

Grant Program Guidelines
ConnectALL Connectivity Innovation

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State of New York

Kathy Hochul, Governor

Empire State Development

ConnectALL Office



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A. Statutory Authority

Section 16-GG*2 of the New York State Urban Development Corporation Act (“UDC Act”), Chapter 174 of the Laws of 1968, as amended, establishes the Division of Broadband Access, with the stated goal to “assist in ending the digital divide, supporting a more robust and competitive internet marketplace, and carrying out other actions to ensure universal access to high-speed, reliable, and affordable broadband.” See UDC Act, §16-GG*2(1).¹ The statute also establishes the “ConnectALL Innovation Grant Program...which is authorized to develop, pilot, and deploy innovative models and technologies for the delivery of broadband services.” Pursuant to the statute “grants issued pursuant to this program shall: (a) benefit the development of innovative and new broadband solutions and technologies; (b) deploy innovative broadband technology to rural, low-income, or other areas that would be unlikely to otherwise see such deployment; (c) promote critical private sector investment in such technologies; (d) provide seed funding for the development of such technologies and products; or (e) foster collaboration between the academic research community and the business sector for such purposes.” (See UDC Act, §16-GG*2(9)).

B. Program Background

The ConnectALL Initiative, announced by Governor Kathy Hochul in January 2022, is an ambitious set of programs and activities aimed at addressing New York State’s digital divide, transforming the state's digital infrastructure, and ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to reliable and affordable high-speed broadband internet service. The Governor’s announcement included a grant program for Connectivity Innovation: “This program will provide competitive grants to entities statewide to pilot and construct creative, innovative, and new solutions pioneering future breakthroughs.” The Connectivity Innovation Program, (the “Program”) is administered by the ConnectALL Office, which is housed within the New York State Urban Development Corporation d/b/a Empire State Development.

Through the Program, ConnectALL will provide funding to assist internet service providers, mobile network operators, system integrators, equipment vendors, research institutions, nonprofit organizations, government entities, and other well-situated stakeholders to research, develop, test, deploy, and document new technologies, business models, and use cases for the purposes stated by the Governor, consistent with the statutory authority described above, and in furtherance of the ConnectALL mission.

ConnectALL developed the Program based on engagement with state agencies, municipalities, counties, regional planning boards, regional economic development organizations, tribal governments, utilities, internet service providers, mobile network operators, equipment manufacturers, researchers, and other stakeholders. ConnectALL identified the market gaps and deployment challenges to inform the Program through the planning and implementation of other ConnectALL programs.

¹ https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/JDA/16-GG*2

C. Program Administration

The Program will provide grant funding or other forms of assistance to Eligible Applicants (see Section E) based on proposals received through a Request for Applications. The Program may procure equipment or services to use in grant-funded innovations and may provide grants to secure the required facilities to support deployments of tests or innovations. The Program may also provide matching funds for New York-based entities seeking complementary funds from other innovation programs, such as The Public Wireless Supply Chain Innovation Fund from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration at the US Department of Commerce or innovation research grants from the National Science Foundation.

ConnectALL will be the administrator of the Program. As such, ConnectALL, or its duly authorized representative will determine program structure and requirements, evaluate Applicant information, monitor Grantees for project completion and satisfactory performance, collect Grantee data to ensure compliance with all program requirements and verify allowable uses of funds, and approve disbursement of grant funds to selected Grantees. ConnectALL may provide technical assistance to the Applicants during the application process, at ConnectALL's discretion.

ESmpire State Development will execute a Grant Disbursement Agreement (GDA) with each Grantee that will describe the innovation challenge as it relates to a need in New York, the planned use of funds, the timeline for completion, and the intended outcome, including documentation to be made public.

D. Eligible Applicants

Eligible Applicants are municipalities, counties, regional planning boards, regional economic development organizations, tribal governments, municipal utilities, internet service providers, mobile network operators, system integrators, equipment manufacturers, academic institutions or independent researchers, nonprofit and community-based organizations, New York-based businesses with an innovative use case for connectivity, and other stakeholders.

E. Program Assistance

The Program makes available financial assistance in the form of one-time grants or in-kind resources for use by Applicants. The Program may procure equipment or services to use in Program-funded innovations and may provide grants to public entities, nonprofit organizations, or academic institutions to secure the required facilities to support deployments of tests or innovations (e.g., "testbeds"). The Program may also provide matching funds for New York-based entities seeking complementary funds from other philanthropic or government innovation programs, including for the purpose of enhancing the competitiveness of New York-based proposals for national or regional programs. ConnectALL may offer grants for academic research or seed funding for the development of new technologies, products, and services where the outcome enhances New York's status as a national leader in connectivity innovation and furthers the mission of ConnectALL. The Program will prioritize multi-stakeholder collaboration, as appropriate, and innovations that address the deployment challenges of the hardest-to-reach rural areas of the state and low-income areas within the state's urban areas or other sectors underserved by the current connectivity marketplace. ConnectALL will coordinate with state agencies as needed to identify use cases and implement the Program.

Funds are available for the eligible uses described in Section F– Eligible Uses, and for the additional activities set forth in the GDA that ConnectALL will share with, negotiate, and agree upon enter into with Grantees.

The funding for the Program comes from the Governor’s FY 22 Executive Budget.

F. Eligible Uses

Eligible uses for program funding include

- Connectivity equipment, installation, operation, and monitoring
- Infrastructure, physical assets, site licenses, and other site preparation
- Prototypes, proof of concept, research and development
- Business plans and other startup costs
- Documentation, community engagement, and public awareness

G. Application and Selection Process

ConnectALL will issue a Connectivity Innovation Request for Applications (RFA) or multiple RFAs, in which it will set forth specific program details and eligibility/selection criteria in line with the Guidelines. Each RFA or separate sections of an RFA will describe the challenge ConnectALL seeks to address. In some cases, ConnectALL will identify a specific location or type of location in New York associated with the challenge or an innovative connectivity deployment use case or solution suited to the economic conditions and opportunities of the state.

ConnectALL will determine the appropriate timelines and application deadlines for each RFA.

Because awards are offered as an incentive to undertake a project, the project should not begin, and expenses should not be incurred, before funding awards have been announced. Expenses incurred prior to submission of an application should not be included in the project budgets, nor should expenses that will be incurred after submission of an application but prior to an award announcement.

H. Application Requirements

The Program application requirements will be further defined in the Request for Applications (RFA).

In accordance with the requirements of Article 15-A of the New York State Executive Law: Participation by Minority Group Members and Women with Respect to State Contracts, Projects awarded funding shall be reviewed by ESD’s Office of Contractor and Supplier Diversity, which may set business and participation goals for minorities and women to the extent not preempted by Federal requirements.

Applicants must submit the EEO Policy Statement (Form OCSD-1) <https://esd.ny.gov/sites/default/files/OCSD-1-Policy-Statement.pdf> with their application confirming their understanding of the MWBE requirements and agreeing to show due-diligence and make good faith efforts to provide meaningful participation by MWBE’s, whenever possible, and as applicable, if awarded grant funding.

Empire State Development’s agency wide MWBE utilization goal is 30%. Each Project may be assigned an individual contract-specific goal, which may be higher or lower than 30%. In the event that an Applicant receives a funding award with prescribed MWBE goals assigned to the Project, the Applicant shall be

required to use good faith efforts to achieve such goals. Applicants must maintain such records and take the actions necessary to demonstrate such compliance. Failure to achieve a specified MWBE goal requirement may result in award reduction.

In 2014, the Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Business Act was signed into law. The new law created the Division of Service-Disabled Veterans' Business Development in Office of General Services to certify, promote and encourage economic development among disabled veterans throughout the state. Project Applicants are urged to work with Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses (SDVOBs) and a directory can be found at <https://ogs.ny.gov/Veterans>.

I. Evaluation Criteria

The Program application evaluation criteria will be defined in the Request for Applications (RFA).

J. Compliance, Monitoring, and Reporting Requirements

ConnectALL will provide guidance on compliance procedures and eligible costs. ConnectALL will require Grantees to include along with their reports:

- A certification that program funds were spent only on eligible uses and in compliance with applicable guidelines;
- Detailed documentation of all expenditures; and
- The deliverables or other documented program outcomes.

ConnectALL may require Grantees to submit materials including, but not limited to:

- Detailed project plans and designs;
- Equipment certifications;
- Permitting, licensing, and access approvals necessary for implementation;
- Letters of support or other documentation to demonstrate the participation and partnerships necessary for implementation;
- Detailed documentation of project expenses;
- Regular reports on project progress, risks, expenditures, and impact against objectives;
- Reports on project outcomes and performance indicators.

ConnectALL may provide technical assistance and support to Grantees for completing project and expenditure reports. ConnectALL may work with Grantees to revise report materials or provide additional documentation if required.