General Information

What are the objectives and activities of the Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge?

The Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge (Rural Jobs Accelerator) is an interagency initiative designed to support bottom-up, regional economic development strategies by providing rural regions with resources to plan and implement coordinated, flexible, regionally-customized activities to support job creation. The objectives of the Rural Jobs Accelerator are to:

1. Accelerate distressed rural communities' ability to create jobs and strengthen their regional economies, and
2. Help rural communities identify and maximize local assets, and connect to regional opportunities and self-identified clusters that demonstrate high-growth potential.

Which agencies are providing funding?

Total proposed funding for the Rural Jobs Accelerator is approximately $15 million, subject to the availability of appropriations. The Economic Development Administration (EDA) (providing up to $10 million) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Housing Service (providing up to $4.3 million) are collectively referred to as the Primary Funding Agencies. The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) (providing up to $500,000) and the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) (providing up to $500,000) are collectively referred to as the Regional Funding Partners.

What is the difference between a Primary Funding Agency and a Regional Funding Partner?

The Primary Funding Agencies for this challenge are USDA and EDA. The Regional Funding Partners are ARC and DRA. Only applicants and projects located in the ARC and DRA service areas are eligible to receive funds from the applicable Regional Funding Partner.

How much funding has been appropriated to the Rural Jobs Accelerator?

Total proposed funding for the Rural Jobs Accelerator is approximately $15 million in direct Federal support from funding agencies. Subject to the availability of appropriations, EDA is making approximately $10 million available under its Economic Adjustment Assistance program, and USDA is making approximately $4.3 million available through the Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) program. Additionally, ARC is making approximately $500,000 available, and DRA is making approximately $500,000 available to clusters in their service regions. Another nine Federal agencies have committed to supporting Rural Jobs Accelerator recipients through technical assistance. This challenge is not funded with new Federal dollars, but instead leverages complementary existing Federal resources to assist communities in a more coordinated manner.

How much money will the winning clusters receive?

Awards are expected to range from approximately $715,000 to $965,000 per region through the funding agencies. EDA expects to make approximately 20 non-construction awards, with

individual grant awards of up to $500,000. USDA expects to make approximately 20 awards, with individual grant awards of up to $215,000. ARC expects to make approximately five awards to projects within their service region, with individual grant awards of up to $100,000. DRA expects to make approximately two awards to projects within their service region, with individual grant awards of up to $250,000.

When will grants be awarded?

Subject to the availability of funding, successful applicants should expect to receive grant awards within approximately 60 days from the application closing date and time set out in the FFO. See section VII.A of the FFO for award notification information.

What other agencies are supporting this initiative?

Recognizing that the U.S. Government has complementary resources that can support the development of vibrant regional economies in which clusters may thrive, Federal agencies and bureaus have committed to support Rural Jobs Accelerator recipients. Each applicant selected for funding will have the opportunity to receive assistance from a Federal Support Team made up of Federal staff of Funding Agencies and Support Agencies. The Federal Support Teams will help to ensure that successful applicants are aware of available Federal resources relevant to their project and region. The Federal Support Agencies for this challenge are the:

- Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology
- Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NIST MEP)
- Department of Commerce, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)
- Denali Commission
- Department of Education
- Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA)
- Department of Energy
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office of Sustainable
- Housing and Communities
- Small Business Administration (SBA)

Have the Federal Support Teams been designated?

No, the Federal Support Teams have not been designated yet.

What is TARIC?

Recognizing the importance of Regional Innovation Clusters (RICs) to the U.S. economy, the White House created the Taskforce for the Advancement of Regional Innovation Clusters (TARIC) to provide more streamlined support to RICs. TARIC agencies offer unique resources and expertise to help advance the long-term economic health of all regions of the U.S. TARIC recognizes that regions can benefit from coordinated, flexible, regionally-customized investments that link economic development, workforce development, and small business development with greater inclusion of historically underrepresented and excluded communities and stronger goals and metrics. Moreover, TARIC recognizes that globally competitive regions address housing, transportation, environmental protection, and other regional issues in alignment

with cluster goals. Winning the future requires that regions address competitiveness and sustainability in a comprehensive way.

What is the White House Rural Council?

The White House Rural Council was established by Executive Order to address challenges in Rural America, build on the Administration's rural economic strategy, and improve the implementation of that strategy. The Council coordinates the Administration's efforts in rural America by performing three core functions:

1. Streamlining and improving the effectiveness of Federal programs serving rural America;
2. Engaging stakeholders, including farmers, ranchers, and local citizens, on issues and solutions in rural communities; and
3. Promoting and coordinating private-sector partnerships.

The Council focuses on job creation and economic development by focusing on four key areas: opportunity, innovation, quality of life, and conservation.

Are total award proceeds provided at the time of the award decision or awarded over the 3 year project period?

Project funds will either be advanced or reimbursed as authorized by each Funding Agency, in accordance with successful completion of project tasks and compliance with award conditions, based on the award period authorized under the grant award.

Is this challenge funded with new Federal dollars?

This challenge leverages complementary existing Federal resources to assist communities in a more coordinated manner than through traditional approaches.

Is there a list of previous Jobs Accelerator grant recipients or project descriptions?

In 2011 three funding agencies and 13 support agencies initiated the first Jobs Accelerator to fund 20 awards to support regional industry clusters in rural and urban areas across the nation. Please go to the Rural Jobs Accelerator initiative website at http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/RuralJobsAccelerator.html and click on "2011 Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge" to see a description of the 20 funded projects under this previous competition.

Will there be additional rounds of the Jobs Accelerator grant program? If so, if we apply for the Rural Jobs Accelerator can we also apply for future rounds?

The Jobs Accelerator initiative is funded through existing agency appropriations. The Rural Jobs Accelerator is funded as a 2012 initiative, subject to appropriations.   Any new Jobs Accelerator competitions will be announced and available on www.grants.gov. Applicants are not prohibited from applying to future Jobs Accelerator opportunities or other EDA and USDA opportunities.

Can letters of support be submitted for our proposal?

Yes, letters of support can be submitted, but they are not required. If you would like to submit a letter they can be addressed as follows:
Attn: Terry D'Addio
U.S. Department of Agriculture
14th and Independence Avenue SW
Room 6015-S
Washington, DC 20250

Eligibility

Who is eligible to apply for funding?

For EDA:
    The following entities are eligible to receive funding from EDA:

- District Organizations (as defined in 13 C.F.R. § 300.3);
- Indian Tribes or a consortium of Indian Tribes;
- States, cities, or other political subdivisions of a State, including a special purpose
- unit of a State or local government engaged in economic or infrastructure
- development activities, or a consortium of political subdivisions;
- Institutions of higher education or a consortium of institutions of higher education; or
- Public or private non-profit organizations or associations acting in cooperation with
- officials of a political subdivision of a State.

In addition, to be eligible for EDA funding, a project must be located in a region that, on the date EDA received the application, contains one or more subdivisions that meet at least one of the following economic distress criteria:

- An unemployment rate that is, for the most recent 24-month period for which data are available, at least one percentage point greater than the national average unemployment rate;
- Per capita income that is, for the most recent period for which data are available,
- 80 percent or less of the national average per capita income; or
- Has a "Special Need," as determined by EDA (as defined in 13 C.F.R. § 300.3).

For USDA:
The following entities are eligible to receive funding from USDA:
Qualified private, nonprofit, including faith-based and community organizations, in accordance with 7 C.F.R. Part 16, and public (including Tribal) intermediary organizations apply as intermediaries.

The intermediaries work with recipients who must be private nonprofit, including faith-based organizations, community-based housing and development organizations, low-income rural communities, or Federally-recognized Tribes based on the RCDI definitions of these groups. The recipient then provides assistance to beneficiaries who are entities or individuals that receive benefits from assistance provided by the recipient.

The recipient and beneficiary, but not the intermediary, must be located in an eligible rural area. The physical location of the recipient's office that will be receiving the financial and technical assistance must be in an eligible rural area. If the recipient is a low-income community, the median household income of the area where the office is located must be at or below 80 percent of the State or national median household income, whichever is higher.

What is a cluster?

Clusters are networks of interconnected firms and supporting institutions that accelerate innovation, business formation and expansion, and job creation. They provide a globally proven approach for developing regional economic prosperity. Clusters may not conform to traditional notions of regional geographies, such as political jurisdictions or Federally defined metropolitan statistical areas. Clusters exist across the U.S. in urban, rural, suburban and multi-jurisdictional regions. Globally competitive industries may be anchored in a given region as the foundation of a cluster, but have networked assets (e.g., suppliers, investors, research partnerships) in other States or even abroad.

What are some examples of clusters?

Clusters can be found in central Iowa (wind energy), Wichita (aviation), Vermont (cheese making), and southeast Alaska (seafood). Clusters also span state lines. For example, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington benefit from a multi-State food-manufacturing cluster.

What kinds of clusters will be most competitive?

This competition recognizes that a diversity of clusters and associated industries play a vital role in helping the U.S. create an economy built to last. Competitive applications will provide strong evidence of supporting a high-growth cluster, clear descriptions of the region's needs and opportunities, the proposed project concept and scope of work, and clearly articulated projected impact and measurable outcomes overall and by Funding Agency. Through this effort, the Federal government aims to direct funds in a smarter, more targeted way that leverages the partnerships in communities and regions, expands success and spurs private investment. This approach empowers local leaders to maximize their regional strengths and assets and create job opportunities to make their region more competitive. It acknowledges that the jobs of the future will be generated in local communities, not through a top-down approach from Washington, DC.

What is a region?

In general, a region is area defined as such because of identifiable common features, assets and challenges. There is no geographic restriction to what constitutes a region. Applicants have the flexibility to suggest geographies based on demonstrated analysis of quantitative and/or qualitative information about where and how the cluster targeted for development operates.

What is considered rural or a rural area?

As defined by USDA, "Rural" and "Rural Area" are: any area other than (i) a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants; and (ii) the urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to such city or town. Projects must benefit rural communities, but applicants need not be physically located in a rural community. For USDA funding, the recipient and beneficiary, but not the intermediary, must be located in an eligible rural area. The physical location of the recipient's office that will be receiving the financial and technical assistance must be in an eligible rural area. For example, a county could have 500,000 residents and be entirely eligible if no individual city or town exceeds 50,000 or is in the urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to such city or town. If there is a city within the county with a population that exceeds 50,000, that city would not be able to participate in the in the Rural Innovation Accelerator program through the RCDI program. USDA has a website that is included in the FFO where you can enter an

address to determine whether the address is located in an eligible rural jurisdiction. That website is: http://eligibility.sc.egov.usda.gov/eligibility/welcomeAction.do?pageAction=RBSmenu& NavKev=property@13. Once you navigate to the website, click on the link that applies to the RCDI initiative.

Can the unemployment rate of a particular population be submitted to meet EDA distress criteria and USDA eligibility requirements?

EDA applicants must demonstrate that the EDA project is located in a geographically-defined region that meets at least one of EDA's economic distress criteria. To meet the EDA unemployment distress criteria the application must include an unemployment rate for the region where the proposed project will be located. The project must provide substantial direct benefit to the population within the region that is used to qualify for EDA funding. Please see section IV.A in the FFO for EDA's economic distress criteria for more information.   USDA selection factors do not include unemployment rates.

Can EDA funding be used to purchase equipment?

EDA funding can only be used to purchase equipment that is required and used specifically for the purposes of the project and to meet the objective of helping rural communities connect to regional opportunities and clusters. Under this competition, EDA funding *cannot* be used to purchase equipment that must be installed via construction activities or that will need a new air, water, sewer or other permits for installation and/or operation. Please see section IV. of the FFO for EDA eligibility and permitted activities. For additional information, please contact the applicable EDA Regional Office representative (listed in Appendix F of the FFO).

Are Benefit Corporations (b-corps) eligible to apply?

Please see section IV. of the FFO for EDA and USDA eligibility criteria. EDA cannot provide assistance directly or indirectly to individuals or to for-profit entities. For additional information about determining eligibility for EDA or USDA please contact the applicable EDA Regional Office or USDA State Office representative, respectively (listed in Appendix F of the FFO).

Regarding eligible activities for the Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge funding opportunity, can EDA or USDA funds be used to develop an EB-5 Regional Center application?

Developing an EB-5 Regional Center application is not a permitted activity. Please see section IV. of the FFO for EDA and USDA eligibility criteria and permitted activities.

What are permitted industries or activities? For example, does Open Ocean Aquaculture qualify under this grant?

The Funding Agencies have not specified particular industries or sectors that do or do not qualify to apply under this solicitation. Applicants are required to describe the economic ecosystem of their region and the specific cluster that will be targeted by the proposed project. Section VI.A of the FFO outlines the evaluation criteria upon which applications will be evaluated.

Are consortiums fundable, and who should be the 'lead' applicant?

An applying consortium must be: (1) formed in accordance with relevant State or local law and as an entity to which EDA can make a grant, generally as a non-profit organization working with a political subdivision of a State; or (2) comprised exclusively of eligible applicants. There are no requirements about which organization of a consortium is considered the lead – that may be decided by the consortium. Please see section IV.A of the FFO for information on applying as a consortium for EDA funds. Consortiums must meet the USDA RCDI eligibility requirements. Since State and local laws vary, you should contact your USDA State Office for specific guidance.

For questions about EDA eligibility please contact the applicable EDA Regional Office representative (listed in Appendix F of the FFO). EDA cannot provide assistance directly or indirectly to individuals or to for-profit entities.

Can EDA funding be used to purchase property and perform renovations?
Under this competition, EDA funding cannot be used for construction activities in any form, including purchasing real estate and renovations. Please see section IV. of the FFO for EDA eligibility and permitted activities.

To meet EDA distress criteria based on unemployment or per capita income, are applicants required to use American Community Survey (ACS) data?
For economic distress levels based on the unemployment rate or per capita income requirements, EDA will base its determination upon the most recent American Community Survey (ACS) published by the U.S. Census Bureau for either: the region impacted by the proposed project; the geographic area where substantial direct project-related benefits will occur; or the geographic area of poverty or high unemployment, as applicable. If a recent ACS is not available to determine project eligibility, EDA will base its decision on the most recent Federal data from other sources (e.g., data available from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureaus of Economic Analysis, Labor Statistics, and Indian Affairs). If no Federal data are available, an applicant must submit to EDA the most recent data available from the government of the State in which the region is located (i.e., conducted by or at the direction of the State government).

We work in a region that has 12 counties, some meet USDA's Median Household Income (MHI) requirements, some do not. Our center is in an area whose MHI is higher than 80%. Can the USDA funding only be used in regions with less than 80% MHI?
If the USDA Recipient is a low income rural community it must have an MHI at or below 80% of the State or National Median Household income, whichever is higher. If the Recipient is an eligible entity other than a low income rural community, the 80% MHI requirement does not apply.

Does the entire geographic area, or region, have to meet USDA's low-income requirement? No. For USDA eligibility only the low income rural communities identified as Recipients must meet the requirements.

Does EDA require *every* community or subdivision within the identified region to meet EDA distress criteria?

EDA's regulation requires that the region where the project is located contains one or more subdivisions that meet at least one of EDA's economic distress criteria. The project must provide substantial direct benefit to the population within the region that is used to qualify for EDA funding. Please see section IV.A in the FFO for EDA's economic distress criteria for more information.

Is there a website that demonstrates if an area meets EDA distress criteria? Does it provide U.S. comparison data?

Yes. In addition to utilizing Federal data from American Community Survey (www.acs.gov) and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (www.bls.gov), applicants may also utilize the Distress Criteria Statistical Report generated by StatsAmerica (http://www.statsamerica.org/distress/distress.html) to access the 24-month Average Unemployment Rate or Per Capita Income for the user-identified region and comparison data for the U.S. in order to determine EDA eligibility.

What is the difference between the cluster of focus and the project region? Do the cluster _and_ the region need to meet EDA distress criteria?

The project region is a geographic area. Clusters are networks of interconnected firms and supporting institutions that are partly or wholly located within the region. Applicants only need to demonstrate that the geographically-defined region where the EDA project is located meets at least one of EDA's economic distress criteria.

What is an Applicant Team? Do a group of eligible entities need to create a new incorporated organization to be an Applicant Team?

The Applicant Team is a team of organizations that is collectively eligible to receive funding from EDA and USDA. For example, the Applicant Team may consist of two organizations with one organization eligible to receive USDA funds and the other organization eligible to receive EDA funds. It is not necessary to create an incorporated organization for the Applicant Team to submit the application.

Do applicant teams receive preferential treatment?

No.

Is performance under a current or previous grant award taken into consideration?

A policy factor that the Policy Review and Recommendation Committee may consider is an applicant's performance under previous Federal financial assistance awards. Please see section VI.B in the FFO for information.

If our region is currently updating the CEDS, can we still apply using our existing CEDS?

Yes.

What happens if one agency (EDA or USDA) finds an applicant ineligible for their funds and the other agency doesn't?

To be considered for funding under the Rural Jobs Accelerator competition, the applicant or Applicant Team must meet each Agency's (both EDA and USDA) eligibility criteria, be technically complete, and include allowable activities. Applications that do not meet these criteria for both USDA and EDA will be deemed non-responsive and excluded from further consideration for funding under the Rural Jobs Accelerator competition.

Must the EDA scope of work propose activities that impact USDA-eligible rural communities (as defined in the FFO)?

The applicant must demonstrate how they will utilize EDA funds to link rural communities to markets, networks, industry clusters, and other regional opportunities and assets. Since EDA and USDA intend to fund the same 20 projects, it is required that the EDA scope of work impact all or some portion of the USDA-eligible rural communities. However, the EDA project may also have a different or a broader impact area beyond those USDA-eligible rural communities. Please see the FFO for a definition of USDA-eligible rural community.

Do scholarships fit under the EDA funding?

EDA cannot provide funding directly to individuals or support pass-through funding. For more information contact the applicable EDA Regional Office representative for your state listed in Appendix F of the FFO.

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Can a region span two or more States?

Yes. Applicants have the flexibility to define their region based on quantitative and qualitative information about where and how the cluster targeted for development operates.

Can an applicant propose a project that spans two or more EDA Regions? What CEDS or alternate strategy document should be submitted?

Yes, an applicant or Applicant Team can propose a project that spans two or more EDA Regions. Applications for EDA assistance must be consistent with the applicant-identified region's (or project area) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) or the alternate EDA-approved strategic planning document. The applicant should submit all (i.e., single or multiple) CEDS or alternate strategic planning documents associated with the proposed EDA project and funding request. For a list of States that fall within each of EDA's six Regions, go to http://eda.gov/contact.htm or see Appendix F of the FFO.

Can the EDA applicant and the applicant-defined region, or project area, be located in two different EDA Regions?

Yes. While an EDA applicant and the project area can be located in two distinct EDA Regions, project implementation and impacts must be completely realized within the proposed project area. For example, the EDA applicant may be located in Idaho (within

the EDA Seattle Regional Office) and the proposed project area may be in Wyoming (within the EDA Denver Regional Office). To meet evaluation criteria requirements, applicants should fully describe regional partnerships that are directly engaged in supporting the targeted cluster and proposed project (see section VI.A of the FFO). For a list of States that fall within each of EDA's six Regions, go to http://eda.gov/contact.htm or see Appendix F of the FFO.

Does the CEDS or alternate planning document submitted to EDA need to identify/reference the cluster of focus for the proposed project?
> While the FFO does not require that the cluster of focus be directly referenced in the CEDS or strategy document, applications for EDA assistance must be consistent with the plan or strategy. If EDA does not already have the applicable plan, the applicant must provide a copy of the plan or a functioning hyperlink to where the plan is found online. Please see page 27 of the FFO (section V.C) for more information or contact the appropriate EDA Regional Office representative listed in Appendix F of the FFO.

To meet EDA's distress criteria based on "Special Need", what degree of population loss is needed?
> For eligibility based on Special Need, the applicant must present appropriate and compelling economic, demographic, or other appropriate statistics to demonstrate the Special Need. For more information contact the applicable EDA Regional Office representative for your state listed in Appendix F of the FFO.

Will a proposal be considered less competitive if the region includes areas that do not meet EDA's economic distress criteria?
> No. EDA's regulation requires that the region where the project is located contains one or more subdivisions that meet at least one of EDA's economic distress criteria. If an application meets this and all other requirements, then the application will be reviewed based on the evaluation criteria outlined in section VI.A of the FFO.

Matching Share Requirements and Funding Amounts

Can EDA and/or USDA matching funds be provided by a private investor to contribute to a seed fund if formation of a seed fund is part of the work scope?
The Matching Share for EDA funding can be provided by a private entity. The EDA matching share must go towards an eligible and permitted project and be used to support the overall purpose of the EDA scope of work. Please see section VI.A of the FFO for detailed information on EDA eligible projects, and section VI.A FFO for information on EDA's matching share of requirement or contact the applicable EDA Regional Office representative (listed in Appendix F of the FFO).

If a State agency provides a cash match but the source is Federal, is that considered Federal match for USDA or EDA funds?
Generally, the matching share for EDA funding must be from non-federal sources (including those provided by another Federal government agency) unless the federal source's applicable governing statute authorizes such use. This may be determined by EDA's reasonable interpretation of such authority. See section VI.A of the FFO for information on EDA matching share requirement or contact the applicable EDA Regional Office representative (listed in Appendix F of the FFO).

Can loan dollars be used for EDA match to extend loans to startup entrepreneurs as part of an EDA scope of work?
No. The EDA matching share must go towards an eligible and permitted project and used to support the overall purpose of the EDA scope of work. Although EDA supports revolving loan funds under other programs, funding a revolving fund and pass-through grants are ineligible uses of EDA funds for purposes of the Rural Jobs Accelerator competition. Please see section VI.A of the FFO for detailed information on EDA eligible projects or contact the applicable EDA Regional Office representative (listed in Appendix F of the FFO).

What is the amount of the EDA match requirement? Can in-kind contributions make up the entire match for EDA?
Generally, the amount of EDA assistance may not exceed 50 percent of the total cost of the project. However, projects may receive up to 80 percent of total cost based on the relative needs of the region in which the project will be located, as determined by EDA. Please see *Table 1: Maximum Allowable Investment Rate for EDA Assistance* on page 14 of the FFO or 13 C.F.R. § 300.3.

The EDA Matching Share requirements may be met entirely through in-kind contributions, which must be eligible project costs, verifiable through clear documentation, and meet applicable Federal cost principles and uniform administrative requirements, as determined by EDA. Please see pages 13-14 in section IV.A of the FFO for detailed information on EDA's matching share requirements.

What is the matching share requirement for USDA?

Please see page 16-17 of section IV.B of the FFO for detailed information on USDA's matching share requirements.

What is the match requirement for ARC?
Please see page 52 of Appendix C of the FFO for detailed information on ARC's matching share requirements.

What is the match requirement for DRA?
Please see page 56 of Appendix C of the FFO for detailed information on DRA's matching share requirements.

Can USDA funds and EDA funds be used as match for each other?
No. The matching share for both the EDA and USDA funded projects must be distinct and meet each applicable Agency's matching requirements, including demonstrating available matching share and the full and free commitment of such funds to the project.

Can the same match for one agency (EDA) also be used as matching for another agency (USDA)?
The matching share for EDA must be available and committed to the EDA project as outlined by the scope of work and the matching share for USDA must be committed to the USDA project as outlined by the scope of work. Please see page 25 in section V.C of the FFO for matching fund verification requirements for EDA and USDA.

Can we apply for only the EDA funds and not USDA funds, or vice versa?
No. Under the Rural Jobs Accelerator competition, all applicants or Applicant Teams must apply for both EDA and USDA funding. Applicants who wish to apply for funding from only one Agency are recommended to contact their applicable EDA Regional Office representative or USDA State Office representative, outlined in Appendix F of the FFO, for more information.

Can an applicant or Applicant Team be awarded only the EDA funds and not the USDA funds, or vice versa?
No. EDA and USDA will make each of their individual awards to the same projects.

If the EDA maximum allowable investment for my region is 70% based on the table on page 14 of the FFO, then is the required amount of Matching Share the remaining 30% of the project cost?
This means that the maximum investment share provided by EDA would be 70% of the project costs, but it does not guarantee a 70% investment. The table of page 14 of the FFO sets forth the Maximum Allowable EDA Investment Rate for projects located in regions subject to certain levels in distress. The percent of EDA investment will be determined based on the application and award of grant funds.

Can the match for USDA funds be 50% or less?
It cannot be less. The USDA funds must be 50%, meaning a one-to-one match is required.

What are considered in-kind contributions to meet the Matching Share for EDA funds?

In-kind contributions consist of contributions of space, equipment, services, or assumptions of debt, as approved by EDA. Please see pages 13-14 in section IV.A of the FFO for detailed information on EDA's matching share requirements.

Does the project receive a preference for demonstrating a matching share beyond the required match?

Eligible matching share is a requirement for EDA and USDA funding, and applicants should demonstrate a value to government and the ability to implement the proposed project. Matching share helps demonstrate increased commitment to the project success and a sound approach. Matching funds must meet the requirements established by EDA and USDA, as outlined in the FFO in section IV.A, and section IV.B, respectively. Applications are evaluated as outlined in section VI. A of the FFO; applicants are strongly encouraged to review and ensure their application successfully meets all criteria to be most competitive.

What is the maximum amount available per project?

The combined grant total from the two Primary Funding Agencies, USDA and EDA, is expected to be a maximum of $715,000 per project. EDA expects to make 20 individual grant awards valued at up to $500,000 per award. USDA expects to make approximately 20 awards, with individual grant awards up to $215,000 per award. ARC expects to make individual grant awards up to $100,000 and DRA expects to make grant awards up to $250,000 for projects located in their region.

What is the minimum amount for which a grant can apply?

There is no minimum funding request amount for either USDA or EDA. Applicants are encouraged to review the budget requirements outlined in section V.C of the FFO and ensure that the requested budget supports specific activities for which funding will be requested.

Project Narrative and Evaluation Criteria

Will new and innovative programs be favored over established proven programs?
Winning projects will be determined by ability to meet requirements and objectives of the FFO and successfully address evaluation criteria. The evaluation criteria do not prioritize new programs over established ones.

Is there a place applicants can describe their HUD-designated Preferred Sustainability Status or alignment with the Sustainable Communities Partnership?
To meet evaluation criteria requirements, applicants should fully describe regional partnerships that are directly engaged in supporting the targeted cluster and proposed project, including Preferred Sustainability Status holders within the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, as outlined in section VI.A of the FFO.

To what degree is this funding targeted at supporting expansion of existing clusters, versus developing new clusters?
The Rural Jobs Accelerator provides resources to support the development of existing high-potential industry clusters through leveraging existing assets and strategic private and public investments. The evaluation criteria outlined in section VI.A of the FFO states that applicants are required to demonstrate existing assets, evidence of a concentration of firms, industry-specific infrastructure that supports the cluster, clear regional leadership and existing partnerships directly engaged in supporting the targeted cluster.

Where can I find out more information about what is considered a cluster, and examples of how to grow and support clusters?
Please see the Tools and Resources page of the Rural Jobs Accelerator website for more information
http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/SupportDocuments/RuralJobsAcceleratorApplicantTools-Resources.pdf

Can the description of the cluster include either employment data or establishment data?
Yes. Providing cluster data based on employment and/or establishments is appropriate.

Does a cluster have to be across contiguous counties?
Clusters are not required to be contiguous, but in such situations, applicants must state that the targeted cluster is non-contiguous and ensure that the project narrative clearly describes the cluster and addresses the Region and Cluster of Focus evaluation criterion, as outlined in section VI.A of the FFO. A situation in which a cluster may be non-contiguous is if business and institutional cluster "anchors" are located in one area, with networked assets such as research partnerships or supply chain linkages in other areas.

Does the targeted cluster have to be an export, or traded cluster?
Not necessarily. While 'traded clusters' made up of traded industries that sell products and services across economic areas are exceptionally productive and offer high wages and regional growth opportunities, they are often supported by 'local' clusters that serve only the local market. Local clusters usually represent a significant portion of regional employment. Likewise, resource-driven clusters may be significant for a particular region. Any cluster type can be supported under this award; applicants are encouraged to ensure that the project narrative clearly describes the cluster and addresses the Region and Cluster of Focus evaluation criterion, as outlined in section VI.A of the FFO. Please see the Tools and Resources page of the Rural Jobs Accelerator website for more information.
http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/SupportDocuments/RuralJobsAcceleratorApplicantTools-Resources.pdf

Are activities that support entrepreneurship important in cluster development and relevant for the Rural Jobs Accelerator competition?
There are clear correlations between cluster development and the existence of entrepreneurs and small firms. The Rural Jobs Accelerator seeks to accelerate the formation of new businesses, enhance the capacity of small businesses, and develop the skills and expertise of entrepreneurs to support growing clusters. Proposed projects must meet the objectives outlined in the FFO, support eligible activities, and align with the evaluation criteria described in section VI.A of the FFO. For more information about clusters please see the Tools and Resources page of the Rural Jobs Accelerator website
http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/SupportDocuments/RuralJobsAcceleratorApplicantTools-Resources.pdf

NEW

What is an example of an 'asset map'?
Asset mapping can be an integral part of regional economic development. An asset map inventories a region's key resources such as businesses, universities, workforce development institutions, economic development organizations, and other organizations or groups that are part of the economic ecosystem. The visual layout of regional assets uncovers opportunities for collaboration and communication. An asset map can be conducted for a particular sector, cluster, or for a geographic area.

The Know Your Region curriculum provides information about asset mapping, including a library of information with examples (see http://www.knowyourregion.org/). For example, Know Your Region includes a report on the EDA-funded Kansas Opportunity Innovation Network (KOIN). KOIN is mapping regional assets along with business profiles in order to connect companies with others that can fulfill their needs or use their services. The dynamic set of maps visually illustrates the local business dynamic, identifies linkages, gaps and opportunities.

Application Submission

An application team must apply for both EDA and USDA funding available under this FFO. If the team does not apply for both EDA and USDA funding, the application will be considered non-responsive and will not be reviewed. Applicants are not required to apply for ARC and DRA funds; although they are encouraged to do so if their project is located in either the ARC or DRA service area.

Can an applicant be selected for funding from one Primary Funding Agency (i.e. EDA), but not the other (USDA)?
The Primary Funding Agencies (USDA and EDA) intend to make their individual awards to the applicant teams representing approximately 20 regions selected under this competition; however, ARC and DRA may only fund projects within their respective regions.

Can applicants propose activities to support more than one cluster?
The FFO does not preclude activities that support more than one cluster. Applicants are required to propose one project with two distinct activities that support a minimum of one cluster. See section V.C of the FFO for a detailed description of the information that must be included in an application.

Can the project area be a subset of the region outlined in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) or alternative EDA approved strategic planning document?
Applicants have the flexibility to suggest geographies based on demonstrated analysis of quantitative and/or qualitative information about where and how the cluster targeted for development operates.

How do I get more information about the challenge?
Additional information about the challenge can be found at:
> http:// www.rurdev.usda.gov/RuralJobsAccelerator

What if I have additional questions about the process?
You can email any additional questions to the following email address: ruraljobsaccelerator@wdc.usda.gov, or call the appropriate EDA Regional Office contact or USDA Rural Development State Office contact listed in Appendix F of the FFO.

The application package on the grants.gov website only includes application forms for EDA, where do I find application forms for USDA?
Application forms for USDA can be found under the "Full Announcement" tab for the grants.gov Rural Jobs Accelerator. These forms must be uploaded as "attachments" to the application after they are completed.

If our applicant team consists of two separate organizations, who must submit the application package on grants.gov?

The Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) for the organization that is applying for EDA funds must submit the application package on grants.gov. See section V.D of the FFO for grants.gov submission information.

How do I obtain application forms for ARC?

Application forms for ARC can be found on www.arc.gov/accelerate. Application forms must be submitted directly to ARC by emailing them to accelerate@arc.gov. See Appendix C of the FFO for more details.

How do I obtain application forms for DRA?

Application forms and submission information for DRA can be found on www.dra.gov. Application forms must be submitted directly to DRA. See Appendix D of the FFO for more details.

Can applicants, regions or clusters submit more than one application?

The FFO does not restrict the number of distinct project proposals one organization/applicant, region or cluster can submit; however, the Funding Agencies request that applicants kindly refrain from submitting multiple copies of the same application package. If multiple copies of an application are received, the Funding Agencies will only review the last application that was received.

Can an organization be part of more than one application team responding to the FFO?

The FFO does not restrict the number of application teams one organization can be a member of or affiliated with.

Does the budget narrative in the Project Description contain the budgets for all funding agencies?

Each budget narrative should be specific to the funding source. If you are applying for three funding sources, you will have three separate budget narratives, one for each funding source, so that each funding agency can monitor their grant. All three budget narratives will be shared with each funding agency. See also section V.C.2. of the FFO.

Can our organization submit this application if we have submitted a proposal for another EDA, USDA, ARC or DRA grant, or plan to in the future?

Yes, the Rural Jobs Accelerator FFO does not preclude applicants from applying for another grant opportunity.

Do applicants have to submit or have an approved Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to apply for EDA funds?

While a planning document is required to apply for EDA funds, if an approved CEDS is not available, applicants have the option of submitting an alternative strategic planning document that closely aligns with the requirements for a CEDS. The planning document does not need to be attached to the application if it has been previously submitted to EDA or is available on the internet. For more information on the CEDS requirement, see section V.C of the FFO.

Can organizations charge indirect costs to the grants?
Yes, where the applicant satisfies the criteria described in the FFO and forms. Please see section IV.A of the FFO and relevant forms for information about EDA requirements. Please see section IV.B of the FFO for USDA funding restrictions for this grant. Please see section Appendix C of the FFO and relevant forms for detailed information about ARC's requirements and Appendix D of the FFO and relevant forms for detailed information about DRA's requirements.

Can you provide more information about the requirements of an Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) for EDA? Is this a special designation and must we submit our application through one of these entities?
The AOR is a person at your organization who has the authority to submit the grant application on behalf of your organization. Grants.gov has a registration process for your organization to designate the person (or people) who may submit applications on your organization's behalf. The grants.gov registration process can be completed at http://www07.grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp. Applicants submitting an application electronically through grants.gov must register at least one AOR. Please see section V.D.1 of the FFO for AOR information and details. If submitting through grants.gov, the Rural Jobs Accelerator Applicant Team must submit its application package using the registered AOR for the organization applying for EDA funds.   If the Applicant Team is not submitting through grants.gov then AOR registration at grants.gov is not required; however, all forms submitted in your application must be signed by someone at your organization who is legally authorized to make commitments on behalf of your organization.

Review Process

What is the timeline for reviewing applications and making awards?
Successful applicants should expect to receive grant awards within approximately 60 days from the application closing date outlined in the FFO.

Who is on the merit review panel? Do EDA and USDA apply the evaluation criteria and rank applications together?
Merit Review Panels will be comprised of EDA Regional Office staff and USDA staff who will evaluate applications deemed responsive and eligible, and rank the applications by consensus using criteria outlined in the FFO. Merit Review Panels may also include Regional Funding Partners and experts from Support Agencies. See section VI.B of the FFO for the review process.