Responses to Questions from
Federal Funding Account Live Webinar – July 2023

I.   General Application Process

1. When will you post submitted applications for the 14 days window? One month? by groups?

   The goal is to provide updates on applications monthly.

2. Are matching funds required?

   Matching funds are not required. However, Appendix A, Section 3a – Funding Criteria of the Federal Funding Account Rules and Guidelines awards up to 10 points for matching funds.

3. Once the application window closes can you please give us an approximate timeline as to when we will hear from the FFA team regarding our application?

   The target is to review applications within six months of the application window closing.

4. Can we apply for up to $25M per application per county without Ministerial review?

   Applications that meet the requirements in Appendix A, Section 13 of the Federal Funding Account Rules and Guidelines may undergo Ministerial Review. Among the ministerial review criteria is a total grant amount less than $25,000,000. Applications that do not meet the ministerial review criteria would be approved via Commission resolution.

5. Will projects be awarded on a first come first served basis or an overall competition among all received applications?

   All applications submitted during the same application window will be reviewed holistically (e.g., applications within a county).

6. How are applicants or projects expected to certify their ability to hit 100/100 Mbps service?

   Applicants must attest they can reach 100 megabits per second download and 100 megabits per second upload in their applications. Applications and projects will be reviewed and may be subject to post-completion inspection and verification.

7. Is the amount listed on the Application Tool the highest allowable money that can be requested? The investment model census block data listed in the Applicant Tool is for informational purposes.

   Applicants may apply for more or less than the modeled amounts. Please provide an explanation for why an applied for amount is more or less than the Applicant Tool amounts.

8. What if the cities within a county have different priorities than the county? Should they just submit different proposals?

   Cooperation between local entities is encouraged. Applicants may choose the most appropriate form of cooperation suitable to their circumstances.

9. Does the project plan ID need to be submitted under the same username as the account that designed it in the applicant tool?

   No

10. Can one username create the project and then a separate username enter the plan ID to submit the application?

    Yes

11. If we find additional unserved locations in a proposed serving area, can we include them in the application?

    Additional unserved locations should be included in the application. Guidance for the justification of these additional locations is included in Appendix A, section 9.6 of Decision D.22-04-055.

12. Without the Plan ID we cannot begin the application, correct?

    Applicants may begin an application without a Plan ID; however, the Plan ID is a required field in the Broadband Grant Portal.

13. Can applicants add contractors and writers as collaborators in the portal? If so, how do they do that?

    Multiple logins can be created, but separate users cannot see each other's work. Applicants working as a team are encouraged to create/use a single log in for such circumstances.

14. Does the portal allow us to save our work and return to edit at a later time?

    Yes. The Broadband Grant Portal allows a user to click the "Save for Later Function" and then return to continue work another time.

15. Can one login be used to apply for multiple agencies, or should we create individual accounts for each agency that is applying?

    Multiple logins can be created, but separate logins cannot see each other's work. Applicants may want to consider creating a team login when multiple people are working on projects.

16. Will there be multiple rounds of applications over subsequent years?

    The first application window closes on September 29, 2023. Subsequent application windows are anticipated every six months depending on the availability of funding.

II. Objections

1. Will challenges be due 14 calendar days from Sept 29 (date applications are due) or from the date staff publishes the notice of applications? If the latter, do we know what date that will be?

   The Commission will provide a period during which interested persons may review the grant applications that have been submitted and file written comments objecting to an application under review. Challenges to any applications will be due 14 days after Staff publishes the notice of applications. Please see Appendix A, section 12 of Decision D.22-04-055. Subscribe to Federal Funding Account updates for further information.

2. What is the process for challenging provider claimed speeds?

   Please see Appendix A, Section 12 of Decision D.22-04-055. Subscribe to Federal Funding Account updates for further information.

3. Where do we find the applications that have been submitted, so we can review to see if an objection is warranted?

   Staff will post the applications to the Broadband Grant Portal after the application window closes. Subscribe to Federal Funding Account updates for further information.

III. Applicant Tool and Registration

1. Will we at some point have access to address level availability CSV data by location including status - served, unserved, underserved?

   The CPUC is working with federal agency partners (the Federal Communications Commission and the National Telecommunications Information Administration) to expeditiously make this information available. Those interested can subscribe to program updates additional program information and guidance [here](#).

2. We registered using the applicant tool but it took our CAO to an online signature page for a document our legal team hasn't reviewed. Is there a way to execute on paper versus online?

   For questions about the end user license agreement, please contact federalfundingaccount@cpuc.ca.gov.

3. If only specific "unserved" addresses are eligible for FFA Funding, then why is only census block level information available? How can we identify the specific addresses that are eligible for state funding? Unserved information is currently publicly available at the hex bin level and census block levels. Applicants provide detailed geographic information in other parts of the application—as has been the case with past federal and state broadband grant programs that predated the Broadband Serviceable Location Fabric.

   The CPUC is working with federal agency partners (the Federal Communications Commission and the National Telecommunications Information Administration) to expeditiously make this information

available. Those interested can subscribe to program updates additional program information and guidance [here](#).

4. Does the proposed service have to be based on census blocks?

   Applicants may propose projects at the address or location level. The applicant must also submit the census blocks in which all of the project locations are located in the Applicant Tool. Unserved locations, demographic information, estimated subsidy, business case and other information is summarized at the census block level in the Applicant Tool.

5. Can multiple people from each entity (like City) register for the applicant tool, or just one person/account per entity?

   Multiple logins can be created, but separate users cannot see each other's work. Applicants working as a team are encouraged to create/use a single log in for such circumstances.

6. Is it possible to challenge eligible locations currently on the FFA public map?

   Yes. See "How do I leave feedback on the map" in the [Federal Funding Account FAQ](#) or the "Search and Give Feedback" tab on the Public Map.

7. Can we upload our own map layer in the mapping tool to overlay our data with the tool's data?

   An applicant can upload maps or shapefiles in the Broadband Grant Portal, but not the Application Tool. Applicants can, however, download the "unserved mass market locations" hex layer [https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/industries-and-topics/internet-and-phone/broadband-implementation-for-california/last-mile-federal-funding-account/ffa-public-mapfrom the Public Map](#) for use in your own GIS software. GIS users can follow up with additional questions about a host of broadband data that is publicly available.

8. Do we use the CA interactive map in https://www.broadbandmap.ca.gov/ to view eligible locations? The [Federal Funding Account Public Map](#) and Applicant Tool are the official source of information for unserved locations under the program. Other official sources may be considered when evaluating applications if an applicant provides information beyond what is in the Federal Funding Account Public Map and Applicant Tool.

   The CPUC is working with federal agency partners (the Federal Communications Commission and the National Telecommunications Information Administration) to expeditiously make this information available. Those interested can subscribe to program updates additional program information and guidance [here](#).

9. Is eligibility based on census blocks? Do we need to serve all points in the block?

   Individual addresses or locations are eligible. The information is summarized by hexbin and census block. If an applicant submits a shapefile with their application, they will be expected to cover every address within that shapefile. Similarly, if a census block (s) is included in an application, the applicant will be expected to serve every address within those census blocks.

10. Will the new FCC map be counted as a reliable source map for the application?

    The Federal Funding Account Public Map and Applicant Tool are the official source of information for unserved locations under the program. Other official sources will be considered when evaluating applications if an applicant provides additional information beyond what is in the Federal Funding Account Public Map and Applicant Tool. Note that the Federal Funding Account Public Map and Applicant Tool present different data eligibility. See Federal Funding Account FAQ question 10 for additional information.

11. Low-income populations and disadvantaged agricultural communities cannot easily be identified through Census data. Is there another method to identify these communities?

    The Federal Funding Account Public Map and Applicant Tool are the official source of information for unserved locations under the program. The Applicant Tool displays relevant demographic data required in the application. Other data can be submitted and other official sources will be considered when evaluating applications if an applicant provides additional information beyond what is in the Federal Funding Account Public Map and Applicant Tool.

12. Is an eligible area defined only as a census block and how are applicants meant to find/identify the funding eligible locations they intend to serve without access to the individual location data?

    Individual unserved locations are presumed eligible. The information is summarized by hexbin and census block. Estimated subsidies are reported by census blocks. A project can be designed to the location level using other sources such as address or parcel databases.

    In addition, the CPUC is working with federal agency partners (the Federal Communications Commission and the National Telecommunications Information Administration) to expeditiously make the Broadband Serviceable Location Fabric data available.

13. Do projects need to match entire census block geometries?

    Individual locations are eligible. Applicants may submit an application with project boundaries that that are a subset of the selected census blocks. Applicants will be expected to cover every unserved location within that shapefile. Similarly, if a list of census block (s) are included in an application rather than a shapefile, the applicant will be expected to serve every unserved location within those census blocks.

14. Can you upload shapefiles to the map on the Applicant tool?

    An applicant can upload maps or shapefiles in the Broadband Grant Portal, but not the Applicant Tool. Applicants can, however, download the "unserved mass market locations" hex layer on this page for use in your own GIS software. GIS users can follow up with additional questions about a host of broadband data that is publicly available.

15. Does the applicant tool allow us to select individual locations in a census block or apply for only part of a census block?

    Individual addresses or locations are eligible. Unserved data is summarized by hexbin and census block. A project can be designed to the address level using other sources such as address or parcel databases and submitted in the portal using address es and/or a shapefile (that is a subset of the selected census blocks). Individual locations cannot be selected in the Applicant Tool at this time.

16. Must the same account which created a project on the applicant tool also submit the application on the Portal?

    The Applicant Tool and the Broadband Grant Portal have separate registration processes. The login details for the Applicant Tool may be different from the login details used for the Broadband Grant Portal.

17. Where should we pull speed info if the public map does not have speed data?

    The California Broadband Availability map is one of multiple sources for speed data.

18. Are we required to use the existing cost quest estimates in the Applicant Tool for our application, or are they a guideline?

    Applicants may apply for more or less than the modeled amounts in the applicant tool. Applicants should provide a justification for why an applied for amount is more or less than the Applicant Tool numbers.

19. Can you make modifications to projects in the Application tool?

    Modifications may be made to draft projects in the Applicant Tool. However, an applicant cannot make changes to project areas after clicking "Create Plan ID." If edits need to be made post submission, an applicant will need to copy the original submission, make the necessary edits, and create a new Plan ID.

20. Are there separate registrations for the Applicant Tool vs the Broadband Grant Portal vs. California Advanced Services Fund?

    Yes.

21. Where can we find a template of the end user license agreement for the FFA application tool - for legal review?

    For questions about the end user license agreement, please contact federalfundingaccount@cpuc.ca.gov.

22. How would you apply for partial if the map only lets you select the full Census Block?

    An applicant may submit a shapefile for the area they propose to cover (which should be a subset of the selected census blocks).

IV.   Award Performance and Expenditures

1. Can grant funds be used for support services such as accounting and admin staff for reporting?

    Appendix A, Section 8 – Reimbursable Expenses of the Federal Funding Account Rules and Guidelines provides information on reimbursable expenses. Administrative expenses directly related to the project shall be capped at 2 percent of the award amount.

2. What is the period of performance or the timeline for completion?

    All grant funds must be encumbered by December 31, 2024, while the funds must be spent and projects completed by December 31, 2026. Additionally, all CEQA exempt projects must be completed within 18 months and all other projects within 24 months after receiving authorization for construction. See Appendix, Section 9.7 if an applicant is not able to construct and complete the proposed project within the approved timeline.

3. Are projects currently under construction eligible? If so, can costs be reimbursed?

    Federal Funding Account grant funds are designated only for those projects which are not yet developed and/or under construction.

4. What is the maximum amount that will be paid out per site?

    Appendix A, Section 8 of the Federal Funding Account Rules and Guidelines provides information on the costs that may be reimbursable. Appendix A, Section 9.8 – Proposed details the proposed project expenditures the applicant must provide.

5. Are reimbursements allowed for certain paid invoices between completion milestones?

    Appendix A, Section 15 – Payments of the Federal Funding Account Rules and Guideline describes the intervals for payment requests and the deadlines.

6. If we know projects will require more than 18 months, may we state so? I understand that State funds used to allow project close out later than 2026 and budgets are allocated further out.

    Currently, grant funds must be encumbered by December 31, 2024, while the funds must be spent and projects completed by December 31, 2026. See Appendix, Section 9.7 if an applicant is not able to construct and complete the proposed project within the approved timeline.

V.   Review & Scoring

1. Points are awarded for connections to the State's Middle-Mile Network. The network won't be in place by the time grants are awarded. Will we still get points if we build to where the future State Middle-Mile Network will be constructed?

    Appendix A, Section 6 – Middle Mile Funding in Appendix A of the Federal Funding Account Rules and Guidelines contains relevant information. Your application should state what backhaul source

you will use upon completion. If your project will be dependent upon the State Middle Mile's completion, you must set your project schedule accordingly.

2. Will reviewers be prioritizing the unserved vs total locations more or whether the locations are within the Disadvantaged/Low-income area?

   Appendix A, Section 3 – Funding Criteria and Commission Evaluation of Applications provides information on the evaluation criteria and available points. The Scoring Rubric provides an additional breakdown of the total 130 points and the 20 points for projects proposing to serve Disadvantaged Communities/Low-Income Areas.

3. For municipalities who will be putting out RFPs/RFIs for ISPs to partner with on their proposed project, would including the pricing commitments as part of the RFP/RFI be accepted to get full points in the scoring criteria for the application?

   Appendix A, Section 9.11 – Pricing Commitment of the Federal Funding Account Rules and Guidelines provides information that entities must include in their applications to fulfill the pricing commitment requirements. Up to ten points may be awarded to project applications that commit to not raising prices for ten years instead of the minimum requirement of five years.

4. Can you define "affiliated" with a non-profit or local government for scoring? Is it purely equity based?

   Section 3c – Funding Criteria and Commission Evaluation of Applications provides information on types of partnerships. For questions about specific situations, please contact federalfundingaccount@cpuc.ca.gov

5. Can you elaborate on how the "Type of Partnership" and "Matching" criteria will be evaluated?

   Appendix A, Section 3 – Funding Criteria and Commission Evaluation of Applications of the Federal Funding Account Rules and Guidelines provides the criteria for evaluating project applications, including "Matching" and "Type of Partnership."

VI.   Funding Requirements and Allocation

1. Will we see which entities have applied for a County's allocation?

   See Appendix A, Section 9.1: application Project Summaries will be posted on the website.

2. Do Tribal communities within a County have their own allocation? Or do they share the County allocation?

   Tribal communities do not have a separate allocation, and proposed projects within Tribal areas are eligible for up to 20 points. If both tribal and non-tribal entities apply for a project in an area that includes tribal lands, special consideration will be given to the Tribal applicant. See Appendix A, Section 3 – Funding Criteria and Commission Evaluation of Applications of the Federal Funding Account Rules and Guidelines for more information.

3. If funds allocated to a County have not been applied for, will the CPUC consider moving those funds to other eligible projects in other counties, thus increasing the allocation in a county that has more applications?

   Decision 02-04-055 adopted allocations for projects in each county without an end date. Funds will not be transferred to other counties.

4. Is it possible to fund a wireline project with some wireless access for difficult areas to serve?

   Appendix A, Section 4 – Definitions specifies an eligible project as capable of offering wireline broadband service at or above 100/100 Mbps, or 100/20 Mbps if symmetrical service is not practicable. Combination wireline/wireless projects may use funding for the portion of the project that provides the end user wireline service. Additionally, applicants may seek additional funding for these types of projects from the California Advanced Services Fund and/or Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Fund.

5. Are applicants required to have audited financials, or are attested financials acceptable (as is the case with CASF)? Section 9.15 in Appendix A of the Federal Funding Account rules describes the information.

   Appendix A, Section 9.15 – Financial Qualifications describes the required financial information. Applicants are required to submit: 1) Certified Public Accountant Audited/Attested Financial Statements for the last three years, 2) Pro Forma Financial Forecast for a five-year period, and 3) a Five-year annual EBIT (Earnings Before Income and Tax) projection. Appendix A, Section 9.15 also provides information on what is required from subsidiary and/or recently formed organizations.

6. Is there a minimum threshold for matching funding?

   Although there is no minimum threshold for matching funds or requirement for matching funds, Appendix A, Section 3a Funding Criteria and Commission Evaluation of Applications awards up to 10 points for matching funds on the percentage of matching funds the applicant proposes to invest in their project.

7. Is there an indirect cost rate?

   There is no specific indirect cost rate, but administrative expenses are capped at 2 percent of the total grant amount. Further information can be found in Appendix A, Section 9.8 – Proposed Project Expenditures.

8. When do you expect to announce how much money is left/available in Round 2 for funding? Will the round 1 projects be announced by then?

   Our goal is to resolve all applications within six months of the window closing. The first application window closes on September 29, 2023. A second application window is anticipated in the first quarter 2024 depending on the availability of funding, and the amount of funds available will be announced at that time.

VII.   CEQA

1. How do you determine if a project is CEQA exempt?

    There is a CEQA questionnaire included on the portal. The CPUC's CEQA team will determine if a project is exempt from CEQA based on the answers in the questionnaire. See Appendix A, Section 9.18 – CEQA Attestation for more information.

VIII.   Eligibility

1. Are community anchor institutes eligible to apply?

    Appendix A, Section 5 – Eligible Entities lists the entities that are eligible for grant funding. These include community anchor institutions and local government agencies, which are defined under California Government Code Section 53167e.

2. Can a single applicant submit multiple applications for areas in different counties?

    Yes, an entity can submit multiple applications, as long as they are for separate eligible project areas.

3. If we are an RDOF winner, can we apply for FFA funds for the RDOF awarded area?

    The CPUC will consider a previously awarded RDOF area in the application review process if project meets the Federal Funding Account requirements.

4. Will the CPUC make public a list of funding eligible "unserved" addresses?

    The CPUC is working with federal agency partners (the Federal Communications Commission and the National Telecommunications Information Administration) to expeditiously make this information available. Those interested can subscribe to program updates for additional program information and guidance.

5. Can middle mile be covered to service last mile users if the middle mile is severely constrained?

    Appendix A, Section 6 – Middle Mile Funding for more provides information on the requirements for using grant funds for middle mile infrastructure.

6. If an area currently has wireline up to 100 Mbps down (but not more), it wouldn't qualify?

    Unserved areas, displayed on the public map and applicant too, are presumed eligible. Appendix A, Section 4 – Definitions defines "unserved" as an area for which no wireline broadband provider reliably offers broadband service at speeds of 25Mbps download and 3Mbps upload. Appendix A, Section 4 defines an eligible project as one capable of offering wireline broadband service at or above 100/100Mbps upon completion.

7. If applicants submitted an application under CASF can they submit it under FFA too (fiber technology).

   Yes, entities may apply for both California Advanced Services Fund Infrastructure and Federal Funding Account grant funding. Only one award will be approved for each location.

8. The federal broadband definition is 25/3 plus a minimum latency criterion -- does the FFA criteria specify minimum latency?

   Appendix A of Decision D.22-04-055, Section 7d – Performance Criteria requires all projects to provide service at no higher than 100ms of latency.

9. Can you clarify if a single applicant can make multiple applications for different service areas/projects or whether it would need to submit once application listing all projects being applied for?

   The applicant will need to submit one project application for each project it proposes to serve.

10. If an area already has at least 25/3 by fixed wireless, is it eligible for funding?

    Unserved locations, displayed on the public map and applicant too, are presumed eligible. Appendix A, Section 4 – Definitions defines "unserved" as an area for which no *wireline* broadband provider reliably offers broadband service at speeds of 25Mbps download and 3Mbps upload.

11. Do we have to serve every home in the census block?

    If an applicant gives submits a shapefile (which may split census blocks) with their application, they will be expected to cover every address within that shapefile. Similarly, if a list of census blocks is included in an application rather than a shapefile, the applicant will be expected to serve every address within those census blocks.

12. Since the application says we must use contiguous CBGs, are we supposed to put in multiple applications?

    The applicant should submit a single application for an eligible project area. See Appendix A, section 9 of Decision D.22-04-055.

13. Do I have to use the State Middle Mile, or can I use privately owned Middle mile companies, like crown castle, and still qualify?

    Applicants must state their source of backhaul in their application. Use of the State Middle Mile is not required. Appendix A, Section 6 – Middle Mile Funding provides information on the requirements for using grant funds for middle mile infrastructure. See also section 3.j Leveraging Statewide Middle Mile for applicant scoring.

14. Could you clarify the areas that qualify, as far as speed, any area with a max of 25/3? How about areas that for example, already have Spectrum 400/35 service?

    Unserved areas, displayed on the public map and applicant tool, are presumed eligible. Appendix A, Section 4 – Definitions, defines "unserved" as an area for which no wireline broadband provider reliably offers broadband service at speeds of 25Mbps download and 3Mbps upload.