

ConnectMT Website:  
<https://connectmt.mt.gov>

ConnectMT Points of Contact:

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Email:

Step 1: create an OKTA account  
at [okta.loginmt.com](https://okta.loginmt.com)

Step 2: goto **contact us tab** on  
connectMT website and send  
an email.



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# Welcome to the Connect MT website

One Stop Broadband Resources

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DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION

## Broadband - Connect MT and Communications Advisory Commission

The 2021 Legislature passed and Governor Gianforte signed SB297 creating the ConnectMT Act. The Department of Administration (DOA) is responsible for establishing and administering the broadband infrastructure deployment program. The Department will be responsible for receiving and reviewing responsive proposals and awarding contracts. Before awarding any contracts, contracts will be reviewed by the Communications Advisory Commission created by HB632 to oversee Montana's American Rescue Plan Act dollars. The Governor will then approve any proposal recommended for funding by the Department. The Communications Commission's meetings will be noticed on this website.

The DOA is currently building the state's broadband program. Working with the Commission and the Governor's Office, DOA will develop the open process for submission of proposals for funding required in SB297. Eligible providers may be awarded funding for projects in unserved, underserved or frontier areas. DOA will hire broadband deployment experts to staff the Broadband Task Force within the department.

SB 297 defines Frontier and Unserved areas, and HB632 defines Underserved areas:

"Frontier area" means an area where there is no or extremely limited terrestrial broadband service.

"Unserved area" means a project area where at least 10% of delivery points have no access to broadband service or have no access to services operating with a download speed of at least 25 megabits per second and upload speed of at least 10 megabits per second with low latency.

"Underserved area" means an area where at least 10% of the delivery points have no access to broadband service offered with a download speed range of at least 100 megabits per second and an upload speed of at least 20 megabits per second or less with low latency.

Those interested in potentially submitting proposals are encouraged to stay up to date and follow the Commission meetings. For more information, please review both SB297 and HB632 and check this website often for updates on program development and Commission meetings.

## Advisory Commission Members

- Senators Dan Saloman
- Jason Ellsworth
- Janet Ellis
- Representatives Mike Hopkins
- Ed Buttrey
- Katie Sullivan
- Director Misty Ann Giles
- Director Scott Osterman
- Director Scott Sales

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# Connect Montana Agenda

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Eligible Project Areas

ConnectMT Broadband Map

Eligible Project Costs

Online Application and Application Guide

Challenge Process

Review Process

Scoring Chart

Estimated Timeline through Award Decisions



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# Eligible Providers



Has authorization to do business in the state.

Has demonstrated that it has the **technical, financial, and managerial resources and Experience** to provide broadband service or other communications service to customers in the state.

May **only be a nongovernment entity with demonstrated experience in providing broadband service** or other communications services **to end-user residential or business customers in the state.**

**Shall commit to paying a minimum of 20% of the project costs** and may not provide a minimum matching amount from any funds derived from government grants or subsidies, except for federal funds designated for broadband deployment.

May not receive funds under any other federal or state government grant or loan program where government funding supports 100% of the proposed project's capital costs.

**Language from enrolled bill SB297 (Montana's 67<sup>th</sup> Legislature)**



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# Eligible Project Areas

## ConnectMT Broadband Map



"**Project area**" means a shapefile area in an unserved or underserved area where the proposed broadband service infrastructure would be built as described in a proposal for funding authorized under [sections 1 through 9].

"**Underserved area**" means an area where any of the delivery points have no access to broadband service offered with a download speed range of less than 100 megabits per second and an upload speed of 20 megabits per second or less with low latency.

"**Unserved area**" means a project area where at least 10% of delivery points have no access to broadband service or have no access to services operating with a download speed of at least 25 megabits per second and upload speed of at least 10 megabits per second with low latency.

"**Frontier area**" means an area where there is no or extremely limited terrestrial broadband service.

(To comply with the FCC guidelines, 80 percent of the download measurements should be equal to, or higher than, the required download speed. The same holds true for the uploads.)

"**Shapefile**" means a GIS file format for storing, depicting, and analyzing geospatial data depicting broadband coverage. It is made up of several component files, such as a main file (.shp), an index file (.shx), and a dBASE table (.dbf).



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# Eligible Project Areas (continued)

- (1) An eligible provider may be awarded funding under this section for a project in a project area that, as of the date the proposal is filed, constitutes an **unserved or underserved area** as defined in [section 2].
- (2) The **project area** to be served by a project funded under the program **must be described on a shapefile basis**.
- (3) The department may issue requests for proposals or accept proposals from eligible providers or solicit proposals for specific eligible projects as designated by the department, which would be submitted as proposals pursuant to [section 1 through 9].



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A request for proposal may be canceled or any proposal may be rejected in whole or in part when it is in the best interests of the state.

# Eligible Project Costs



"Project" means a proposed deployment of broadband service infrastructure.

"Broadband service" means any commercially mature, universally available, terrestrially deployed technology having the capacity to transmit data from or to the internet at minimum speeds downstream and upstream at low latency to accommodate adequate and commonly used internet-based applications for residential, commercial, or government use.



"Broadband service infrastructure" means the signal transmission facilities and associated network equipment proposed to be deployed in a project area used for the provision of broadband service to residential, business, and government customers.



"Low latency" means latency that is sufficiently low to allow multiple, simultaneous, real-time interactive applications.

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(FCC: sub 100 milliseconds (ms) round trip latency measurements, 95% or more of all the latency tests are "at or below 100 ms when measured between the customer premises and a remote server that is located at or reached by passing through an FCC-designated IXP" (Internet Exchange Point).)

Funds may not be used to support noncapital expenses, including general operations of an eligible provider, nonbroadband services, marketing, or advertising.

# Online Application and Application Guide

A responsive proposal must include the following information:

- (a) evidence demonstrating **the provider's technical, financial, and managerial resources and experience** to provide broadband service or other communications services to customers in the state, and the **ability to build, operate, and manage broadband service networks** serving business and residential customers in the state;
- (b) a description of the project area, **including shapefiles**, that the eligible provider proposes to build or serve and **specific mapping of currently served areas**, if any, **including actual speed verification**;
- (c) a description of the broadband service infrastructure that is proposed to be deployed, including **facilities, equipment, and network capabilities that include minimum speed thresholds**;
- (d) evidence, including a **certification from the proposal signatory, demonstrating the unserved or underserved nature of the project area** to the best of the provider's knowledge;



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# Online Application and Application Guide (continued)



A responsive proposal must include the following information:

- (e) **the number of households, businesses, and public institutions or entities** that would have new access to broadband service as a result of the proposal;
- (f) **the total cost of the proposed project and the timeframe** in which it will be completed;
- (g) **the amount of matching funds**, including funds from local or tribal governments, and except for federal funds designated for broadband deployment, the eligible provider proposes to contribute and a **certification that no portion of the provider's matching funds are derived from any federal or state grant program**; and
- (h) **a preliminary list of all government authorizations, permits, and other approvals** required in connection with the proposed deployment, and **an estimated timetable for the acquisition of the approvals and the completion of the proposed project**.



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The department shall treat any information that is not publicly available as confidential and subject to the trade secrets protections of state law upon an eligible provider's request for confidential treatment, except that shapefile information depicting broadband coverage must be publicly disclosed in sufficient detail to enable a challenging provider to identify the area covered by the provider.



# Challenge Process



Five business days following the closing of the submission window, the department shall make the proposals received available for review in a publicly available electronic file, subject to the confidentiality provisions of [section 6(3)].

A broadband service provider that has timely submitted a proposal may submit to the department, within 30 days of the release of the proposals received, a written challenge to the proposals.

The challenge must also include a new proposal that identifies improvements or increases in broadband speed, lower cost, area coverage, or completion date relative to the submitted proposals.



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# Challenge Process (continued)



This challenge **may** include:

- (a) information **irrefutably disputing a provider's certification that a proposed project area is an unserved or an underserved area** supported by the department's verified independent analysis and testing;
- (b) that no federal funding has been awarded to support the specific deployment proposed in the response pursuant to [section 5(1)]; and
- (c) **evidence of broadband service infrastructure meeting or exceeding minimum standards for competitive proposals** in the project area under challenge.
- (d) **public shapefile data that includes the project area** created under the FCC's rules for shapefiles must constitute evidence of broadband service infrastructure sufficient to show that a challenged project area is served completely beyond minimum standards.



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# Review Process

In reviewing proposals and any accompanying challenge, **the department shall conduct its own review of the proposed project areas to ensure that all awarded funds are used to deploy broadband service infrastructure to unserved or underserved areas.**

The department may require a provider or challenging provider to submit additional information consistent with [sections 1 through 9] to enable it to properly assess the proposal or challenge.

The department **may not award a contract to fund deployment of broadband service infrastructure for a project area that fails to meet any of the criteria provided in [sections 1 through 9]** for being an unserved or underserved area.

The department **may require a provider to modify a proposal** based on broadband access in the proposed area or other relevant factors.

**Final response to challenges will be provided within 15 days of receipt of challenge** for the purpose of expediting awarded projects or modifications accepted through the challenge process.

**The department shall create procedures including penalties associated with any failure to comply with the provisions of the awarded contract without reasonable cause.**



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# Scoring Chart

(120 points possible)

(Approved and Revised as of 12/22/21)



## 1. Matching Funds: (15 points maximum)

### a. % tribal / local government / school district contributed of total eligible project costs

	Points
1-9%	1
10-19%	2
20-29%	3
30% or more	5

### b. % broadband deployment allocation requested of total eligible project costs

	Points
30% or less	5
31% to 50%	2
51% to 79%	1
80% or more	0

### c. % applicant funds used for total eligible project costs

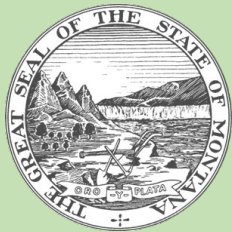
	Points
50% or more	5
40% to 49%	2
21% to 39%	1
20% or less	0



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# Scoring Chart (continued)



- 2. Passing Counts of locations: (20 points maximum)
  - a. # passed vs current served locations (households, businesses, farms, anchors)

	25%	50%	100%
Frontier	10	15	20
Unserved	10	12	15
Underserved	5	7	10

- 3. Speed Thresholds of project: (30 points maximum)
  - Upload /download speeds (mbps)
  - Points

- a. 100/20 up to 99/99 with scalability to 100/100

100% (of project)	20
75%	15
50%	10
25%	5

- b. 100/100 or higher

100%	30
75%	20
50%	10
25%	5



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# Scoring Chart (continued)



4. Use of Existing Infrastructure: (30 points maximum)
  - a. Use of existing rights of ways and easements: 5 points
  - b. Use of existing fiber optics middle mile infrastructure: 5 points
  - c. Colocation of existing & new facilities for public safety communication networks: 10 points
  - d. Use of new construction project funds for middle mile open access: 10 points
5. Timeframe to Complete Project: (5 points maximum)
  - a. up to 2 years: 5 points
  - b. over 2 years up to 3 years: 3 points
6. # of Montana Jobs Created or maintained relative to county(ies) of project area: (10 points maximum)
  - 1% or more increase in jobs created: 10 points



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# Scoring Chart (continued)



## 7. Equity and Affordability: (10 points maximum)

- a. Free public access offered at community center for broadband service for 3 years: 2 points
- b. Monthly subscriber fees included for low-income residents: 2 points
- c. 30% or more of residential locations at or below poverty level: 2 points
- d. 30% or more of residential locations receiving WIC: 1 point
- e. % of unemployment of area above national average: 2 points
- f. 20% of residential locations receiving free school meals: 1 point



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# Estimated Timeline through Award Decisions



2/7/22-4/6/22	Statewide Application window
4/8/22	Applications available for public review
4/11/22-5/11/22	30 day Challenge period
5/26/22	DOA responses to challenges
5/30/2022-6/3/22	Applicants open to modify applications that were successfully challenged
6/30/22	Receive ARPA funds from US Treasury
6/6/22 – 7/5/22	Review final applications
7/6/22	Obligate and announce awards



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