



# REBUILD RURAL

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## BROADBAND

Access to a fast, reliable broadband connection is a quality-of-life issue and critical for all Americans. Broadband access and speed should not depend on whether one lives in an urban, suburban or rural area.

From telemedicine to precision agriculture and teleworking to distance learning, it's time to invest in improving access to broadband in rural communities. We should no longer accept the urban/rural divide on broadband. It's time to Rebuild Rural.

Rural communities deserve the same robust, affordable and reliable broadband service available in urban areas. It would enable them to compete and participate in the national and global economy from a fair footing. It also would create jobs and grow local economies.

To achieve these goals, providers of all kinds – whether traditional telecom providers or others such as electric cooperatives – need access to effective incentives and tools to deploy and sustain broadband networks in certain rural areas.

For many network operators, and especially in rural areas, Universal Service Fund (USF) programs enable network deployment and promote the availability of reasonably comparable voice and broadband services in rural and urban America alike. The Federal Communications Commission's programs demonstrate successful examples of public-private partnerships in

the broadband industry.

While these programs don't fully fund broadband networks, they strengthen the business case for tens of billions of dollars of private investment in rural markets that would not otherwise justify loans or use of cash flows to build broadband infrastructure.

However, these programs require adequate funding to invest in technologies that can deliver the fastest speeds over the long-term life of the network. Federal resources should not support technologies that cannot reliably meet the needs of rural communities in the long-term. A transparent and accountable process would ensure recipients of federal broadband support both deliver the services promised and fulfill the commitment.

In addition to USF, the ReConnect initiative at the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other financing programs provide much-needed capital to increase rural development and broadband deployment. Given the capital required to sustain broadband networks, these programs need appropriate funding.

It is also time to modernize the process of applying for permits and access to build out networks, especially on federal lands. Standardizing the application, fees and approval policies and procedures across federal land-managing and property-managing agencies would facilitate reasonable sequencing and completion of environmental and historical reviews.

**REBUILD RURAL COALITION**

50 F Street, NW, Suite 900 · Washington, DC 20001 · 202.626.8710