

Meeting Notes: American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 Broadband Initiatives

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) held a joint meeting on March 10, 2009, on the broadband components of the ARRA. NTIA has \$4.7 billion to distribute, and RUS has \$2.5 billion. The meeting provided an overview of issues, with remarks from U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, Federal Communications Commission Acting Chairman Michael Copps, and Department of Commerce Senior Advisor and Acting Chief of Staff Rick Wade. All three agencies are soliciting input on how to structure their programs.

Information shared at the meeting included:

- NTIA appears to be leaning toward using a Notice of Funding Availability, instead of issuing formal regulations.
- NTIA will use three rounds of funding: 1) April through June 2009; 2) October through December 2009; and 3) April through June 2010.
- NTIA plans to distribute one-third of the funds during each round, but this may change.
- RUS is also going to use three rounds of funding: 1) the first within the next 90 days; 2) the second in three to four months after round one; and 3) the third in three to four months after round two.
- RUS also plans to distribute one-third of the funds during each round.
- It is unclear how much of the RUS funding will be grant funding and how much will be loans and loan guarantees.
- The ARRA states that NTIA may consult with states on various aspects of the program. If states are interested in providing input, they should contact NTIA to set up a consultation.
- There will be field workshops on the grant application process once guidelines are fully developed.
- The FCC has released [GN Docket No. 09-29](#) soliciting comments for the development of a rural broadband strategy. Interested parties should respond in accordance with the guidelines given in the docket.

In addition, the meeting included a discussion of the definitions of “unserved,” “underserved,” “rural,” and “broadband.” There were questions on many issues, including mapping, demand aggregation, potential workshops, coordination between agencies, policy issues at the FCC, “buy America” provisions, wireless spectrum, satellite participation in the program, innovation and sustainability, in-kind matching, measurement criteria, and the role of the states. Because of the complexity and number of unresolved issues, NTIA and RUS issued a [request for information and notice of public meetings](#) seeking public comments on the issues. The comments will be used to help the agencies structure their programs. The meetings are scheduled for March 16, 19, 23, and 24 in Washington, D.C.; for March 17 in Las Vegas; and for March 18 in Flagstaff, Arizona. Interested parties are invited to attend the meetings and to submit written comments for the record. Comments will be received through April 13, 2009.