



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, DC 20410-0050

Policy Guidance
Status: Current
Subject: Policy Guidance for “Certification of Consistency with Rural Partners Network Community Network Goals and Implementation Form”
Applicability: Rural Partners Network Community Network “Host Entities” and Partners Organizations
Date: February 28, 2024

Dear Rural Partners Network Community Network “Host Entities”:

The Rural Partners Network (RPN) Community Network designation may provide your organization as the “Host Entity” access to preference points or priority/special consideration for selected competitive Federal grant programs, technical assistance, and other capacity-building opportunities that will strengthen your rural community and economic development efforts. It can also provide your RPN Community Network partner organizations with access to preference points or priority/special consideration for select competitive Federal grant programs.

For specified competitive Federal grant programs, your RPN Community Network partner organizations submitting requests for activities/projects within your RPN Community Network communities will have the opportunity to qualify for preference points or priority/special consideration because of you holding this status as the “Host Entity”.

The relevant applicant’s proposed activities/projects for the Federal grant application are as follows:

- The proposed activities/projects will occur solely within the boundaries of the Rural Partners Network Community Network(s).
- The proposed activities/projects will occur within the boundaries of the Rural Partners Network Community Network(s) and other communities.
- The proposed activities/projects will occur outside the boundaries of the Rural Partners Network Community Network(s), but substantial and direct benefits will accrue within the Rural Partners Network(s).

As a RPN Community Network designee (“Host Entity”), your primary contact within your organization as the Host Entity (not the Federal staff stationed in your community) will be responsible for certifying competitive Federal grant applicants for RPN Community Network preference points or priority/special consideration.

Please note that activities/projects which substantially and directly benefit RPN Community Network residents, but which are not proposed within the boundaries of the RPN Community Network may be considered. Federal agencies will make clear the acceptable definition of substantially and directly beneficial in the program’s award and funding announcement.

What This Means for You as the Host Entity of Your Rural Partners Network Community Network

The RPN Community Network designation enables the Federal government to partner with local leaders who are addressing multiple rural community and economic development challenges in a collaborative way and have demonstrated a commitment to results. Your role, as Host Entity for your RPN Community Network, in certifying qualifying grant activities/projects for RPN Community Network preference points or priority/special consideration virtually guarantees that numerous entities will approach you seeking endorsement of their activities/projects by asking you to sign the Certification Form.

We recognize that this will mean some staff time commitments for you in reviewing and processing requests for these forms, but we believe the potential benefits are significant. The benefits include ensuring applications are supportive of your local priorities and alignment of potential applications from multiple organizations. As the Host Entity for your RPN Community Network, you will be responsible for establishing your criteria and process for determining if you will support the applicant's request for the Certification.

HUD has tried to make the process as streamlined as possible. We stand ready to support you as you undertake this responsibility, and we trust that you will exercise prudent judgment in determining whether the activities/project have the potential to advance the strategies in your rural community and help further the goals of the RPN initiative.

The Process for You to Certify a Federal Grant application for Rural Partners Network Community Network Preference Points or Priority/Special Consideration is as Follows:

1. Partner or non-partner organizations to your RPN Community Network who wish to submit the "Certification of Consistency with Rural Partners Network Community Network Goals and Implementation" form (HUD 425) for preference points or priority/special consideration with their Federal grant are required to contact your organization to review the request, make the determination to support the request by signing the form and providing the signed form back to the applicant to submit or make the determination not to support the request. Thus, you will need to develop your process for these requests for both your partner organizations and non-partner organizations.
2. When an organization reaches out to request you to review their grant proposal to determine whether to certify the preference points or priority/special consideration you should ensure that the following criteria are met:
 - a. The applicant is engaged in activities, that in consultation with the RPN Community Network Host Entity, further the purposes of the initiative; and
 - b. The applicant's proposed activities/project either directly reflect the goals of the RPN Community Network or will result in the delivery of services or a project that are consistent with the goals of RPN Community Network; and
 - c. The applicant is committed to maintaining an ongoing relationship with the RPN Community Network Host Entity and its activities. If awarded the Federal grant the applicant should report on the grant accomplishments, milestones, and outcomes. The applicant should continue to collaborate with the RPN Community Network Host Entity and partner organizations in securing additional resources and partnerships, as necessary.

3. **If you determine that the applicant organization’s proposed activities/ project meets these criteria and any other criteria you may have established, you will be responsible for providing the applicant with the information to fill in the form and approve the contents of the form by one of these methods:**
 - a. If you are the applicant, you can fill in the form online, provide the RPN Community Network “Authorized Official” digital signature (the person from your organization authorized to sign the form), and submit the form with your Grants.gov application. Filling in the form online will allow the federal government to collect and analyze this data. In cases where you are unable to get the RPN Community Network Authorized Official’s digital signature on the form, the form provides alternative instructions.
 - b. If you are not the applicant, the applicant will be required to work with the RPN Host Entity to fill in the form and provide a copy of the form with the content for review and approval. In order to provide your approval, prepare a letter of approval of the form along with a copy of the filled-in form and share the digital file with the applicant. The applicant will then upload the letter and copy of the form with the online form to illustrate your approval.
 - c. The form is available on the HUD website and is available as an official [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) form.
4. **The applicant is responsible for including and submitting the form with their applications. For HUD grants, HUD staff will review all certification forms and confirm the qualifying activities/projects. While the certification is the driving document in this process, HUD retains the right to do additional diligence to confirm that the points are merited and to determine whether to award the preference points or priority/special consideration.**
5. **If your organization wants to apply for a Federal grant where RPN Community Network preference points or priority/special consideration are offered, your designated Host Entity primary contact may self-certify by filling in the form on behalf of the RPN Community Network Host Entity. The individual completing and signing the certification must be authorized to make commitments on behalf of and legally bind the Host Entity, otherwise, the certification may not be considered valid by the Federal agency making the selection for the awards.**

Rural Partners Network Community Network preference points or priority/special consideration checklist

We recommend that RPN Community Network Host Entity considering requests for certification for RPN Community Network preference points or priority/special consideration review at least a detailed summary of the application, including a summary of the proposed activities/project, the location of the activities/project, and the amount of funding that will be spent for the proposed activities/project specifically located within your RPN Community Network boundaries and/or benefiting your community. When developing your process, you may want to request a short description from the applicant explaining why the proposed project aligns with the goals or priorities, as established, of your RPN Community Network. At a minimum, you should consider the following questions when deciding whether to certify an application for preference points or priority/special consideration:

1. Does the proposed activities/project align with the goals of the RPN initiative? For your reference, they can be found at [Rural.gov](https://www.rural.gov).
2. Does the proposed activities/project align with and further your community’s Rural Partners Network Community Network need, strategies, and goals?
3. Is the applicant committed to maintaining an ongoing relationship with your Rural Partners Network Community Network?