

Commerce and Agriculture Departments explain broadband grant and loan resources

Written by

Tuesday, 21 July 2009 15:21

MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL -- The Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) met in St. Paul in the eighth of ten public workshops designed to help prospective grantees apply for \$4 billion in broadband grants and loans under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Today's forum followed Vice President Biden's announcement earlier this month of the availability of \$4 billion in Recovery Act loans and grants to help bring broadband service to unserved and underserved communities across America. This is the first round of funding aimed at expanding broadband access to help bridge the technological divide and create jobs building out Internet infrastructure.

Senator Amy Klobuchar provided video remarks. Commerce Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information Lawrence E. Strickling and USDA Rural Development State Director Colleen Landkamer participated in the public forum.

"By bringing broadband service to unserved and underserved parts of rural, urban and suburban America, we can bring new opportunities for jobs, innovation and economic growth to these communities," said Strickling. He also noted that the workshop participants represent diverse interests - including local governments, infrastructure providers, universities, libraries, community groups, and other nonprofits, for example - who may benefit from the opportunity to explore partnerships at these events.

"Expanding access to broadband in communities throughout rural America is a major goal of the Obama administration because it is critical for future economic success," said Landkamer. "Today's workshop is an important part of the effort to expand broadband to unserved and underserved communities in the region to enable all communities to compete in the 21st century economy."

Workshops included an overview of the first round of grant funding available under NTIA's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) and grants and loans available under RUS' Broadband Initiative Program (BIP). The workshops are designed to assist potential grant and loan applicants with questions about the application process.

Future workshop dates and locations for the first round of funding include July 23 - Albuquerque, N.M.; and July 24 - Los Angeles, Calif. Attendees may pre-register for workshops online at www.broadbandusa.gov.

The Recovery Act provided a total of \$7.2 billion to the Department of Commerce and the USDA to accelerate broadband deployment in areas of the country that have been without the high-speed infrastructure. Of that funding, NTIA will use \$4.7 billion to deploy broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas in the United States, expand public computer center capacity and encourage sustainable adoption of broadband service. RUS will invest \$2.5 billion to facilitate broadband deployment in rural communities.