



ConnectALL

A Division of Empire State Development

Affordable Housing Connectivity Program | Request for Applications Question & Answers

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1. When will the list of Eligible Properties be published?

Property owners must submit their properties to the Program. To be eligible, the properties must be regulated by a government agency to provide rental units for low-income households. The properties may be publicly or privately owned. Properties where a majority of units are funded by one of the following programs are likely eligible for the AHCP: 4% and 9% low-income housing tax credits (LIHTC); project-based section 8; the federal HOME Investment Partnerships program; the Mitchell-Lama program; and/or federal public housing. Properties supported by other HUD, State, county, and local funding programs may also be eligible.

2. Will there be an opportunity for Internet Service Providers to provide information about existing broadband services already available to those properties that might inform their eligibility, including existing fiber-based broadband services?

Property eligibility is based on the presence of government-regulated affordable units in the property. Property prioritization is based on the existing broadband services in a property, which ConnectALL will consider when assembling Portfolios. ConnectALL will use data from the FCC Broadband Data Collection system to inform this process. To the extent feasible, ConnectALL will draw on the most recent FCC data available.

3. Will properties outside the 15 metro areas be eligible?

Yes. For properties outside the 15 metropolitan areas, ConnectALL may, at its reasonable discretion, incorporate those into nearby areas or issue them in distinct Portfolios.

4. Will all properties submitted to the Program be included in Portfolios?

ConnectALL does not expect to include all properties submitted to the Program in Portfolios. The size and number of Portfolios will be informed by the capacity projections for a particular metropolitan area indicated by successful Section One applicants. ConnectALL will issue Portfolios until the available program funding is allocated. ConnectALL will prioritize properties based on several factors, including the level of information received from property owners.

5. How can small ISPs utilize this program to serve existing customers?

Broadband service providers or infrastructure owners currently operating in a building will not be funded for those locations under this grant unless they are (1) upgrading existing infrastructure and (2) providing additional network capacity or pathways to support the infrastructure's use by other service providers, such as through an open-access arrangement.

6. Can I select the properties I want to serve?

Applicants can identify metropolitan areas they want to serve, but cannot identify specific properties. An applicant whose submission to Section One makes them eligible to submit a Section Two Application will be able to choose which Portfolios they respond to within their chosen metropolitan areas, but they will have to respond to the complete Portfolio.

7. How many properties can I propose to serve in my application?

In Section One, applicants will indicate the minimum and maximum number of units they have capacity to deploy infrastructure to within each metropolitan area by the end of 2026. An applicant can propose any number in Section One. Applicants whose submission to Section One makes them eligible to respond to Section Two will be able to apply to serve Portfolios of properties within the geographic area(s) the applicant noted in their Section One application. Portfolios will range in size. Applicants can submit multiple Section Two responses until they have won Portfolios that equal the maximum capacity of the Applicant in the specific metropolitan area, at which point they would need to explain how their capacity will have changed (for example, because they have already completed work under the initial awards).

8. I'm already working with a property owner. Can I propose to serve that property in my application?

Applicants do not have an opportunity to identify specific properties. If an Applicant wishes to work with a particular owner, the Applicant should encourage that owner to complete the owner interest survey, in which they can indicate a preferred partner. ConnectALL, at its discretion, may consider such indications in assembling Portfolios. Note that such indications are not binding for ConnectALL, the property owner, or the Applicant. Applicants should be sure to identify the appropriate metropolitan area in the Section One Application.

9. Is there a required medium for providing service? Fiber? Fixed-wireless?

The US Department of Treasury Capital Projects Fund requires 100/100 Mbps symmetrical speeds. Any proposed medium must, at minimum, be scalable to this speed. Applicants proposing an approach other than fiber wireline and in-unit wired connections must explain the justification for using this alternative approach. A minimum reliable speed of 100/20 Mbps must be met.

10. Will AHCP require private investment similar to the BEAD program?

AHCP does not require matching funds from applicants, but it does consider the Applicant's contribution in the scoring criteria. Matching funds may include cost share or in-kind contributions, for example in the form of digital literacy programs, devices distributed for free to tenants, or service provided to tenants for free.

11. Will AHCP cover the cost of make-ready so ISPs can apply for funds based on the cost of deployment?

The budget provided in the response from an applicant should include a total grant amount based on all expenses related to completing the project. Should the project require make-ready costs, the applicant should include those costs in their budget.

12. Can funds from other State and Federal grants be layered to support proposed projects?

Projects already receiving funding from other federal or state sources are not eligible for AHCP funding for the same activity. Other funds available for proposed broadband deployment at a given property should be indicated in the application by a potential grantee and/or owner interest survey.

13. Is it possible to receive a copy of the application questions?

Yes. Visit <https://apps.cio.ny.gov/apps/cfa/help.cfm?section=programquestions> and select “ConnectALL - Affordable Housing Connectivity Program (AHCP) – Section One” to download a PDF of the complete set of application questions.

14. What is the deadline for filing?

ConnectALL will accept Section One applications on a rolling basis until funds are expended, until ConnectALL pauses or closes the RFA, or until January 30, 2026 – whichever date is earliest. Each Section Two portfolio will have its own deadline. To have the opportunity to be eligible to apply for all Section Two portfolios, ConnectALL requests Applicants complete the Section One application no later than 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on February 16, 2024. Completion of a Section One Application does not guarantee eligibility to apply to Section Two.

15. I missed the deadline to submit questions in advance of the Request for Applications Information Session. Can I still submit questions?

Applicants may communicate with the ConnectALL Office. All questions or requests for clarification must be in writing, sent by email to ahcp@esd.ny.gov. Please include "AHCP Request for Applications" in the subject line of the email. Q&As will be posted on the ConnectALL website and updated periodically.

16. Will the potential loss of funding for the Federal Communication Commission’s Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) impact this RFA?

The scoring criteria and application content for AHCP take into consideration potential changes to the ACP including its expiration. Please review the “Application Section One Criteria Categories” on page 11 of the Request for Applications as well as the “Service Quality” section of the Application Content on pages 18-19, specifically section 5.2.

17. I do not participate in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), am I eligible to apply?

Eligible applicants that do not currently participate in the Affordable Connectivity Program can apply, but all AHCP-funded projects will be required to participate in the ACP (or its successor program).

18. Are there funds available via other broadband programs or for non-affordable properties?

Information on other ConnectALL grant programs can be found on the ConnectALL website at <https://broadband.ny.gov>.

19. Will AHCP serve only existing buildings, or will new builds be included in Portfolios as well?

Only existing affordable housing properties with rental units regulated by a government entity are eligible to participate in the program.

20. Does the program consider whether there is already broadband service (and at what speed) at a property? Is there a performance threshold that disqualifies a property from being eligible to participate and receive a new ISP?

ConnectALL will prioritize locations that are unserved or underserved or that otherwise do not have the benefits of a robust broadband marketplace.

21. Will the portfolios open for bid require that an applicant bid on all buildings available? Or can an applicant limit its response to buildings that lie within (or close to) its existing fiber footprint?

Section Two Applications will address the entire Portfolio. Applicants will not be able to specify individual Properties they seek to serve.

22. Who owns/has rights to the vertical/horizontal infrastructure (including pathway) within the building at the end of the project?

AHCP-funded projects must be operated and maintained by the Grantee to allow delivery of service meeting the State's standards for a minimum of five years following project completion. If the Applicant is providing open-access infrastructure intended for public ownership by the State or another public entity, the Applicant should propose the length of time of ownership and date of transfer. ConnectALL will also prioritize projects that involve a pathway to public ownership or control of assets by ConnectALL or other public entities. ConnectALL is open to a variety of ownership models and agreements, including full public ownership, public ownership after a period of private ownership, public ownership with private operations, and an Indefeasible Right of Use (IRU) for ConnectALL or another public entity to use a portion of the AHCP-funded network.

23. In addition to providing an open network or lit fiber services to another ISP, what other reduced barriers to entry for subsequent service providers could a grantee implement to meet the program requirement to facilitate robust broadband marketplace?

Applicants may propose approaches ranging from provision of lit fiber services for other ISPs to installation of second pathways to Properties for other ISPs to install their own service, or other arrangements that would lower barriers to entry to Properties for subsequent service providers.

24. Who is the retail service customer? Will property owners or residents purchase service?

Grantees will be required to offer service to individual tenants. ConnectALL expects this will generally be a retail service, but it can also be a free service available to all qualifying units. Grantees may also offer bulk agreements to property owners, but property owners are not currently required to enter into such agreements, and Applicants should not assume such agreements will be in place when formulating their Application.

25. I do not provide retail service to end-users or I only provide retail services in bulk to property owners. Am I eligible to apply?

You are eligible to apply, but you will have to explain in your application how you will meet the requirement to deliver internet service (i.e., retail service or a baseline free service) to all of the affordable units in the property.

26. For an applicant team submitting a joint application, does a specific entity (e.g., the retail service provider) need to be the "lead" applicant?

Entities may apply to Section One in teams to fulfill the broadband deployment, operation, maintenance, and end-user ISP roles. Entities that apply as an Applicant Team must indicate the lead entity and a primary contact in their applications. There are no requirements around which entity on an Applicant Team is identified as the lead.

27. Will eligible costs for AHCP-funded projects include direct builds from existing fiber network infrastructure to a building as well as vertical builds within the building?

Yes. Please review the Eligible Uses of Funds section on pages 9-10 of the Request for Applications. Last-mile infrastructure, drops to a building, and in-building equipment and wiring retrofits are eligible expenditures for AHCP funds.

28. Can the network being built be used for other commercial activities (i.e., wireless carriers)?

AHCP grants can only be used for the eligible purposes listed in the Request for Applications and to serve the eligible homes in the building with residential broadband service. Grantees can, at their option without the use of AHCP grant funding, choose to self-fund other activities or additional infrastructure for other uses aside from eligible purposes, including wireless carrier commercial activity, consistent with the applicable building access and site license agreements.

29. Will grant-funded projects include infrastructure deployment to all units at a mixed finance property?

No. Section Two applications must be specific to the units and buildings identified in the Portfolios. Grant funds may only be used for last-mile infrastructure to the property and connections to the affordable units in the property.

February 23, 2024, Additions

30. Are there specific supply and wiring requirements? Our network design includes an antenna placed on the rooftop that has line-of-sight to a wireless network. The antenna is then connected to a network switch on the rooftop or in the basement. New wiring (fiber or cable) is run from the network switch to each floor in vertical risers. Will such an approach be considered?

Proposed projects must meet the program and network performance requirements on pages 5-8 of the Request for Applications. Of note from the Minimum Performance Requirements on page 6, "Each subscribing residential household must receive service of a minimum of 100 Mbps downstream and 100 Mbps upstream (100/100). The network design must provide each location with the required throughput. Service must be provided inside each residential unit." Further, from the Network Design Requirements section on page 7: "For alternate network solutions that provide sufficient availability and capacity to serve all subscribers at a minimum speed of 100 Mbps downstream and 100 Mbps upstream (100/100), the Applicant must explain why a wireline-based solution is not feasible or is suboptimal for the properties the Applicant proposes to serve. The Applicant's proposed network design must serve each served location with the required throughput and capacity. The selected Applicant should further develop the proposed design to consider future growth in consumer demand and how upgrades would be performed to deliver higher performance levels (e.g., symmetric 1 Gbps)."

31. What long-term obligations are Grantees held to after network implementation/build completion?

AHCP-funded projects must be operated and maintained by the Grantee to allow delivery of service meeting the State's standards until December 31, 2034. For detailed information on reporting and compliance requirements, see section 7.3 of the Application Content and Scope of Services on page 21 of the Request for Applications and Appendix C: Testing Methodology on pages 33-37.

32. Is my organization eligible to apply if it offers a free service option, but does not participate in the Affordable Connectivity Program?

We encourage you to apply. Given that it is not currently possible to participate in the Affordable Connectivity Program if you do not currently do so, you can acknowledge the program requirements at the start of your application and explain the free service option in response to questions Q_14601, Q_14466, Q_14591, Q_14593, and Q_14602. If you are selected for a conditional award, a waiver from ConnectALL and the Treasury Department may be required, but that determination can only be made on the basis of the specific proposal. In general, a free service option may be compatible with the goals of the program and we encourage all qualified applicants with a free service option to apply.

33. Is participation in the Affordable Connectivity Program still a requirement?

Yes, participation in the Federal Affordable Connectivity Program continues to be identified as a program requirement. Notwithstanding, it is acknowledged and understood that it is not currently

possible to enroll in the Affordable Connectivity Program if you are not already participating. Applicants to the Affordable Housing Connectivity Program should review the program requirements at the start of the application, and assess and address the extent to which a waiver request may be called for in connection with their applications. Depending on the future status of federal programs that provide low-income consumers with subsidies on broadband internet access services, and based on the specific application under consideration, a waiver from ConnectALL and the Treasury Department may ultimately be required for prospective grantees who are not participating in the Affordable Connectivity Program. We encourage applicants to apply even if not currently participating in the Affordable Connectivity Program.

34. Are all of the “Broadband Service Quality and Price” criteria in the “Application Review” section required for an application to be eligible for review and consideration?

No. For project requirements, please review the “Project Requirements” section of the Request for Applications beginning on page 5. The Application Review Criteria in the “Broadband Service Quality and Price” category indicate criteria upon which all applications will be scored. Applications that respond to all criteria may receive higher scores depending on the substance of the submission.

35. Will the portfolios of properties be shared publicly?

No. ConnectALL will issue Portfolios of Properties directly to qualified Section One applicants.

36. A property owner has indicated I am their preferred broadband partner in the Building Conditions Self-Assessment and in my AHCP Section One application I have indicated my interest in the service area where that owner’s properties are located. Is there anything else I can do?

Yes, affordable property owners can provide letters of support to a broadband partner, which can then be included in the broadband entity’s AHCP Section One and/or Section Two applications.

February 29, 2024, Additions

37. Do I need to submit specific attachments with my AHCP application?

Yes, the applications questions under the “Documents” tab specify the templates to use and types of documents applicants should upload. Within this tab, you will see which documents are required or optional and if a specific format or template is required for that document. Applications that do not submit required documents or do not use the required templates will not be reviewed.

38. How should I complete the series of Section One application questions about my interest in and capacity to deploy broadband infrastructure to various metropolitan areas and over a 24-month period?

In this series of unscored questions, ConnectALL is looking for the following:

1. In the metropolitan areas table that starts with Q_14373, applicants should indicate the geographic areas they are interested in serving and provide realistic estimates of:
 - a. the minimum number of units the applicant would require to be awarded in order to take on a project in a given geographic area, and
 - b. the maximum number of units the applicant expects they would have capacity to bring to completion within each geographic area by the end of 2026.
2. Following that table, Q_14549 asks the total number of units applicants believe they can realistically deploy broadband infrastructure to within a 24-month period. Note: the applicant’s maximum capacity in a given geographic area (item 1.b above) may be equal to, but should not exceed, the total number of units entered in response to this question.

July 26, 2024, Additions

39. I submitted a Section One Application. What's next?

ConnectALL is in the process of assembling property Portfolios across New York State Metropolitan Statistical Areas. We will notify you when a Portfolio that includes a service area selected in your Section One application is published.

40. In older buildings, will an AHCP installation/project trigger an environmental review?

It is expected that ISPs' technical proposals minimize environmental and aesthetic impacts to the property(/ies). If an ISP anticipates that the installation will have an environmental impact, the proposal should include a description of changes, challenges, or risk to project timeline, and a mitigation plan. The ISP will determine the need for an environmental review based on the nature of the installation work and in accordance with NYS SEQR regulations.

August 30, 2024, Addition

41. Can I select multiple metropolitan areas in the Section One application?

Yes, Applicants may select as many metropolitan areas as they have the capability and interest to serve.