

## **Notes from the Public Meeting of NTIA's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program**

March 10, 2009, 10:00 am – 11:30 am Eastern

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### **Summary of Speaker comments**

The first of a series of public meetings was held at the Department of Commerce today. This bulletin summarizes some of the key points made by the speakers and includes selected questions from attendees and answers from the panel.

#### **Tom Vilsack**

##### **Department of Agriculture**

- Focus is particularly in unserved and underserved areas:
  - Farmers & Ranchers
  - Small Business growth
  - Young Minds, education
- Looking for creative and innovative ways to expand technologies.
- Anxious to leverage the \$2.8 billion for resources beyond this (loans in addition to grant monies).

#### **Michael Copps**

##### **Acting Chairman of FCC**

- “We pay too much for service that’s too slow.”
- “Broadband is the infrastructure challenge of our time.” Likened to roads, power & railroads.
- Success measured in jobs, better health, education , self-fulfillment & renewed economic opportunities

#### **Rick Wade**

##### **Senior Advisor & Acting Chief of Staff, Dept of Commerce**

##### **5 Goals:**

1. Close the broadband gap across America. Rural communities, competitive choices.
  2. Stimulate investment
  3. Create jobs
  4. Ensure schools, libraries, etc. have high speed access
  5. Encourage demand for broadband
- Users “need to be online at 21<sup>st</sup> century speeds”
  - Encourage applicants to work together with local governments, non-profit institutions, and community institutions & business sector to develop viable vibrant projects.

## **Bernadette McGuire-Rivera**

### **Associate Administrator, NTIA**

- Has to happen “very fast”
- Need to work together (NTIA, USDA, FCC, Applicants)
- Applicants can start working on your Grant application “as soon as you walk out the door”
- Public meetings are being scheduled to discuss guidelines & rules of program
- Each initiative will be managed as a separate program (e.g.: Computer center capacity will be a separate program vs. broadband program)
- April to June timeframe – Notice of Availability of funds will be issued
- 3 grant rounds will take place. They will be competitive grants based on the criteria defined in the ARRA
  - Round 1: April-June, 2009
  - Round 2: October- December, 2009
  - Round 3: April -June, 2010
- You can apply to both programs. They will coordinate with USDA. Cannot “double-dip.” Funding must be for different parts of the proposed project.
- Applicants can start pulling all this information together now.
- Timetable of public meetings: March 16, 19 23 & 24 at the Commerce Dept.... more scheduled....at <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/>

## **David Villano**

### **Asst. Administrator for Telecommunication Programs USDA**

- USDA intends to divert some of this to loans and loan/grant combos vs. grants only
- Implementation plan:
  - Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) will begin within 60-90 days
  - At least 3 NOFAs will be published within ~ 3-4 months of one another
  - The NOFAs will define the process, rules, criteria, etc.

### **Selective Questions/Comments:**

- 1. Will consolidated applications be encouraged?**
  - a. Yes, encouraged BUT...everything still depends on nature of the project
- 2. What information will be on the map?**
  - a. Goal is for map to be as granular as possible.
- 3. Has “rural” been defined?**
  - a. Not yet. NTIA, USDA & FCC working together to define rural and underserved.
- 4. What % of funds will be made available in each of the rounds? Will all application types be considered in each round?**
  - a. Anticipating ~33% in each round across all programs.
- 5. Comments on “Buy America” provisions?**
  - a. Awaiting legal opinion.
- 6. Is NTIA planning to hire staff or outsource Grant application processing? How many grants? Dollar floors/ceilings?**

- a. NTIA will definitely be contracting out support to process Grant Applications. Interested in obtaining more feedback about the best number of grants to be issued and dollar/floor ceilings, if any, on Grants.
- 7. Will satellite-based rural broadband providers be allowed to participate?**
  - a. Both USDA & NTIA say “yes.”
- 8. Is NTIA considering a combination of loan and grants as well?**
  - a. USDA: Grants, loans and loan/grant combos. NTIA is a grant program. Can combine NTIA grant money and USDA funds for different parts of the same project.
- 9. Preference for fiber vs. copper vs. wireless?**
  - a. No priority in the statute, but it does say fastest speeds possible. Looking for forward looking investments that offer the “best bang for the buck.”
- 10. What is being done to streamline the application process?**
  - a. Working to do this. Grant is easier. Loan program requires financials. NTIA doesn’t have legacy forms and is under time pressure, so they expect a streamlined process.