Commission Announces BEAD Local Planning, Workforce Planning and Digital Equity Outreach Grants

The Commission is now accepting applications for multiple federally-funded grant programs to assist in the state's broadband and digital equity planning efforts in preparation for federal funds.

The 'Internet for All' initiative includes the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program and Digital Equity Program. Both programs will help build broadband infrastructure and promote digital equity in the state. The federally-funded, state-administered planning grant programs now open are the BEAD Workforce Planning Grant, the Digital Equity Outreach Grant; more information will soon be available regarding the BEAD Local Planning Grant.

Digital Equity Outreach Grant

The Digital Equity Outreach Grant will provide funding to trusted partners to collect locally-informed insights into barriers to internet access for Wisconsin residents. Digital Equity Outreach activities may include, but are not limited to, interactive workshops, surveys, townhall discussions, data collection, and interviews with impacted residents. The outreach results will inform the statewide digital equity plan. A total of $335,000 in funding is available for this grant program. **Applications are due March 1, 2023 at 1:30pm CT**. The Commission will host a webinar on February 9, 2023

Application instructions and webinar registration are on the Digital Equity Outreach Grant Page.

BEAD Workforce Planning Grant

As part of Wisconsin's BEAD plan, the State must prepare a plan to ensure that a highly skilled workforce is trained and available to build and maintain proposed broadband infrastructure investments. The Workforce Planning Grant will engage existing entities to plan workforce development strategies, map assets, conduct stakeholder engagement, and review policy and funding models to develop solutions that will best prepare the state for broadband infrastructure funding, as well as ensuring that all Wisconsinites have a pathway to these career opportunities. A total of $100,000 in funding is available for this grant program. **Applications are due March 1, 2023 at 1:30pm CT.**

More information and application instructions are on the Workforce Planning Grant webpage.

BEAD Local Planning Grant

Counties and Tribes are well positioned to understand the need, vision, and barriers related to successful deployment of high-speed internet. BEAD Local Planning formula grants will offer resources to counties and Tribes to participate in broadband planning. The resulting local broadband planning will inform the basis of Wisconsin's Five-Year Action Plan for broadband. BEAD Local Planning Grants are non-competitive formula grants that will be allocated to each county and Tribe that opts into the program. A total of $1.5 million in funding is available for this grant program. **Applications are due March 7, 2023 at**

1:30pm CT.

Additional information will be forthcoming on [BEAD Local Planning website](#). We invite Counties and Tribes to attend the [webinar](#) below.

Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Funding for Wisconsin Counties & Tribes Webinar

W Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Join UW Extension and the Wisconsin Broadband Office for the first of three virtual webinars as we discuss Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Planning for Wisconsin Counties and Tribes on **Monday February 6, 2023 at noon.**

This event is free to the public and is the first of three webinars that will focus on broadband planning and funding opportunities in Wisconsin. It will specifically cover the Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) program, which aims to expand high-speed interest access and usage in the state, by providing an overview of state-wide broadband planning efforts and funding opportunities for local county and Tribal broadband planning.

Register

FCC Broadband Map and Badgering the FCC

A huge thank you to all the communities, local governments, and Wisconsin residents that reviewed and submitted challenges as needed to the new [FCC national broadband map](#). Together we **Badgered the FCC**. This continued work will help our state improve our broadband data and secure more federal funding to expand reliable, affordable broadband for all.
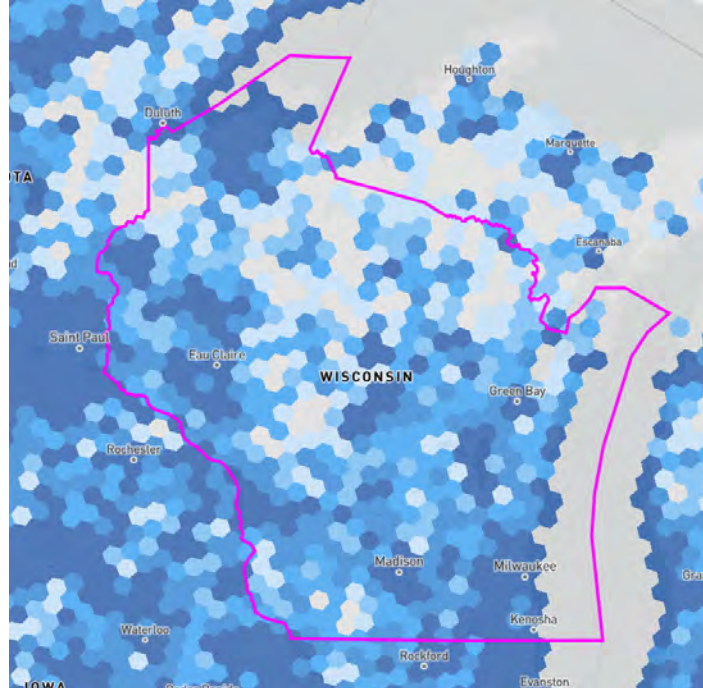The initial draft version of the FCC's National Map shows:

- There are approximately 2,300,000 locations (i.e. residential and businesses) that broadband serviceable locations in Wisconsin
- Of the total 220,000 locations are unserved as defined by the BEAD program, they have service of less than 25/3 Mbps, only unlicensed fixed wireless of any speed, or no service.
- Of the total 300,000 locations are underserved as defined by the BEAD program, they lack access to service of 100/20 by a wireline or licensed fixed wireless provider.

The Wisconsin Broadband Office worked diligently to evaluate the FCC map on both individual locations and by reviewing provider and FCC methodologies. The WBO cast a wide net in our approaches to the FCC challenge in order to maximize our opportunities to validate reporting, improve the map, and maximize the BEAD allocation for Wisconsin. Given the the rules outlined in the federal DATA act, the challenge process is the only path for states to remedy potential errors in the national broadband map.

In addition to the robust local participation, the Wisconsin Broadband Office successfully submitted **260,966 challenges to internet service availability** using the bulk challenge process.

While the initial January 13 challenge submission is in the past, improving the map is an ongoing effort and important to our continued broadband planning and local coordination. *We still encourage individuals to [Badger the FCC](#) on an ongoing basis.*

Broadband Expansion Grants Due February 22nd

The State Broadband Expansion Grant Program is currently accepting applications through **February 22, 2023 at 1:30 pm CT.**

In this grant round, $14.1 million is available to applicants to help expand high-speed broadband Internet to unserved and underserved areas in the state. An applicant in the FY 2023 grant cycle is required to submit the application using the new online PSC Grants System. Applicants must also submit geospatial data by the February 22 deadline.

More Grant Opportunities

Nonprofit Access Grant
The Nonprofit Access Grant Program is currently accepting applications. The application period runs through **March 1, 2023 at 1:30 pm CT**.

The Commission may award up to $500,000 in grants under this program for a two-year performance period. The Nonprofit Access grant enables nonprofit groups to apply for partial funding of programs or projects that will facilitate affordable access to telecommunications.

Lifeline Outreach Grant
The Lifeline Outreach Grant Program is currently accepting applications. The application period runs through **March 1, 2023 at 1:30 pm CT.**

The Commission may award up to $250,000 in grants under this program. The Lifeline Outreach Grant enables eligible entities to apply for funding of programs, projects, research or resources that will assist low-income customers to obtain affordable access to essential telecommunications through the Lifeline program.

Support for Broadband Planning

The Public Service Commission is pleased to announce that UW Extension and Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation's Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP) will be serving as technical assistance partners for communities seeking support in broadband planning activities as part of developing the BEAD 5-year broadband action plan and the Wisconsin Digital Equity Plan.

Over the coming months UW Extension will host workshops, webinars and provide tools for communities, local broadband champions and regional economic development organizations. The first webinar is listed below.

UW Extension will be focused on support for counties and local governments and the Office of Rural Prosperity will be focused on support for Regional Economic Development Organizations. The Wisconsin Broadband Office continues to be available to support local planning. For more information about UW Extension email Gail Huycke and for more information about the Office of Rural Prosperity email Danielle Jones.

Articles and Resources Worth Reading

Broadband Benefit Programs are Helping to Close the Digital Divide

Written by John B. Horrigan, PhD

Recently released data from the American Community Survey shows substantial increases in household wireline broadband adoption from 2019 to 2021—an increase of more than twice the rate of growth compared to the 2017-to-2019 interval. This suggests that pandemic-driven initiatives to address home adoption gaps have had an impact. Notably, increases in home broadband subscriptions have been most pronounced in cities with higher-than-average rates of poverty.

Read the Full Analysis

What is permitting?

National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA) has posted an introduction to permitting as it relates to broadband projects, including the types of permits a deployment may require, the process for securing an easement or right of way access, and steps to obtaining permission to access federal/state/local land.

Read the Report

Governor's Task Force on Broadband Next Meeting

The February meeting of the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access is scheduled for Wednesday, February 15, 2023 from 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. The Task Force will continue work on preparing their annual report on Broadband Access to the Governor and Legislature which is due by June 30th.

The meeting will be posted on the PSC calendar and the agenda will include information for the public to listen.

Grant Recipients Corner

ARPA Broadband Access Grant Recipients

Find ARPA "Final Reporting" information on our website (final report instructions, location data file instructions, final reporting webinar recording and slides)

The Wisconsin Broadband Office (WBO) will begin monitoring American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) Broadband Access Grants (5-BF-2022) at the beginning of 2023. Monitoring ensures we meet our federal compliance while also serving as an opportunity for technical assistance and strengthening our partnership with grant subrecipients. Partners selected for review will be notified via email with the monitoring timeline and documentation to be provided. We appreciate your participation in the review process as we work towards our shared goal of connecting Wisconsin.

State Broadband Expansion Grant Recipients

Filenames & Email Subject Lines
If you're familiar with ERF or the sheer quantity of open broadband grants, it's hard to keep them all straight whether you're a recipient or Commission staff. When corresponding via email or uploading to ERF, please always include the fiscal year of your grant as well as keywords from your entity name and the name given to the project by the Commission. This helps us save time and ensures accurate tracking of documentation.

WBO Newsletter

The Wisconsin Broadband Office will send out regular communication to internet service providers, grant applicants and broadband stakeholders. We aim to be relevant and share timely information from our office.

Please reach out if anyone from the Wisconsin Broadband Office can be of assistance. Email Us

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