



PUBLIC NOTICE

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

News Media Information 202 / 418-0513
Internet: <http://www.fcc.gov>
TTY: 1-888-835-5322

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WIRELINE COMPETITION BUREAU RELEASES LIST OF CENSUS BLOCKS ELIGIBLE FOR RURAL BROADBAND EXPERIMENTS AND ANNOUNCES ENHANCEMENTS TO MAP DEPICTING INITIAL PHASE II ELIGIBLE AREAS

WC Docket No. 10-90

On July 14, 2014, the Commission released the *Rural Broadband Experiments Order* finalizing decisions to use on a limited scale Connect America funding for rural broadband experiments in price cap areas that will deploy new, robust broadband to consumers.¹ The Commission directed the Wireline Competition Bureau (Bureau) to release a list of the census blocks that are eligible for rural broadband experiment support and their associated support amounts, as calculated by the Connect America Cost Model (CAM), within 15 days of the release of the Order.² Today, the Bureau makes this list available at <http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/rural-broadband-experiments>. Census blocks not on this list are not eligible for funding in the rural broadband experiments. The Bureau also announces that the map previously released depicting the geographic areas that may be eligible for Phase II support now provides more detailed information regarding location totals and support amounts at the census tract level, which may be a useful tool for applicants interested in applying for rural broadband experiment funding. This map is available at <http://www.fcc.gov/maps/fcc-connect-america-fund-phase-ii-initial-eligible-areas-map>.

In the *Rural Broadband Experiments Order*, the Commission concluded that it would accept applications for three categories of experiments.³ For categories one and two,⁴ entities must propose to serve census blocks eligible for funding in the rural broadband experiments with a monthly cost per location exceeding the Connect America Phase II funding threshold (\$52.50), but below the extremely high-cost threshold (\$207.81),⁵ and not served by an unsubsidized competitor offering voice service and Internet access providing at least 3 Mbps downstream/768 kbps upstream as identified by the National

¹ *Connect America Fund, ETC Annual Reports and Certifications*, WC Docket Nos. 10-90, 14-58, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 14-98 (rel. July 14, 2014) (*Rural Broadband Experiments Order*). The Order establishes a budget of \$100 million for the rural broadband experiments and an objective, clear cut methodology for selecting winning applications.

² *Id.* at para. 15 n.38.

³ *Id.* at paras. 24-29.

⁴ *See id.* at paras. 26-27. Experiments proposed for category one must meet very high performance standards, while experiments proposed for category two must meet specified minimum performance standards that exceed the Commission's current standards. *Id.* For both categories, winning bidders will be selected based on their cost-effectiveness as compared to the support the CAM calculates for the relevant census blocks. *Id.* at 35.

⁵ *Id.* at para. 15. Earlier this year, the Bureau adopted these preliminary support thresholds for determining which areas are eligible for model-based support. *See Connect America Fund, High-Cost Universal Service Support*, WC Docket Nos. 10-90, 05-337, Report and Order, 29 FCC Rcd 3964, 4033, para. 165 (2014).

Broadband Map.⁶ For the third category, entities must propose to serve exclusively census blocks where all price cap locations in the census block exceed the extremely high-cost threshold and are unserved by an unsubsidized competitor as defined above.⁷ To increase the likelihood that experiments serving Tribal census blocks will receive funding, the Commission also adopted a 25 percent bidding credit for entities that propose an experiment for any of the three categories that will serve only Tribal census blocks.⁸

The list released today identifies the state and county where each census block is located along with its tract and block ID numbers; the total number of locations in the census block (which includes locations served by rate-of-return carriers and price cap carriers), the total number of price cap locations in the census block, and the total number of price cap locations within the block that are eligible for rural broadband experiment support.⁹ The list also identifies which census blocks have locations that fall within the support thresholds and thus are eligible for categories one and two (“Eligible Locations” column), and which census blocks have price cap locations that exceed the extremely high-cost threshold and thus are eligible for category three (“PC Locations Over Extremely High Cost Threshold” column). Finally, the list identifies the annual support amount for each census block as calculated by the CAM,¹⁰ and flags which census blocks are eligible for the Tribal bidding credit for purposes of these experiments.¹¹

Finally, the Phase II map posted on the Commission’s website has been enhanced to provide more detailed information at the census tract level, which may help parties interested in seeking funding for rural broadband experiments generally identify potential areas for such experiments. The map now has a mouseover feature that allows users to zoom in at the census tract level to view: (1) the census tract number, (2) the total number of locations eligible for Phase II support, and (3) the CAM-derived amount of annual Phase II support available to serve these locations (identified on the map as “Price Cap Between”). Additionally, the displayed information separately provides the total number of price cap locations in the census tract that exceed the extremely high-cost threshold, and are unserved by an unsubsidized competitor (identified on the map as “Price Cap Above”).¹² Applicants may wish initially to

⁶ *Rural Broadband Experiments Order*, FCC 14-98, at para. 15. The Bureau will conduct a challenge process similar to the process it has adopted for determining eligible areas for model-based support after the Bureau has issued a public notice identifying the winning bidders. *See id.* at para. 51.

⁷ *Id.* at para. 28. Winning bidders for category three will be selected based on the lowest bid per location. *Id.* at para. 37.

⁸ *Id.* at paras. 43-44.

⁹ The total number of locations in the “Total PC Locations” column and the “Total PC Experimental Locations In Block” may differ in some limited circumstances because the cost per location has been calculated in certain census blocks on a sub-census-block basis. *See id.* at para. 13 n.34. We remind entities that they must commit to serve the total number of price cap locations in each census block (i.e., the number of locations in the “Total PC Locations” column), but their cost-effectiveness scores will be determined using only locations that are eligible for funding (i.e., the number of locations in the “Total PC Experimental Locations In Block” column). *Id.* at 15. An entity’s application must list the census block IDs for each census block it proposes to serve, the number of locations that are eligible for funding in each of those blocks, and the total amount of support it requests for the ten year term (i.e., the requested annual support amount times 10). *Id.* at para. 47.

¹⁰ The CAM does not calculate support amounts for census blocks above the extremely high-cost threshold; thus, the eligible census blocks list indicates that the model-based support amounts for these census blocks is \$0.

¹¹ The Commission has indicated that it will not entertain any proposals to modify the list of census blocks identified as Tribal. *Rural Broadband Experiments Order*, FCC 14-98, at para. 44.

¹² Not all census blocks that are identified as extremely high-cost on the Phase II map will be eligible for rural broadband experiment support. As noted above, only those extremely high-cost census blocks where all price cap locations are extremely high-cost are eligible for rural broadband experiment support. *See id.* at para. 28 n.60. The

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identify general regions of interest on the map and then review the more detailed census block information in the files we are releasing today to confirm the eligibility of particular census blocks.

For additional information, contact Katie King (Katie.King@fcc.gov) or Ian Forbes (Ian.Forbes@fcc.gov) of the Wireline Competition Bureau, Telecommunications Access Policy Division, (202) 418-7400.

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list of the census blocks eligible for rural broadband experiment support that the Bureau releases today only includes those extremely high-cost census blocks where all price cap locations are extremely high-cost.