

Key Points
USDA Rural Development
(U. S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Programs)
Rural Utilities Service

Intro: The Rural Development State Office, located in Bozeman, administers three U. S. Department of Agriculture programs, supporting such essential public facilities and services as water and sewer systems, housing, health clinics, emergency service facilities and electric and telephone service. Rural Development promotes economic development by supporting loans to businesses through banks and community-managed lending pools, and provides technical assistance to cooperatives or community groups. The Rural Utilities Service (RUS), through its Community Programs (CP) branch helps rural communities to improve the quality of life through universal access to utilities which in turn will promote economic development.

➤ **Programs funded**

1. *Community Programs (CP) Water and Environmental Programs* provide grants and loan guarantees designed to aid public entities such as municipalities, counties, special-purpose districts, Indian tribes and nonprofit corporations in their efforts to develop water systems, wastewater disposal systems, solid waste disposal systems, and storm drainage systems in rural areas and towns with populations of 10,000 or less.
2. *Electric and Telecommunications Programs* provide direct and guaranteed loans to nonprofit and cooperative associations, public bodies and other utilities to finance the generation, bulk transmission and distribution of electric power as well as the enhancement of 911 emergency services, and installation digital switching equipment and fiber optic cable in order to provide rural residents with access to electric and telecommunications infrastructure.
3. *Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Program* provides direct loans or grants in order to provide rural residents with improved access to health care and educational services through the use of advanced telecommunications technologies.

➤ **Eligibility**

Generally, Rural Development services are for areas with less than 20,000 in population. Some are further restricted to communities with less than 10,000 or 5,000, with income limits as well. Each of the programs offered has specific eligibility requirements.

Eligibility details for each program are available on the respective Internet sites (below), or through discussion with program directors.

➤ **Application Process**

After exploring the appropriate web site pages (below), applicants should contact the Area Specialist to discuss potential grant or loan projects and learn detailed application requirements. Rural Development staff will be glad to discuss a community's needs and the services available from Rural Development and sister agencies within the USDA. Potential applicants in

Yellowstone County should contact the County Commissioners and Big Sky EDA to inform both of interest in County sponsorship of a proposal.

➤ **Deadlines**

Deadlines are variable for each program within the three main areas. Applicants should inquire about deadlines once the appropriate area and program are determined.

➤ **Resources for more information**

Rural Utilities Service Program Area Specialist, phone (406) 457-5100

The *Montana State Office* for USDA Rural Development is at P. O. Box 850, Bozeman, MT 59771. Phone number is (406) 585-2580.

The *Billings Area Office* is at Building A, 1629 Avenue D, Billings, MT 59102. Phone number is (406) 657-6297, Extension 4.

Internet address is <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/mt>

[Besides USDA, another Federal agency, the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Rural Housing and Economic Development, addresses some rural development issues. See their Internet site, the *Rural Housing and Economic Development Gateway*, at <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/economicdevelopment/programs/rhed/gateway/index.htm>.