Better Broadband for More Folks: Everything's Bigger in Texas!

Presentation at 2024 TFI Technology Conference

Introduction

- My journey from the classroom to the Texas Broadband Development Office.
  - Passionate public-school educator for 22 years
  - Experienced the digital divide firsthand
  - Teaching during COVID
  - Closing the digital divide for all students and their families

Digital Divide

- American Community Survey: Approx. 3 million Texas households do not have access to broadband.
- Barriers:
  - Lack of infrastructure
  - Digital literacy
  - Affordability and access to devices

House Bill 5 (87R)

- Created the Broadband Development Office (BDO) at the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts.
- Required the BDO to:
  - Create a state broadband plan (June 2022).
  - Create a broadband development map (January 2023).
  - Implement a broadband development program to administer broadband expansion grants.
  - Serve as an information clearinghouse for state & federal funding opportunities in Texas.
- Created the BDO Board of Advisors
  - Chaired by the Comptroller with seven appointed members by the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, & Speaker

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

- Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund (CPF)
- Administered by U.S. Department of the Treasury
- Texas' Allocation: $500.5 Million
- Purpose: helping to ensure that all communities have access to the high-quality modern infrastructure, including broadband, needed to access critical services.
- Funds must be expended by Dec. 2026.

CPF Funding

Program	Description	Allocation Request		
		Project Costs	**Admin. Costs**	**Total Costs**
Infrastructure and Facility Access Improvement Access Improvement Grant Program	Texas State Library and Archives Commission aims to modernize select libraries in the state	$7,799,162	$1,611,177	$9,410,339
Texas Rural Hospital Broadband Program	Texas Department of Agriculture modernizes rural hospitals in the state	$22,845,000	$1,000,000	$23,845,000
El Paso District Safety Rest Area Broadband Infrastructure Project	Texas Department of Transportation will provide Wi-Fi connection at rest stops outside of El Paso.	$6,000,000	$0	$6,000,000
Texas Broadband Pole Replacement Program	BDO - reimbursing eligible costs for replacing telephone poles.	$75,000,000	$0	$75,000,000
Bringing Online Opportunities to Texas	BDO - Texas Last Mile Connectivity Program	$363,807,243	$22,412,581	$386,219,824
	Total:	$475,451,405	$25,023,758	$500,475,163

Bringing Online Opportunities to Texas (BOOT) Program

- ARPA/CPF funded last mile infrastructure grant program that connects businesses and households to the internet.
- Eligible applicants include political subdivisions, broadband service providers, and partnerships between the two.
- Projects must:
  - Bring at least 100/20 Mbps to locations.
  - Participate in Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).
    - Program possibly running out of funding April 2024.
  - Provide a universally available low-cost option.

BOOT Program Next Steps

- March 6 – BOOT Notice of Funding Availability published
- April 3 through May 5 – Applications accepted
- July 21 through Aug. 21 – Application Challenge Period
- Next Steps:
  - Evaluations and awards
  - BOOT Round 2

Broadband Infrastructure Fund (BIF)

Proposition 8 was passed by voters on Nov. 7, 2023.

- The constitutional amendment created the BIF in the Texas Constitution.
- The fund will be financed through money allocated by the state legislature, gifts, grants and investment earnings.
- The purpose of the fund is to enhance the availability and usage of broadband and telecommunications services.
- The fund takes effect on Jan. 1, 2024, and expires on Sept. 1, 2035.
- House Bill (HB) 9 appropriates $1.5 billion to BIF.

Broadband Infrastructure Fund (BIF)

The Next Generation 9-1-1 Service Fund will receive support from the BIF.

- HB 9 provides for a one-time transfer of $155,200,000.
- Funds will be transferred no later than September 2024.
- Once transferred, the funds will be managed by the Commission on State Emergency Communications.

Broadband Infrastructure Fund (BIF)

The BIF also supports the Texas Pole Replacement Program.

- Established by HB 1505 in 2021.
- $75 million in funds were committed with the passage of HB 9
- Funds must be made available to the program by Sept. 15, 2024.

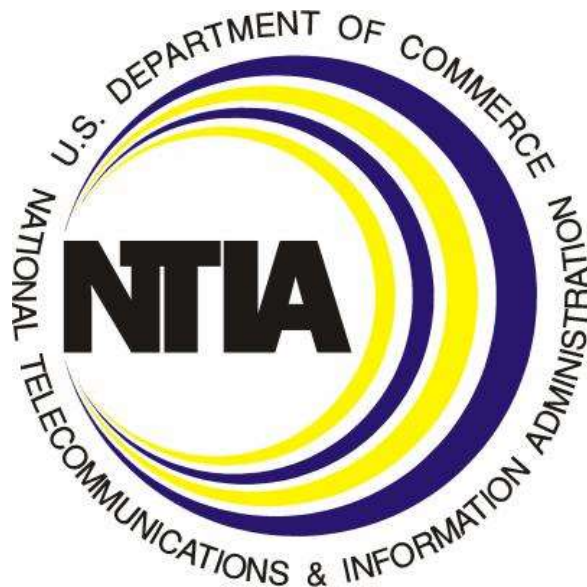# Broadband Infrastructure Fund (BIF)

Pole Replacement Program

- Aims to speed up rural broadband deployment by reimbursing a portion of eligible pole replacement costs.
- Reimbursements per pole range from 50% of eligible costs to $5k (whichever is less).
- Eligible participants are pole owners or qualifying broadband service providers who have incurred eligible pole replacement costs.
- The BDO is currently researching and fact-finding to develop the program.
- More details provided in early 2024.

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) Funding

- Administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).
  - Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program.
    - Help close the availability gap.
    - Texas's Allocation: $3.3 billion.
    - Fiber Preference.
  - Digital Equity Act.
    - Help close the digital opportunity gap
    - Expected Allocation: $130 million.

IIJA Planning Activities and Next Steps

- Public engagement.
- Working Groups.
- Summer 2023 – BDO public meeting tour wrapped up.
- Aug. 31, 2023 – public surveys closed.
- Over 10,000 responses.
- Key dates:
  - Aug. 28: BEAD Five Year Action Plan submitted.
  - Dec. 23: BEAD Initial Proposal submitted.
  - Feb. 28: Texas Digital Opportunity Plan is due.

IIJA BEAD Eligibility

- Eligible locations:
  - Unserved – less than 25/3 Mbps.
  - Underserved – between 25/3 Mbps and 100/20 Mbps.
  - Community Anchor Institutions.
  - [FCC Broadband Map](#).

- Eligible applicants:
  - Internet service providers.
  - Political subdivisions.
  - Nonprofit organizations.
  - Partnerships amongst any of the groups mentioned above.

Points of Engagement

- Industry Roundtable hosted virtually on the last Tuesday of every month at 3:00 p.m. CST.
  - Next meeting: Jan. 30, 2024.
- Local Government Roundtable hosted virtually on the first Thursday of every month at 10:00 a.m. CST.
  - Next meeting: Feb. 1, 2024.
- BDO Board of Advisors Meeting hosted virtually and in person on Feb. 29, 2024, at 2:00 p.m. CST.
  - Webinar password: 5RUga3MxZv4
- Sign up for updates and monthly newsletter.
- Outreach webpage houses meeting links and highlights all engagement opportunities.

Questions

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