

**Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development**  
***Rural Connections: Community Broadband Infrastructure***  
***Pilot Program***

**Guidelines and Criteria**

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**Objective**

The *Rural Connections: Community Broadband Infrastructure Pilot Program* consists of a \$9 million initiative to fund targeted rural communities for projects that enable access to reasonable high-speed broadband service.

**Program Description and Eligible Activities**

This funding is part of a Government of Alberta Community Adaptation and Transition Initiative to help economically vulnerable rural communities adapt by investing in economic development and diversification initiatives. Overall funding for the Initiative was made available through the national Community Development Trust.

The Program will consider applications to fund broadband projects in rural communities that:

- Are in transition as a result of changing economic circumstances and vulnerable to economic uncertainty as a result of dependence on a single employer or economic sector
- Currently have limited or no access to reasonable high-speed broadband service

Eligible activities under the Program are:

- Infrastructure projects to benefit from the Alberta SuperNet
- Testing and evaluating technologies to extend or enhance broadband service
- Feasibility studies in support of broadband infrastructure projects
- Outreach and extension initiatives to create a culture of broadband use and skill sets

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. Infrastructure projects are not intended to compete with the private sector and will only be considered where broadband service is limited or not currently available.

**Eligible applicants**

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

- Local authorities (as defined in the Municipal Government Act) that are legal entities
- Bands, as defined in the Indian Act
- Métis settlements
- Incorporated not-for-profit community organizations
- Cooperatives that do not distribute profits to their members or shareholders

For-profit businesses or ventures are not eligible for funding but may be a partner with an eligible applicant on a project.

All applicants must demonstrate the ability to lead the broadband initiative and contribute resources to the project in their community.

## **Rural Communities**

For the purposes of this program, a rural community is defined as any Alberta community outside of the seven urban centres of Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, or Red Deer.

## **Eligible costs**

Eligible costs under this program include:

- Feasibility studies, professional service and consulting fees, and disbursements
- Broadband-related infrastructure such as towers, equipment and technology, fibre optic cable, wireless equipment, installation costs and radio license fees
- Network development costs, including consulting fees and services
- Project management costs (up to 10 percent of total project cost)
- Outreach, extension and broadband training activities to increase use of broadband applications such as government e-services, economic development, health services, and education, training and skills development
- Temporary staff costs directly related to the broadband project
- Software, materials and supplies
- Other costs approved by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development 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
- Membership fees, dues, and contributions
- On-going 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 Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

## **Funding levels**

The program will provide up to 75 percent of eligible project costs to a maximum of \$500,000 per project.

Successful applicants will be required to cost-share the project. The minimum project grant size considered will be \$10,000 per project.

## **Other funding and assessment criteria**

Funding priority will be placed on projects in rural and remote communities in Alberta that have limited or no access to broadband connectivity. Additional priority will be placed on broadband connectivity projects that lead to economic development and diversification, education, training and skills development, entrepreneurship, and innovative ways to participate in the emerging knowledge society and the digital economy.

The project proponent will provide letters of support, partnership agreements, and/or other documentation to demonstrate community support and commitment to the project.

Successful applicants must provide a minimum 25 percent investment in eligible project costs. In-kind contributions may be considered. Program funding may compliment other sources of funding.

Funding must be approved before projects are initiated.

All projects funded through this pilot program will need to respect Canada's obligations under the North American Free Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organization.

**Program term**

Program funding will expire on March 31, 2011 or earlier depending on availability of funds.

**Application and selection process**

Applicants must complete an application form and submit a project proposal to Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development where it will be screened for program requirements and criteria. The final date for receipt of applications will be December 31, 2010.

Eligible applications will be evaluated for acceptability and priority by a Cross-Ministry Program Committee that will make project funding recommendations for the consideration of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Final authority for approving or rejecting applications rests with the Minister.

As this is a pilot project with limited funds, not all projects may be approved. Only those applications best meeting the program criteria will be considered.

**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 projects may be documented and used for outreach programs for the purpose of illustrating broadband deployment 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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