

Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) FAQs

What is BEAD?

BEAD is the federal program administered by the National Telecommunications and Infrastructure Administration (NTIA) intended to address issues of Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD). It is one of three programs put together by the NTIA under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, signed into law on November 15, 2021. The other two programs are the Digital Equity program (see FAQ here), and the Middle Mile program.

If it is a federal program, why should Nebraskans care?

The administration of the BEAD program is the responsibility of each individual state. In Nebraska, the Public Service Commission was delegated the responsibility by Governor Ricketts to administer the program. One of the main goals of the program is to reach every unserved household in the state with broadband service.

What will the program do?

The BEAD program provides federal funding for grants for broadband planning, deployment, mapping, equity, and adoption activities.

How much money will Nebraska be receiving as a part of this program?

Each state will receive at least \$100 million, and additional amounts will be made available depending on the number of unserved locations in high-cost areas as a proportion of the total high-cost locations in the nation. This determination will be made based on Federal Communications Commission (FCC) maps currently in development.

How will the FCC map be developed?

The FCC map relies on two key sources of information:

1. Location Fabric – a common dataset of all locations (or structures) in the U.S. (or Nebraska) where fixed broadband internet access service can be installed
2. Carrier reported availability – Providers of broadband service are required to report what service they have available to the locations in the fabric that they are able to serve.

Using these two sources of information, the FCC expects to produce a map that shows broadband availability on a location-by-location basis. Prior maps produced by the FCC, based on the Form 477 data collection process, showed broadband availability on a census block by census block basis, leading to errors in blocks where only some of the locations in that block were served by the reporting carrier.

When will the FCC maps be completed?

The FCC collected information from carriers during the summer of 2022 and is expected to release its first version of the map on November 18, 2022. The FCC will accept challenges to that data and will release a second version sometime in 2023. The NTIA is expected to determine the amounts available to states after that second release.

What are the first steps in utilizing the money Nebraska will be receiving?

The first steps in instituting the program have already been completed:

1. Letter of Intent – This lets the NTIA know that Nebraska is interested in participating in the program. The Governor submitted this letter in July 2022.
2. Request for Initial Planning Funds – The NTIA made available to all participating entities initial funding in the amount of \$5 million to kick off planning activities. Nebraska submitted that request prior to the August 15, 2022, deadline. Approval of Initial Planning Funds is expected in November 2022.

What are the next steps in utilizing the money Nebraska will be receiving?

Nebraska will be primarily working on the following efforts in 2022 and 2023:

1. Completion of a Five-Year Action Plan – Once Nebraska receives its Initial Planning Funds, Nebraska is required to complete a Five-Year Action Plan within 270 days.
2. Engagement of a contractor to perform mapping activities for Nebraska. Other contractors may be engaged to perform additional functions as needed.
3. Onboarding new staff dedicated to performing the functions of the federal broadband programs (BEAD and Capital Projects).
4. Outreach Activities – A requirement of the program is to engage key stakeholders, including not only parties interested in providing broadband service, but also users that would benefit from improved broadband service
5. Initial Proposal – Once funding amounts have been announced, expected to be in mid-2023, the state is responsible for submitting an Initial Proposal within 180 days.

What is a Five-Year Action plan?

This plan establishes the state's broadband goals and priorities and serves as a comprehensive needs assessment that will inform the state's Initial Proposal.

What will the mapping activities consist of for Nebraska?

Nebraska will be producing a state broadband map that shows broadband availability statewide and identifies locations that are unserved and underserved. It will also show existing projects that are in place to address broadband availability issues. Users may also be able to complete a speed test to measure their own connection.

What is the “Initial Proposal” and what does it consist of?

Once funding amounts have been announced, expected to be in mid-2023, the state is responsible for submitting an Initial Proposal to the NTIA within 180 days. The Initial Proposal is the “first draft” of the state's

Final Proposal for grant funding and explains how the state intends to ensure that every resident has access to a reliable, affordable, high-speed broadband connection, utilizing all funding available to be brought to bear to accomplish this goal, including but not limited to BEAD Program Funds. The Initial Proposal will describe the competitive process Nebraska will use to decide who will construct broadband projects. This proposal will be made available for public comment prior to being submitted to NTIA.

I keep hearing about Capital Projects Funds from the US Department of the Treasury – what is that? How is it related to BEAD?

Capital Projects Funds is an additional funding source made available to states through the U.S. Department of the Treasury as part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA). Nebraska was allocated \$128 million dollars in Capital Projects Funding, and the Nebraska Legislature determined that at least \$80 million of that will be used for broadband deployment. The PSC will be utilizing that funding for similar purposes as BEAD – i.e. – to get broadband service out to areas that lack it today.

What is the timeline for Capital Projects Funds?

The PSC expects to open a grant cycle for accepting applications and awarding grants through the Capital Projects Funds in early 2023.

What is different about Capital Projects Funds?

Capital Projects Funds had some constraints placed on where and how they can be used for broadband. Of the \$80 + million available for broadband deployment, at least \$40 million has to be awarded in U.S. Congressional District 1, and at least \$40 million has to be awarded to projects that serve cities of the second class and villages in U.S. Congressional District 3. You can view a map of the U.S. Congressional Districts here: (https://nebraskalegislature.gov/about/congress_map.php).

What are the timelines for all of these programs?

BEAD:

1. Release of Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) – May 2022
2. Letter of Intent Submission – July 2022 (Completed)
3. Request for Initial Planning Funds – Due August 15, 2022 (Completed)
4. Release of 1st Version of the FCC Map – Mid/Late November 2022
5. Approval of Initial Planning Funds Request – Expected early to mid-November
6. Completion of 5-Year Plan – Due 270 days (9 months) after receipt of Initial Planning Funds
7. Notice of Available Amounts – Issued after completion of Maps – Expected approximately Spring/Summer, 2023
8. Completion of Initial Proposal – Due 180 days after Notice of Available Amounts
9. Release of 20% of Total Allocation – After approval of Initial Proposal
10. Challenge Process Commences – After approval of Initial Proposal
11. Subgrantee Selection Process – State determines how subgrantees will be selected – (This process is largely in place already – Nebraska Broadband Bridge Program)
12. Final Proposal – Must be submitted no later than 12 months after the date upon which the Initial Proposal is approved.

Capital Projects:

1. Deadline to Request Funding – December 27, 2021 (Completed)
2. Approval of Nebraska Application – Received August 30, 2022
3. Grant Cycle to distribute funds – Expected early 2023
4. An additional cycle to distribute Capital Projects funds may be conducted in 2024 if necessary.

Has there been any decisions made on how the money will get spent for these programs?

While there is still a lot of planning that goes into these programs and how they will be structured specifically for Nebraska, it is expected that most of the dollars made available to Nebraska will channel through the Nebraska Broadband Bridge Program (NBBP), which is a competitive grant program administered by the Public Service Commission (PSC). The PSC is working through the second year of NBBP grant cycles now, with decisions on grants for the 2022 cycle expected in December 2022. More information on the NBBP can be found here (<https://broadband.nebraska.gov/BroadbandBridgeProgram>) and on the PSC website (<https://psc.nebraska.gov>)

What types of service does the NBBP support?

The speed requirement for awardees of grants under the NBBP is 100 Megabits per second (Mbps) for both download and upload speeds. To support those speeds, most builds will need to be fiber to the premise (FTTP).

How can I get involved?

The PSC will be conducting webinars and listening sessions during the development of the Five-Year Action plan. If you would like to participate, all meeting information will be posted on the Nebraska Broadband website - (<https://broadband.nebraska.gov>)

Who do I contact if I have questions?

For BEAD or Capital Projects-related questions, contact Cullen Robbins or Carrie Gans at the PSC

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