Everyone acknowledges the difficulty in financing the middle-mile and last-mile broadband infrastructure. Federal and state funds are available to incentivize the private sector and encourage partnerships.

**FEDERAL**

**USDA Rural Development’s ReConnect Loan and Grant Program** will accept the next, second round of applications starting January 31, 2020 thru March 16, 2020. Congress authorized up to $200 million for grants, up to $200 million for 50/50 grant/loan combinations, and up to $200 million for low-interest loans. Program information, eligibility requirements, and forms and resources are available on USDA’s website, [www.usda.gov/reconnect](http://www.usda.gov/reconnect). Funds can cover costs of construction, improvement, or acquisition of facilities and equipment needed to provide broadband service in eligible rural areas.

**Key Resources:** USDA NC Rural Development State Director Robert Hosford, NC Electric Cooperatives, NC Telephone Cooperatives

**NC federal awards in First Round:**
1. $7.9 million to Columbus County and Atlantic Telephone Membership Corporation to bring fiber-optic broadband into unserved and underserved, 4,057 households, 18 businesses, 22 farms, 15 educational facilities, 3 health care facilities, and 10 critical community facilities spread over approximately 150 square miles.
2. $23.7 million to Star Telephone Membership Corporation of Clinton, NC to deploy service to 8,749 homes, 19 businesses, 10 educational facilities, and 3 critical community facilities. 3. More applications from NC are pending review.

**STATE**

**North Carolina Department of Information Technology Grant Program:** the second round of the GREAT grants by the State Broadband Office opened December 16, 2019 and the application deadline is March 16, 2020. These funds are provided to private providers of broadband services to facilitate the deployment of broadband service in economically distressed Tier One counties, [www.ncbroadband.gov/greatgrant](http://www.ncbroadband.gov/greatgrant).