



# NEWS

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.  
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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## Vilsack, Copps and Wade Kick Off American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's Broadband Initiative

*Commerce's NTIA and Agriculture's Rural Utility Services Invite Comments on the Program;  
Joint Request for Information Also Establishes Schedule of Public Roundtables*

WASHINGTON – U.S. Department of Agriculture Sec. Tom Vilsack, Acting Federal Communications Commission Chairman Michael Copps and U.S. Dept. of Commerce Senior Advisor and Acting Chief of Staff Rick Wade kicked off the joint broadband initiative under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act today and announced a series of public meetings that will give Americans an opportunity to help shape the program.

“President Obama’s commitment to expanding broadband service to rural areas will provide rural communities with access to worldwide markets and the education, first responder, and health care resources they need to prosper and compete,” Vilsack said. “The Department of Agriculture stands ready to partner with the Department of Commerce and Federal Communications Commission to support the President’s goal to deploy high-speed internet service in rural and unserved communities.”

The U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utility Services (RUS) today also released a Joint Request for Information and Notice of Public Meetings (RFI), which invites comments from interested parties on the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) and the RUS grants and loans program established in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. To encourage public participation, the RFI sets a schedule of public meetings from March 16-24. That will give Americans an opportunity to discuss how NTIA and the Rural Utility Service should design and implement these programs. Each of these meetings will feature a roundtable discussion and an opportunity for public comment.

The meetings will be webcast, and as part of the effort to broaden public input, the March 17 meeting will be held in Las Vegas, Nev., with the following day’s meeting scheduled for Flagstaff, Ariz.

The public meetings by NTIA and RUS are an important part of the agencies’ efforts to move quickly to implement the Act’s Broadband Initiatives. They will inform the administration’s innovative and practical approach to spurring economic growth by accelerating broadband deployment in unserved, underserved, and rural areas and to strategic institutions that are likely to create jobs or provide significant public benefits.

"President Obama believes in the power of broadband. Broadband deployment throughout the country will help drive the nation's economic recovery and growth," Wade said. "The grants represent a down-payment on President Obama's communications priority, ensuring that all Americans have access to broadband and the skills to use it. NTIA is eager to engage the public to develop grant programs that best serve the needs of targeted communities, public institutions, community educational centers, first responders, and vulnerable populations."

In connection with the new broadband initiatives, Acting Federal Communications Commission Chairman Michael J. Copps said: "Without ubiquitous broadband, our citizens--our country--will lack the competitive tools necessary for success in the Twenty-first century. The FCC has been given an important role -- to develop, over the next 12 months, a national broadband strategy. We look forward to working with our colleagues in the agencies of government and in the private sector to bring these essential, opportunity-creating tools to every American, no matter whom they are or where they live."

The request for information issued jointly by NTIA and RUS, solicits comments from interested parties on a wide range of topics (see below) critical to the design and implementation of NTIA's grant program and the Rural Utility Service's grant and loan program, including the establishment of selection criteria for grant awards, grant mechanics, the role of various stakeholders, and coordination between NTIA and RUS. The request for information also seeks comment on the creation of a national broadband map. All of these efforts should help inform the cross-agency work on the national broadband plan that will shortly be initiated by the Federal Communications Commission.

Comments will be received up to 30 days after publication of the RFI in the Federal Register. Comments may be submitted via the Web, email or mail. Commenters are strongly encouraged to file via the website, [www.ntia.doc.gov/broadbandgrants](http://www.ntia.doc.gov/broadbandgrants). All material sent via the U.S. Postal Service (including overnight or Express Mail) is subject to delivery delays of up to two weeks due to mail security procedures. Detailed requirements regarding submissions are set forth in the RFI. People submitting comments are advised that all comments received will be posted on the public Web site at [www.ntia.doc.gov/broadbandgrants](http://www.ntia.doc.gov/broadbandgrants).

The RFI solicits comments from interested parties on the following topics:

- the purposes of the BTOP program,
- the role of the States,
- eligible grant recipients,
- the establishment of selection criteria for grant awards,
- grant mechanics,
- grants for expanding public computer center capacity,
- grants for innovative programs to encourage sustainable adoption of broadband service,
- broadband mapping,
- financial contributions by grant applicants,
- timely completion of proposals,
- coordination between the BTOP and Department of Agriculture's RUS grant program,
- how terms set out in the relevant sections of the Recovery Act should be defined,
- how the success of the BTOP program should be measured,
- any other issues NTIA should consider in creating the BTOP,
- the most effective ways Department of Agriculture's RUS could offer broadband funds,

- how Department of Agriculture's RUS and NTIA can best align their Recovery Act activities
- how Department of Agriculture's RUS can evaluate whether a particular level of broadband access and service is needed to facilitate economic development,
- how Department of Agriculture's RUS should consider priorities set out in the Recovery Act in selecting applications, and
- what benchmarks should be used to determine the success of its Recovery Act broadband activities.

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