

MN Broadband, Equity, and Access Deployment Program (BEAD) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Document updated: **10/16/2024**. In the table below, new questions noted with a “***”.

FAQ Summary

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Section I: BEAD Overview

1. What is BEAD?

The Broadband Equity, and Access Deployment Program (BEAD) is a federal program administered by the National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA) at the Department of Commerce, and one of the two broadband programs being administered by our office that came out of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) that was signed into law on November 15, 2021. BEAD provides approximately \$42.5 billion for broadband nationally, and Minnesota was allocated \$651,839,368 in total, and will use these funds to build out broadband infrastructure for fiber, fixed wireless, and satellite. The Office of Broadband Development is Minnesota's eligible entity administering the federal BEAD program.

2. How is BEAD different from Minnesota's previous grant programs?

While BEAD is being administered by the MN Office of Broadband Development (OBD), it is a federal program designed by the NTIA, and with federal requirements that differ from previous Minnesota grant programs, like Border-to-Border and Line Extension. Notable differences include:

- **Eligibility.** NTIA's definition for BEAD Funding eligibility includes fixed wireless delivered over Licensed or Licensed by Rule spectrum, so locations with that type of fixed wireless will not be eligible for BEAD funding (unless documented that the service is not available or not at speeds above 100Mbps download and 20Mbps upload). Locations were eligible for Minnesota state grant funding if they lacked a wired broadband service delivering speeds of less than 25Mbps download/3Mbps upload (unserved) or having 25/3 but not at or above 100Mbps download/20Mbps upload (underserved).
- **Timelines are longer.** Generally state grant programs required completion within two years of a fully executed contract. BEAD allows for four years to complete construction from the date of the fully executed contract.
- **Application and compliance.** BEAD application and compliance requirements are more extensive than state grant funding requirements. Providers that have historically participated in past state grant rounds may "sit out" participation in the federal BEAD program or need greater encouragement to submit an application.
- **Prioritization.** State grant funding prioritized projects where a community partnered with the provider (community support, financial support) whereas BEAD is "Internet for All – BEAD funds are to document that all unserved and underserved locations receive some type of broadband service—fiber, coax, fixed wireless, satellite—with or without community input on desired technology.
- **Purpose.** State grant funding was a competitive grant program. BEAD funding is to get some type of broadband to all unserved and underserved locations.

***3. Have Minnesota's Volume 1 and Volume 2 been approved?

Yes! Minnesota's Volume 1 was approved by NTIA on May 29th, 2024, and Volume 2 on October 3rd, 2024. Both can be found on the OBD BEAD webpage under "Volumes 1 & 2": mn.gov/deed/programs-services/broadband/bead/

Section II: BEAD Challenge Process

1. What is the BEAD Challenge process?

The BEAD Challenge process is part of the federally required process for the BEAD program. The BEAD Challenge process happens before the subgrantee selection process can begin as it establishes the list of locations eligible for BEAD funding. It's an opportunity for eligible challengers (which by federal requirements include local governments, Tribal governments, Broadband providers, and nonprofits), to submit "challenges" on locations identified by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as eligible or not eligible for BEAD.

NTIA defines eligibility for BEAD funding as unserved and underserved locations. In other words, if a location does not have reliable broadband service of 25/3 it is unserved, or if a location has reliable broadband service of 25/3 but not at or above 100/20 it is underserved. If a location has reliable broadband service at or above 100/20 it is served, and reliable broadband service per NTIA includes wired (cable, fiber) or licensed fixed wireless service technologies.

The Challenge Portal accepted information from individuals/residents and businesses to contest the classification of their location; if valid these were rolled up and submitted as a BEAD challenge by the nonprofit, Connected Nation. All challenges, whether submitted by a provider, local or Tribal government, or a nonprofit, were reviewed to determine if they met all federal requirements to be considered as valid BEAD Challenges. Challenges found to be credible were then eligible to be rebutted, again by a provider, local or Tribal government, or a nonprofit.

2. What are the different stages of the Challenge process?

- The BEAD Challenge process consists of 3 different stages: Challenge, Rebuttal, and Adjudication. Challenge window, July 22nd to August 21st: During this first phase, eligible challengers should have reviewed the Challenge Portal map and submitted challenges for locations.
- Rebuttal window, August 22nd to September 20th (rolling): Following a submitted Challenge, the rebuttal window was a time for eligible challengers to support or dispute challenges. Important to note, is rebuttal is due 30 days after notification, not until the end of the window itself.
- Adjudication, September 21st to October 21st: During this time, OBD will make formal decisions on the submitted challenges and rebuttals to determine eligibility of challenged locations for BEAD funding.

***3. What happens after the BEAD Challenge?

After the BEAD Challenge process, the BEAD True-up (optional) and BEAD Deduplication (mandatory) occurs. Results of the BEAD Challenge process (challenges, rebuttal, adjudication), deduplication and any true-ups will be part of the list of final BEAD eligible locations provided to NTIA for its approval. Once the final list has been approved by NTIA, the subgrantee selection process can begin.

OBD anticipates there will be some type of pre-qualification process once we have implemented a new grants management system for receiving the information. This will likely be available in the January/February 2025 timeframe.

- **BEAD True-Up (Optional):** a process for using an updated version of the FCC map to reflect new information on broadband serviceable locations and service availability—occurs after the BEAD

Challenge process but before submission of the BEAD Challenge process results to NTIA: Accuracy in mapping; Equitable funding allocations; and Avoid duplicating

- **BEAD Deduplication:** Required after conducting BEAD Challenge process. Avoids duplicating efforts of ongoing broadband deployment by other programs.

***4. Will there be another opportunity to change the list of eligible locations after the Challenge process is completed?

No. Consistent with National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) requirements, the challenge process determination is complete, and the Office of Broadband Development will not hold another challenge process. Based on the final list of locations eligible for BEAD Funding approved by NTIA, the subgrantee selection process will be conducted. OBD will be monitoring NTIA's guidance for updates on exceptions for locations constructed with private investment between the time NTIA approves the final list of BEAD eligible locations and when Minnesota's Final Proposal is due to minimize duplication of funding to served locations. Separately, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) continues to accept location and service challenges on a rolling basis, and these are used to conduct periodic refreshes to the National Broadband Map though unlikely to affect eligibility for BEAD funding.

Section III: BEAD Challenge Portal, Map, and Technical Assistance

1. If I have questions about the BEAD Challenge Portal or the Broadband Navigator, what resources are available?

The Broadband Navigator does have a User Guide that you can reference

(mn.gov/deed/assets/broadband-navigator-user-guide_tcm1045-632126.pdf). If you still have questions, email us at deed.broadband@state.mn.us

2. How was this data sourced?

This data was sourced from the FCC's data releases. If you have questions relating to the FCC data, visit the Broadband Data Collection Help Center: help.bdc.fcc.gov/hc/en-us. You can submit a question to the Broadband Data Collection Help Center here: help.bdc.fcc.gov/hc/en-us/requests/new. The digital equity indicators were sourced from US Census data. The development of accurate broadband coverage maps is an iterative process and the FCC maps will continue to be improved, updated and validated over time.

3. What was the Planned Service Date for the BEAD Challenge process?

The date for a Planned Service challenge was 6/30/24. OBD plans to be able to capture any construction completed in 2024 through the deduplication process.

4. What if my address isn't on the map?

The addresses displayed on the map are from the Broadband Fabric prepared by the FCC and available at: broadbandmap.fcc.gov/home. Unfortunately, under NTIA's requirements, we cannot add locations to the BEAD Challenge Map. You would need to bring this to the FCC's attention. If your address is not displayed, it is possible that it is not a known Broadband Serviceable Location. In this case, you will be prompted upon searching for your address on the FCC map to flag it for review. Once your address is flagged, the FCC will have been made aware of the issue and the FCC can determine what to do for subsequent iterations of its map.

5. What are "high-cost areas"?

High-cost areas are areas designated by NTIA where broadband deployment is expected to be especially expensive. Within these areas, OBD will be able to award grant funding without requiring at least a 25 percent match from the awardee or requesting a waiver of the match requirement from NTIA.

6. What technologies can be used to deliver internet service?

Internet connections are categorized based on the underlying technology providing access to the internet. There are many types of broadband service which may be available to a particular location, such as Digital Subscriber Line (DSL), Cable, Fiber, Wireless (cellular or fixed; licensed or unlicensed), and Satellite. All these technologies have strengths and weaknesses and varying costs and availability depending on the location they are intended to serve. For more information, please visit: www.fcc.gov/general/types-broadband-connections.

7. Why does this map not show satellite providers and unlicensed fixed wireless locations?

These technologies are not considered "Reliable Broadband Service" under NTIA's BEAD guidelines and thus have been left off of this map. These technologies may be eligible for BEAD funding if fiber is too expensive, no fiber provider applies to serve specific locations, or the state must consider non-fiber

alternatives to ensure that its BEAD funding gets some type of broadband to all unserved/underserved locations.

8. What does the “Funding” column mean in the Unserved and Underserved locations dataset? And what are the Pre-Challenge acronyms?

The funding column designates if a currently unserved location will have broadband service deployed under another broadband program.

The acronyms in the PreChallengeModifier column mean the following:

- Biz = Business-Only Provider Pre-Challenge Modification
- CFW= Cellular Fixed Wireless Pre-Challenge Modification
- DSL= DSL Pre-Challenge Modification
- FCC= FCC Challenge Pre-Challenge Modification

9. Is there a distinction for code 70, 71 or 72 when it is provided via cellular provider rather than licensed fixed wireless (LFW) provider?

We are unaware of a distinction except that you determine the cellular provider by provider name. According to the FCC, technology code 71 Licensed Terrestrial Fixed Wireless includes (cellular) service provided over a 4G LTE or 5G NR mobile network on licensed bands but sold as a fixed solution. More information can be found at the FCC website here: help.bdc.fcc.gov/hc/en-us/articles/12271133620763-Technology-Codes-for-Terrestrial-Fixed-Wireless

Section IV: Your role in BEAD

1. How can I stay up to date on BEAD information?

OBD will be sending out information on updates on BEAD with biweekly emails, you can sign up for those here: mn.gov/deed/programs-services/broadband/contact/.

You can contact the office with further questions at deed.broadband@state.mn.us, or by phone at 651-259-7610

2. How can a Minnesota resident get involved?

Minnesota residents can sign up for emails from OBD (mn.gov/deed/programs-services/broadband/contact/), regularly checking the OBD BEAD webpage. and get involved in the Challenge process by looking at the Challenge Portal and submitting speed tests if your location shows as served but you cannot achieve speeds of 100Mbps download/20Mbps upload. Even if your location is eligible for BEAD funding, a provider still has to submit an application for funding—if you want input on who that provider is/type of technology, reach out to a preferred provider and work with them to submit an application for BEAD funding.

3. How can an Internet Service provider get involved?

You can participate in the State Challenge Process both by submitting challenges and by rebutting any inaccurate challenges that may be made against your service. You can sign up for emails from the OBD office to stay up to date with the latest information on BEAD (mn.gov/deed/programs-services/broadband/contact/).

4. How can a Tribal Nation get involved?

You can participate in the State Challenge Process both by submitting challenges and by rebutting any inaccurate challenges that may be made against your service (if a provider) or service on Tribal lands. You can sign up for emails from the OBD office to stay up to date with the latest information on BEAD (mn.gov/deed/programs-services/broadband/contact/).

The Office of Broadband Development is committed to working with Tribal Communities throughout the BEAD program – if you have more specific questions than you see here, please reach out to the office directly at deed.broadband@state.mn.us, or by phone at 651-259-7610.

5. How can a local unit of government get involved?

Any information residents and businesses enter in the portal will be aggregated and submitted as a BEAD Challenge by the nonprofit, Connected Nation. If you want to submit separately, you will need to set up a mechanism to collect and compile information for submission.

If there are likely to be BEAD eligible locations in your jurisdiction, you will also want to start working with existing broadband providers now to encourage that an application be submitted for those locations. This will give you an opportunity to encourage an application for the technology your residents desire, from a provider they may prefer.

To support the success of any BEAD-funded projects that may be awarded in your area, we recommend at the conclusion of the Challenge Process, you review the list of BEAD-eligible locations in your jurisdiction and consider what permits may be needed for those projects. Compiling the relevant materials, designating a point-of-contact who can help the grant recipient move through the permitting

process and/or other steps that you may identify that could streamline the process can help ensure the success and speed of deployment in your community.

6. How can a nonprofit get involved?

You can participate in the State Challenge Process both by submitting challenges and by rebutting any inaccurate challenges that may be made. You can sign up for emails from the OBD office to stay up to date with the latest information on BEAD (mn.gov/deed/programs-services/broadband/contact/).