

Memorandum

June 1, 2021



Summary of NTIA guidance for Broadband Infrastructure Program from the December 2020 Year End Appropriations and Stimulus Bill

NTIA Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) issued May 19, 2021

Project/Award Period & Amounts:

- \$288 Million total funding – awards will range from \$5 to \$30 million (amount can deviate if good cause is shown) (p.8)
- Projects must be completed in one year unless such period is otherwise extended in writing by the Grants Officer. (p.8)
- Any unexpended funds by the end of the one-year award period can be made available to other covered partnerships for the purposes provided in the Broadband Infrastructure Program. (p.8)

Application and Award Timing:

- Complete applications must be received by www.grants.gov no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) on **August 17, 2021**. (p.1)
- Completion of review, selection of successful applicants, and award processing anticipated by **November 15, 2021** and anticipated earliest start date for awards under this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to be **November 29, 2021**.

Eligible Entity:

- A covered partnership is eligible and defined as a covered partnership as a partnership between: (A) a State, or one or more political subdivisions of a State; and (B) a provider of fixed broadband service. (p.4)
 - A covered partnership may include more than one provider of fixed broadband service as part of its application. Additionally, a provider of fixed broadband service may participate in more than one covered partnership.
 - A provider of broadband service that is part of a covered partnership is not required to be designated as an eligible telecommunications carrier.
 - NTIA encourages municipalities, nonprofits, or cooperatives that own and/or operate broadband networks to participate in this program as part of a covered partnership.

Network Requirements:

- A “qualifying broadband service” means broadband service with: (A) a download speed of not less than 25 megabits per second; (B) an upload speed of not less than 3 megabits per second; and (C) a latency sufficient to support real time, interactive applications. – *Awardees only have to build 25/3 Mbps but projects proposing networks of 100/20 Mbps or higher will be given priority*
 - Grant recipients are required to provide 25/3 Mbps simultaneously to every household in the eligible service area. (p.4)
- NTIA will interpret latency to mean 95 percent or more of all peak period measurements of network round trip latency are at or below 100 milliseconds.

Eligible Service Area:

- “Eligible service area” is defined as a census block in which broadband service is not available at one or more households or businesses in the census block. (p.4) – *The first reference in the NOFO is to*

the new more granular broadband data and maps the FCC is creating which won't be available for a while. Until such time, it appears NTIA will rely on current flawed FCC data and maps.

- **“Unserved,”** with respect to a household, means: (A) the household lacks access to qualifying broadband service (25/3 Mbps); and (B) no broadband provider has been selected to receive, or is otherwise receiving, Federal or State funding subject to enforceable build out commitments to deploy qualifying broadband service in the specific area where the household is located by dates certain, even if such service is not yet available, provided that the Federal or State agency providing the funding has not deemed the service provider to be in default of its buildout obligations under the applicable Federal or State program. (p.7) –*Any area that has 25/3 Mbps, or there is a state and/or federal obligation for a provider to deploy 25/3 Mbps at any time in the future, is not eligible for funding. The use of the word “selected” indicates that even RDOF areas where final approval is pending are not eligible for funding.*

Priority Rankings for Projects:

Priority to applications for covered broadband projects as follows, in decreasing order of priority, as set forth in Section 905(d)(4) of the Act: (p.5)

- (1) Provide broadband service to the greatest number of households in an eligible service area;
 - (2) Projects designed to provide broadband service in an eligible service area that is wholly within any area other than:
 - i. a county, city, or town that has a population of more than 50,000 inhabitants; and
 - ii. the urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town of more than 50,000 inhabitants;
 - (3) Projects that are the most cost-effective, prioritizing such projects in areas that are the most rural;
 - (4) Provide broadband service with a download speed of not less than 100 megabits per second and an upload speed of not less than 20 megabits per second (100/20 Mbps);
 - (5) Any other covered broadband project that meets the requirements of this NOFO.
- Project proposals that deploy future-proof infrastructure, e.g., fiber are encouraged. (p.5)

Scoring Point Based Evaluation Criteria (100 Points Total Possible) (p. 30-31):

- **Project Purpose and Benefits (30 points total)**
 - Level of Impact in the Proposed Service Area (20 points).
 - Affordability of Services Offered (10 points).
- **Project Viability (40 points total)**
 - Technical Approach and Related Network Capacity and Performance (20 points).
 - Applicant’s Organizational Capability & Expertise (20 points).
- **Project Budget and Sustainability (30 points total)**
 - Reasonableness of the Budget (10 points).
 - Sustainability of the Project (15 points).
 - Leverage of Non-Federal Resources (5 points).
- Based on an average of the reviewers’ scores, applications will be assigned adjectival ratings for each priority group in accordance with the following scale: Qualified for Funding – (70-100 points)
Unqualified for Funding – (0-69 points). (p.33)

Cost Sharing/Matching:

- The Act authorizing the establishment of the Broadband Infrastructure Program does not contain a statutory cost sharing or matching funds requirement for this grant program. (p.9-10)
 - Applications that propose to contribute a non-federal cost share of at least 10 percent of the total eligible costs of a project will be viewed favorably.