 - PDF), an American Indian or Alaska Native Tribe, band, nation, pueblo, village, or community that the Secretary of the Interior acknowledges to exist as an Indian Tribe under 25 U.S.C. 5131 (available at this link: https://tinyurl.com/42v5wpj8 - PDF).

Tribal Entity: All entities that fall under eligible legal structures, including:

- Tribal-owned corporations
- Tribal enterprises
- Subsidiaries of Tribally owned corporations and enterprises
- Tribal authorities
- Tribal utilities
- Intertribal nonprofits and associations
- Alaska Native Corporations
- Native entities in Alaska eligible to receive services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (available at this link: https://www.bia.gov/)
- Native Hawaiian organizations, including Homestead Associations
- State-recognized Tribes and nonprofits
- Individually owned Native American entities

Tribal Land: Any area identified by the U.S. Department of Interior (available at this link: https://www.doi.gov/) as Tribal land. A GIS map layer identifying most Tribal lands can be found on the BTA website.

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family or parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (for example, Braille, large print, audiotape, and American Sign Language, among others) should contact the responsible agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY), or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information can be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, available at this link: https://go.usa.gov/xzzfW, and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) postal mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 (2) fax: (202) 690-7442, or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

April 2023

USDA Rural Development
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Together, America Prospers