Montana BEAD Program
Benefit of the Bargain Round FAQs

July 2025

Contents

Frequently Asked Questions

Please note that this document has been updated to reflect recent program changes as outlined in the June 6, 2025, BEAD Restructuring Policy Notice. * Indicate questions added since last refresh.

1. GENERAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

1.1. What is BEAD?

Response: The Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program provides $42.45 billion to expand high-speed internet access by funding planning, infrastructure deployment, and adoption programs. Montana was allocated a $629 million grant under the BEAD program to improve broadband coverage across the state. BEAD program requirements focus this funding on unserved, locations unable to obtain broadband service of at least 25 Megabits per second (Mbps) downstream and three (3) Mbps (25/3 Mbps), and underserved locations, those locations with broadband service between 25/3 Mbps and 100/20 Mbps, and 1 Gbps symmetric for community anchor institutions (CAIs).

1.2. What are the requirements for the State to receive BEAD funding?

Response: To receive the $629 million in BEAD funding, the State must comply with the NTIA requirements. MBO has completed all prior and updated requirements to date. As required by NTIA, MBO will conduct a subgrantee selection process and subsequently submit a final proposal to NTIA by September 4, 2025.

1.3. When is the BEAD application process opening?

Response: The Prequalification Round reopened on June 14, 2025, and the Benefit of the Bargain Round opened on July 7, 2025. The Benefit of the Bargain round will close on July 25, 2025.

1.4. What unserved and underserved areas will be prioritized during the BEAD application process?

Response: The State must comply with the NTIA BEAD Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) requirements when selecting projects. Under NTIA guidelines, the State must award projects to provide coverage of all unserved locations followed by all underserved locations and if funding allows, eligible community anchor institutions. Initial Proposal Volume 2 and the BEAD Restructuring Policy Notice outlines the process the state will use to select subgrantees.

1.5. What kind of factors will be prioritized in the process of considering applications?

Response: The State has designed the subgrantee selection criteria consistent with NTIA guidance. The term "Priority Broadband Project" means a project that provides broadband service at speeds of no less than 100 megabits per second for downloads and 20 megabits per second for uploads, has a latency less than or equal to 100 milliseconds, and can easily scale speeds over time to meet the evolving connectivity needs of households and businesses and support the deployment of 5G, successor wireless technologies, and other advanced services. Priority Broadband Projects will be also be evaluated based on the minimal BEAD program outlay and other scoring criteria as approved by the Communications Advisory Committee and in alignment with the RPN.

1.6. If an ISP does not complete a prequalification application, will it be disqualified from participating in any capacity during any phase of the program?

Response: Completion of a prequalification application is mandatory to participate in the BEAD program. All potential grant recipients were encouraged to complete the prequalification process as early as possible.

1.7. Were the online technical assistance sessions recorded? If so, where can I watch them?

Response: Recordings and slides from all technical assistance sessions are available on the [ConnectMT website](#).

1.8. How long will subgrantees have to complete construction?

Response: Subgrantees will have 4 years from the date the agreement with the State is fully executed to complete construction.

1.9. When will subgrantee awards be determined?

Response: Montana will provisionally select awardees and submit the selection to NTIA as part of the Final Proposal. The Final Proposal is due in September 2025. Once NTIA approves the Final Proposal, MT will make final awards.

1.10. What is the matching requirement for the BEAD program? Do waivers exist for this matching requirement, and in what circumstances would those waivers be provided?

Response: As noted in the BEAD NOFO, except for specific circumstances where NTIA has waived the matching requirement, subrecipients are required to provide a match of 25% of subaward amount. NTIA removed the match requirement for the NTIA defined High Cost CBGs and Montana has not chosen to implement one. Please note, this is only for the 23 CBGs

designated by NTIA. All other project areas would require a match. At this time, Montana has not applied for any additional waivers.

1.11. Will the BEAD application summaries be posted after the application window closes?

Response: Montana will include application summaries as part of the Final Proposal, which is due in September 2025 and will be posted for public comment. This proposal will outline the projects selected for funding.

1.12. Are the high cost CBG's posted on the ConnectMT website?

Response: Yes, a downloadable list of high-cost areas by census block group can be found on the ConnectMT IIJA/BEAD Resources page under NTIA BEAD Program.

2. ELIGIBILITY

2.1. Who is eligible to receive BEAD funding from the ConnectMT Broadband Office?

Response: Consistent with SB 531, an eligible applicant means an entity that has authorization to do business in the state and has demonstrated that it has the technical, financial, and managerial resources and experience to provide broadband service or other communications services to customers in the state. This includes incorporated businesses or partnerships, Montana nonprofit organizations, limited liability companies, corporations, or cooperative entities organized for the purpose of expanding broadband access. A government entity or tribe is only eligible to apply in partnership with an eligible broadband service provider.

In order to be eligible to receive BEAD funding from the State of Montana, subgrantees must:
1. Meet mandated financial, operational, and managerial requirements
2. Propose a project that will provide a minimum 100/20 Mbps broadband service to all locations within the service area within a 4-year timeline
3. Be able to comply with all requirements mandated by the NTIA and the State of Montana

2.2. Will the same companies receive funding as ARPA?

Response: The Department will perform a subgrantee selection process consistent with SB 531, the Initial Proposal and subsequent NTIA guidance. Companies that received ARPA funding may choose to apply for additional projects through the BEAD application process.

2.3. Can startups apply for BEAD funding? If so, should they follow the same application process as experienced companies who already provide service in Montana?

Response: Yes, startups may apply for BEAD funding. Startup entities must follow the same process and guidelines as existing entities applying for BEAD funding. New entrants to the market will be required to submit documentation illustrating their minimum qualifications and be required to meet the same threshold as all other applicants. This includes audited financial statements, evidence of managerial capacity and organizational readiness to implement the program. The ConnectMT Broadband Office will require applicants to provide materials that document the length of time they have been doing business in the state. The ConnectMT Broadband Office will verify this by reviewing the Certificate of Good Standing from the Montana Secretary of State.

3. PROJECT AREAS AND BENCHMARKING

3.1. What are project areas?

Response: Project areas have been updated to reflect previously negotiated project areas to allow for streamlined applications. Applicants can choose which locations within a project area to apply for. MBO recommends creating separate applications if your organization plans to apply for multiple project areas.

3.2. Can BEAD provide funding to areas considered underserved or are only areas deemed unserved eligible for funding?

Response: The State must comply with the NTIA BEAD Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) requirements when selecting projects. Under NTIA guidelines, the State must award projects to provide coverage to all unserved locations followed by all underserved locations, and if funding allows, eligible community anchor institutions. Initial Proposal Volume 2 outlines the process the state will use to select subgrantees.

3.3. Is my organization able to incorporate project areas into an already existing application?

Response: MBO recommends creating a separate application if your organization plans to apply for project areas in addition to an existing application.

3.4. Does my organization need to apply for an entire CBG or Project Area?

Response: It is no longer required for applicants to propose serving all unserved locations in the CBGs and provide a descoping list. Instead, you will be able to apply directly for individual locations.

3.5. Is there a file with the project area boundaries accessible to applicants?

Response: The Broadband Availability Map has been updated to reflect the adjustments made as part of the Benefit of the Bargain Round.

3.6. If a CAI is in an underserved or unserved CBG, are applicants required to serve them? Are applicants required to serve all CAIs within a CBG?

Response: Applicants are not required to serve CAIs, regardless of unserved or underserved classification.

3.7. Can the state provide applicant mapping?

Response: Yes, the State will provide a detailed map of CBGs, eligible BSLs, and CAIs for applicants. This information was published prior to the opening of the Benefit of the Bargain Round application in the Location List.

3.8. If a Community Anchor Institution (CAI) is located within an underserved or unserved Census Block Group (CBG), are applicants required to serve them? Are applicants required to serve all CAIs within a CBG, or just those that are specifically designated underserved or unserved?

Response: Montana's BEAD program does not require applicants to serve any CAIs within a CBG, regardless of it being classified as unserved or underserved. As noted on page 45 of the Initial Proposal Volume 2, "applicants will specify in their applications which CAIs they propose to deploy broadband service to".

3.9. How will the Montana Broadband Office handle proposals with overlapping project areas?

Response: Each application will be evaluated on the project area level, rather than by individual CBG. The ConnectMT Broadband Office has chosen to allow applicants to determine their preferred method of structuring any submitted applications and the associated project areas. For additional information on overlapping project areas, please review MT BEAD Initial Proposal Volume 2 Section 2.4.2.E.

4. MAPPING

4.1. What is the Montana Broadband Availability Map?

Response: The Broadband Availability Map is the outcome of Montana's BEAD Challenge process, identifying which locations within Census Block Groups (CBGs) are eligible for funding under the BEAD program. Each CBG outlines the number of served, unserved, and underserved

locations, the total number of locations, the benchmarking reference price, and the percentage of the CBG eligible for BEAD funding. With the issuance of the BEAD Restructuring Policy Notice it has been updated as of July 16, 2025.

4.2. Where can I find the ConnectMT BEAD Map?

Response: The ConnectMT BEAD Map can be found at https://connectmt.mt.gov/IIJA/IIJA-Map or by visiting the ConnectMT homepage at https://connectmt.mt.gov/, selecting the IIJA/BEAD tab, following the dropdown menu to IIJA Map, and selecting the State Broadband Availability Map tab.

4.3. How do I show only BEAD-eligible locations?

Response: To view BEAD-eligible location data only, remove all layers on the map. Go to the IIJA Map page. Select the State Broadband Availability Map drop-down. Select the State Broadband Availability Map. On the map home page, at the top right of your screen, you will see three icons. Select the middle icon (layer list). Please unselect the five FCC USAC locations: the FCC Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, the FCC Enhanced Alternative Connect America Cost Model, The USDA ReConnect Loan and Grant Program, and the US Treasury American Rescue Plan by clicking the blue check marks. Once all of these layers are removed, the resulting map view will show BEAD-eligible locations.

4.4. Can an applicant download data from the map?

Response: To download data from the map, you must be registered with an ISP Login to access the BEAD Application Map. If you are an ISP in Montana and have a login with the state: Go to the IIJA Map homepage and select the BEAD Application Map. Log in when prompted. Follow the steps to remove layers to show BEAD-eligible locations. Select your Census Block Group (CBG). A pop-up will appear with all the CBG's information, including a link to download the CBG's data. Follow that link.

4.5. How do I learn more about the Montana Broadband Availability Map functionality?

Response: Refer to the State of Montana BEAD Broadband Map How-to Guide for step-by-step instructions. This guide outlines the purpose of each map, outlines how to access the map, and provides detailed instructions on using features and functionalities.

4.6. Can my ARPA Map credentials allow me to register for the BEAD application map?

Response: Your ARPA credentials should allow you access to the BEAD Application Map. If you are having trouble logging in, please go to the IJJA Map homepage and request access through the map access request function on the second tab.

4.7. Can an applicant download multiple Census Block Groups files at a time?

Response: No, you can only download one Census Block Group File at a time.

4.8. Who should I reach out to if I am having trouble accessing the map?

Response: Please reach out to the Technical Assistance email ConnectMTTechAssistance@mt.gov if you are having trouble accessing the maps.

4.9. Has the ConnectMT Broadband Office published a location eligibility list?

Response: Yes, the current Locations List spreadsheet includes the official list approved by NTIA on June 30, 2025. Applicants can find the template on the ConnectMT website under Internet Service Provider Information and Benefit of the Bargain Application Materials.

4.10. Can an applicant utilize the available downloadable information from the Montana Broadband Availability Map for submitting their application, even if the data differs from what NTIA has approved?

Response: The ConnectMT Broadband Office has updated the map as of July 16, 2025.

4.11. Is the applicant required to provide a breakdown between residential and business locations for a BEAD application?

Response: The project description example text provided in the application guide on page 20 is illustrative and not prescriptive. Therefore, applicants are not required to provide a breakdown between residential and business locations for their application.

4.12. What is required by the applicant to provide in order to complete question 6.1 of the BEAD application regarding the Locations List templated .csv file?

Response: The Locations List templated .csv file is available on the ConnectMT website and it is also included in Appendix A of the Main Round Application Guide Addendum.

4.13. The Locations List Template has some locations listed as "Not on NTIA approved BEAD Fabric." What does this mean?

Response: These are new locations on version 6 of the fabric data, but are not officially approved by NTIA to be funded. It is possible that those locations may not be deemed eligible and will not receive funding. Bids are welcome, but they are not guaranteed to be approved by NTIA.

4.14. What version of the fabric data should we be using?

Response: All applicants should be using version 6 of the fabric data, although the Challenge process was conducted on version 3.2 fabric data.

4.15. Many of the served locations in BDC are unvetted and it is as simple as just providing a csv that claims the necessary speed per FCC location. Unfortunately, the ability to challenge those locations are delayed between each BDC. Without the ability to challenge these locations within the BEAD process, it's likely many of these locations are not actually served but per the original rules using 3.2 were not necessary to challenge. What is the best way to proceed with this dilemma? The FCC challenge is not a short process.

Response: The goal is to not overbuild, therefore, submitting locations with evidence to be challenged will make a stronger case for NTIA to remove those locations.

4.16. The instructions for the Locations List template suggest that the workbook should be left completely unedited except for the rows relevant to an application. Should the workbook only include locations specific to the project area? Or should the workbook include the full statewide list, with all locations outside of the project marked as "no" for the Served by Application column? *

Response: Applicants should respond "yes" under the "Served by Application" column to indicate the location will be served with the application and may leave other rows blank or indicate "no" which identifies those locations that are not eligible for the BEAD program with an applicable reason code.

5. PRIORITY AND NONPRIORITY APPLICATIONS

5.1. Can an applicant tell the state that it will serve some locations with multiple technologies?

Response: Yes, multiple technologies can be proposed as long as they meet the minimum speed of 100 Mbps downstream and 20 Mbps upstream.

5.2. Can multiple companies submit a bid as a joint application?

Response: Yes, joint applications are permitted, but there must be a lead applicant.

5.3. How will Priority and Non-Priority applications be evaluated when applying for the same location(s)?

Response: According to NTIA guidance, if a Priority application is deemed to be cost excessive (~15K per location), the state is recommended to consider the next best application.

6. SUBMITTING AN APPLICATION

6.1. Does my organization need to apply for an entire Project Area or CBG?

Response: It is no longer required to apply for an entire Project Area CBG and provide a descoping list. Instead, you will be able to apply directly for individual locations.

6.2. If an applicant applies for three separate Project Areas or CBGs, would that be considered one or three applications?

Response: For the Benefit of the Bargain Round, MBO requests that applications only consist of a single Project Area.

6.3. If an applicant submits more than one application, can the same documents be uploaded for all applications?

Response: Each applicant can choose how to define their proposed project area. All associated documents (financials, project plans, PE certifications, etc.) would be provided at the "project area" level.

6.4. How does the modified definition of "Priority Broadband Project" impact my application?

Response: Priority and Non-Priority projects are no longer determined by technology type. Any technology type is capable of being considered a Priority project so long as it meets the statutory definition. Applicants must identify whether the project is Priority or Non-Priority and provide appropriate evidence if selecting Priority.

6.5. How can an applicant mark excel and shapefiles as confidential in AmpliFund if they need to be uploaded in that specific format?

Response: Any documents deemed by the applicant to include confidential information, trade secrets, or personal information MUST be uploaded separately into the "Confidential Documents" field located in the designated section of the application round application. Please include the Applicant's name and the words CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION in the file name. Please note that if a file that is required in another part of the Application, is marked as

confidential and uploaded in the applicable AmpliFund section, to reference that the response is considered confidential and is located in the Confidential Documents section of the Application.

6.6. If my organization already applied for the original Main Round application, do I need to resubmit an entirely new application for the Benefit of the Bargain?

Response: No, any applicants that submitted a Main Round application are not required to submit a new Benefit of the Bargain application. Returning applicants can choose if they would like submit a new application or keep their original one. There are new requirements due to updated NTIA policy, we ask returning applicants to submit this new required information/documentation in Section 10 of the Main Round application. Please see the Addendum in the User Guide for instructions on what needs to be provided.

6.7. If my organization already applied for Main Round, what occurs with questions that are no longer relevant under the new policy?

Response: These questions are completely disregarded from the application and responses will not be evaluated, despite them still appearing on the application.

6.8. When are full proposals required to be submitted by?

Response: All proposals are due July 25, 2025 at 11:55pm MT, whether it is a new Benefit of the Bargain submission or a resubmission of an initial Main Round proposal. Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait to submit proposals as there will not be any technical assistance available at this late hour.

6.9. Are there any documents or resources required to submit a proposal that has not yet been posted on the website yet?

Response: No, all resources have been posted on the ConnectMT site.

6.10. Does it make a difference whether I use a reopened Main Round application or a new Benefit of the Bargain Round application for a project area that we were preliminarily awarded?

Response: Existing applicants are able to choose two paths to participate in the Benefit of the Bargain Round. They may either:
- Update their existing application following the guidance in the Main Round Addendum or
- Start a new application in the "Benefit of the Bargain Application Portal."

The ConnectMT Broadband Office does not have a preference as to which approach the existing applicant would take. Please note, all curing should be addressed in either instance and that

applicants will receive the "existing" applicant credit in either case as long as the project proposed is fundamentally similar to the previously proposed project.

6.11. In Section 6 - Project Plan Question 6.9 of the Benefit of the Bargain Application does not allow the option to upload a project timeline document. How do I attach this file?

Response: Please upload your project timeline document to Question 6.8, along with your project cost estimate document. Please still refer to Question 6.9 for directions and guidelines regarding the project timeline document.

6.12. In Section 6 - Project Plan of the Benefit of the Bargain Application Question 6.2 jumps from 6.2 C to 6.2 E and does not include any option for a Fiber project. In the guide it states 6.2E should be the question regarding Fiber. Please advise on how we should proceed.

Response: Question 6.2D is currently not available in AmpliFund. Please upload your Fiber Evidence Template to Section 8 of your application and note that it is the "Fiber Evidence Template".

6.13. How should an applicant respond to the questions in Section 5.23A-BB?

Response: These questions only require a simple Yes, No or N/A. MBO will follow up if they have any questions about responses in this section. These questions are not scored and will not have an impact on the final award decision.

6.14. To revise a submission, we submit updated materials in the curing section, but do we need to rework the application questions? *

Response: If you are resubmitting an existing application, please submit all resubmitted application materials in the curing Section 10. Please update questions in Section 2 related to the project description, requested amount and match. For more information, please refer to pgs. 10 - 11 of the Main Round Application Guide Addendum.

6.15. For updating an existing Licensed Fixed Wireless application, which was by rule a non-priority application in the old round – how do we signify that the refiled application is designed to be a Priority Application? *

Response: Please type a response into the provided text box that indicates that the application is submitted as a priority application and upload a Statement of Request to be Considered Priority Broadband and Evidence for Priority Project Designation, as outlined in Section 10 of the Main Round Application Guide Addendum. In addition, submit an accompanying evidence template so that the application can be evaluated as a priority application.

7. APPLICATION – SCORING CRITERIA

7.1. Will applications be re-scored with the new criteria from the updated NTIA policy?

Response: Yes, applications will receive a new score due to the scoring criteria changing from the updated NTIA policy. See the approved scoring rubric on the ConnectMT page for [Internet Service Provider](#) Information for updated criteria.

8. APPLICATION – FINANCIAL CAPABILITY

8.1. In the case that an applicant submits multiple applications, should the pro forma be done separately for each proposed project, or should all proposals be included in a single pro forma?

Response: The pro forma for an application needs to include all Montana BEAD construction included in that application. If an applicant submits multiple applications, then each application should have a project pro forma for all construction in each application that is independent of the other applications.

8.1a. Your original project level pro forma P&L included specific project level subscriber information including a breakout of unserved and underserved subscribers. Is there any new format for the company-wide proforma that is replacing the project level form?

Response: No, please submit the company-wide proforma and project-specific assumptions.

8.2. In the case that an applicant submits multiple applications, can a single Letter of Credit apply to multiple projects or does a separate Letter of Credit need to be completed on a case-by-case basis?

Response: Applicants need to submit evidence that they have a bank or surety lined up for the Letter of Credit, but an executed Letter of Credit does not need to be in the application. A finalized Letter of Credit will be required prior to the execution of any award.

8.3. Will the State accept performance bonds for the amount of work to be performed over a 365-day period, with the intent to renew the performance bond on an annual basis, instead of a performance bond securing the full amount of the grant?

Response: No, a performance bond must cover the full term of the contract.

8.4. Where can applicants locate additional information about match requirements?

Response: NTIA has published a [BEAD Match Primer](#) that provides extensive detail on match requirements.

8.5. Does the ConnectMT Broadband Office have a suggested template for performance bonds?

Response: There is no specific template provided for Performance Bonds. Applicants are free to use what their surety company recommends, as long as it meets the requirements outlined in the BEAD Letter of Credit Waiver. These requirements can be found in the [Main Round Application Guide](#) (p. 60-61). Applicants may reference the model irrevocable standby letter of credit provided in Appendix E of the Application Guide when working with a banking institution or surety company.

8.6. Can one performance bond be used for all Montana BEAD applications, or does a new performance bond need to be issued for each application?

Response: At the time of application, applicants need to provide a letter from a "company holding a certificate of authority as an acceptable surety on federal bonds as identified in the Department of Treasury Circular 570 committing to issue a performance bond to the prospective subgrantee. The letter shall at a minimum provide the dollar amount of the performance bond."   At the time of award, the State can work directly with the awardee on the final structure of the bond. See Section 2.4.11.b (p. 72) of the [Initial Proposal Volume 2](#).

8.7. Will the ConnectMT Broadband Office accept an ILOC that was issued with conditions by the granting authority?

Response: No, conditional ILOC commitments will not be accepted. Any ILOC submitted as part of a BEAD application must be without conditions.

8.8. If an applicant has multiple applications for a company, is the ILOC the total of the ILOC requirements or should an applicant submit separate ILOCs for the matching funds required for each application?

Response: The letter of commitment for the ILOC included in each application must align to the amount requested in the specific application. Upon award, the ILOC can be adjusted to match the final awarded amount.

8.9. Would it be possible to have a single Letter of Credit or performance bond covering multiple applications?

Response: A letter of commitment for a performance bond or an ILOC is required for each application. This may be a single letter with each application amount itemized. Please note that

applicants must pursue either a performance bond or an ILOC for each application - the two cannot be combined.

8.10. If an application request amount is adjusted during negotiation, will the match also be adjusted?

Response: The match amount required is based on the full amount requested. If that amount changes at award, the match would be adjusted accordingly.

8.11. Will financial ratios be determined based on the applicant or the parent company in the case where the parent company is the entity providing the unqualified consolidated financial report?

Response: The financial ratios will be calculated based on the applicant information (see Initial Proposal Volume II, Section 2.4.11.a). As a reminder, if the applicant is relying on a parent company audit, this pro forma should cover the full company, not just the project.
The parent company guarantee will be included as part of the grant agreement.

8.12. Does the Executive guarantee and the legal opinion cover any requirement for the parent company to guarantee project costs, including grant and matching funds?

Response: The parent company guarantee will be part of the grant agreement.

8.13. Is a "schedule of ratios" required for the narrative business plan and related analyses?

Response: Providing a schedule of ratios is not a required component of the application, but it is something that can be provided by the applicant in order to make a stronger case as to why the applicant should be selected. There are not specific ratios that must be met by the applicant, but it is a factor that is considered during the underwriting process.

8.14. Can an applicant submit an electronic transfer in lieu of a check, if a complying draw is issued?

Response: The State will accept electronic transfers in lieu of a check. The bank can amend the language in the BEAD model letter of credit to reflect this form of payment.

8.15. Can an applicant with less capital to secure a performance bond in the full amount of the grant secure a performance bond for the amount of work performed in a 365-calendar day period?

Response: At this time, the state is not exercising any reduction in the performance bond requirements. The performance bond must cover the full term of the contract. Please note that contractor performance bonds are not required - the bond requirements apply only to the applicant themselves.

8.16. **If for example you have a project with 50% of the matching requirement with in-kind contribution and half in cash financing, how are cost reimbursements under an "award" to be distributed to a subrecipient?**

Response: At this time, the state is updating the draft grant agreement and details on reimbursements will be included as part of the final grant agreement.

8.17. **We won't have our 2024 Financial Statements Audit completed before the July 25 deadline. How will this impact our application?**

Response: Audited financial statements are a requirement of the BEAD NOFO (NOFO Section IV.D.iii p. 73). If 2024 financial statements are not audited and completed by the end of July, submit audited financial statements from 2023 and interim statements for this year. This will not impact the review of the application.

8.18. **For Pro Forma modeling purposes, if a project area requests an award of $80,000 and we have allowed an in-kind match contribution of $20,000 and a cash match contribution of $10,000; what should we model as the amount returned upon the 1st $100 of reimbursable costs? Should it be 88.8% or 75%? If 75%? Do we then assume 100% is returned after we have spent the $10,000 cash match? ***

Response: The in-kind match contribution is reflected when it is applicable and available for the project. Reimbursements have historically been proportionally reduced for cash match contributions. For the purposes of developing your pro forma, please detail your reimbursement assumptions.

8.19. **Can we use the bond letters from our Round 1 submission? ***

Response: Yes, if the bond letter is still valid and the relative project costs are the same.

8.20. **If planning to use performance bonds as backing rather than LOC, do you prefer separate bond letters for each project area?***

Response: A single bond letter may be submitted for all projects which are subsequently finalized and executed based on the award.

8.21. Within the pro forma template, if an applicant is submitting multiple applications, do you want all the applications reflected in all tabs (income statement, Capital Investment Workbook, Capital Investment Schedule)? Or should an applicant reflect all applications in the income statement tab, and only project specific information in the Capital Investment Workbook and Capital Investment Schedule tabs? *

Response: The same companywide pro forma may be used, however it is helpful to also submit project income statements to validate project-level assumptions.

9. APPLICATION – ORGANIZATIONAL AND MANAGERIAL CAPACITY

9.1. Does the State have any resources available to assist with the creation of cybersecurity risk management plans?

Response: Please see below for a few resources that may be helpful as you create your cybersecurity and risk management plans:

- NIST has specific resources available for small businesses. More information can be found at the following links: https://www.nist.gov/cyberframework, https://www.nist.gov/itl/smallbusinesscyber
- NIST has profiles available under the older version of the NIST framework: https://www.nist.gov/cyberframework/csf-11-archive/community-profiles
- SBA also has resources that might prove helpful: https://www.sba.gov/business-guide/manage-your-business/strengthen-your-cybersecurity
- NTCA - The Rural Broadband Association has a series that may be helpful: https://www.ntca.org/advocacy/issues/consumer-protection-network-reliability/cybersecurity/cybersecurity-series

9.2. How should an applicant respond to the questions in Section 5.13A-BB?

Response: These questions only require a simple Yes, No or N/A. MBO will follow up if they have any questions about responses in this section. These questions are not scored and will not have an impact on the final award decision.

9.3. Are applicants permitted to make modifications to the legal opinion letter posted on the ConnectMT website?

Response: Yes. A sample legal opinion letter has been provided for the use or reference of applicants, but applicants are not required to use this sample letter. Please note that an updated legal opinion letter was posted as of September 24, 2024. Use of this updated letter is optional. If

an applicant has previously submitted a legal opinion there is no requirement to update it using this model letter.

9.4. For the legal opinion template, does the attorney signing the document have to be barred in MT?

Response: The legal opinion may be signed by an attorney barred in any state. Please ensure the completing attorney identifies which state they are barred in and provides their associated bar number.

10. APPLICATION – PROJECT PLAN

10.1. Will the state allow a contingency for increases in prices from suppliers?

Response: Applicants should be ready for Build America, Buy America (BABA) requirements, as they may cause prices to change. The state does not want increased costs for the network and types of equipment to fall back on subgrantees and recommends that applicants prepare for this in their applications (perhaps by building this into the cost).

10.2. Do Professional Engineers on project teams need to be licensed in the state of Montana?

Response: The ConnectMT Broadband Office will accept applications certified by a professional engineer licensed in any state.

10.3. Do projects need to be certified by an independent engineer?

Response: For the BEAD professional engineer certification requirement, projects can be certified by an in-house professional engineer.

10.4. With the revised NTIA guidance removing the certification component of the capital investment schedule, if an applicant deletes the professional engineer certification form sentence that includes the language, "within the required four-year deployment timeline," will the application be deemed incomplete and ineligible?

Response: The waiver is specific to the Capital Investment Schedule (CIS) requirement, which shows project completion within four years. However, the PE is still required to certify all relevant materials, including the project timeline, and this timeline must demonstrate that the project can be completed within the required four-year deployment period. The Montana Department of Administration held a Technical Requirements webinar which included a discussion on the NTIA waiver, which can be found on NTIA BEAD FAQ question 1.26.

10.5. Can applicants download BSL data from the state and then re-upload with application documents? Do applicants need to identify CAI locations?

Response: Yes, the State will provide a list of all eligible BSLs and CAIs. Applicants will be required to upload a list of all BSLs and CAIs they intend to serve.

10.6. How much detail will the state request for the fixed wireless propagation analysis?

Response: To provide this information, the applicant should complete the Fixed Wireless Design Spreadsheet, which outlines all required details. This template is available on the ConnectMT website.

10.7. If a CAI is also classified as unserved, will subgrantees need to provide 1 Gbps service?

Response: Yes, if a bid is proposing to serve an eligible CAI, the service provided must be at least 1 Gbps service.

10.8. In the case of a hybrid application, can applicants break down project costs?

Response: Yes. The templates offer some uniformity; however, applicants can also provide information as they see fit. The goal of the state is to get enough details such that the applicants understand the scope of the cost.

10.9. Under the assumption that the application is a hybrid: Is the application completely rigid in terms of committing to amounts of specific technology?

Response: There should be a re-baselining phase after awards are distributed in which the engineering will be reviewed again. However, applicants should assume that they are committing to what they put in the application. Nevertheless, the state may entertain reasonable change requests.

10.10. Are permitting fees and right of way (ROW) fees considered part of eligible expenses?

Response: NTIA has provided that eligible costs are those directly related to the project and consistent with 2 CFR 200. These include fees associated with permitting and ROW. In addition, "waiver of fees associated with access to rights of way, pole attachments, conduits, easements, or other types of infrastructure related to the project may be used as an in-kind match." See BEAD NOFO page 22.

10.11. If fees are implemented after applicants have submitted their applications, can applicants petition for changes to the budget?

Response: There is a limited amount of funding available from NTIA and once it is allocated, it will not be reallocated. Applicants may change how they utilize the money; however, the amount of funding allocated cannot be changed.

10.12. **If an applicant feels that there are BSLs within their proposed CBG that are mischaracterized as BSLs (e.g., a rock, an outbuilding), how should they communicate this to the State?**

Response: Applicants should follow the guidance for identifying non-serviceable locations in the Application Guide.

10.13. **Are indefeasible right-of-use (IRU) agreements considered eligible expenses?**

Response: According to the BEAD NOFO, long-term leases (for terms greater than one year) of facilities required to provide qualifying broadband service, including indefeasible right-of-use (IRU) agreements, qualify as an eligible expense. IRU costs will be limited to the upfront cost for the IRU and three years of the annual maintenance costs. See BEAD NOFO page 39.

10.14. **Are applicants able to use non-BABAA-certified components in their networks if they are self-funded?**

Response: The Buy America Preference applies to all federally funded infrastructure projects unless otherwise specified. See 2 CFR Part 200.322 and the BEAD NOFO. Each article, material, or supply that is consumed in, incorporated into, an integral part of, or affixed to an infrastructure project are subject to its Buy America Preference requirements. NTIA has provided a limited waiver on the BABAA requirements detailing specific requirements for common components.

10.15. **Are there restrictions or limitations on the use of backhaul technologies and service providers, on either a temporary or permanent basis?**

Response: Backhaul technologies and service providers must provide backhaul sufficient for the required latency and speed – both in a temporary and permanent solution.

10.16. **In the case of an extremely remote location, can applicants propose to establish service within the service provider timeline by using a Cell Tower on Wheels (COW), and then establishing a more permanent structure on-site to deliver service? If so, are both the COW and the permanent tower considered allowable costs?**

Response: The provider shall describe its assumptions about infrastructure in the narrative response. A tower is an allowable cost. A COW is also an allowable cost, but potential applicants

should note the time available for construction, which should be sufficient for a permanent solution, and carefully consider whether the value of having both a temporary and permanent solution will justify the added cost.

10.17. If BEAD projects are extending existing infrastructure, does equipment and infrastructure previously installed need to be retrofitted to comply with BABA requirements?

Response: No. BABA requirements apply only to new infrastructure/additions. Recipients will not be required to retrofit previously built infrastructure to meet BABA certification requirements.

10.18. When is the upfront payment on an IRU reimbursable? When are monthly/recurring costs considered allowable expenses?

Response: The upfront payment for an IRU will be reimbursable at the point when IRU agreements are completed. Monthly/recurring costs are allowable during the period of performance only.

10.19. If an applicant is planning on/already has leased fiber by the proposed area, can they obtain these points or does leased fiber not apply?

Response: Leased fiber will be accepted as long as the applicant can explain how the fiber connects to the network and provides proof they have the lease. Applicants cannot use hypothetically leased fiber as the existing infrastructure.

10.20. Can an applicant submitting a licensed fixed wireless application, use technologies for back-haul that are NOT fiber, HFC, DSL, or licensed fixed wireless, so long as the resulting licensed FWA service to the end user meets the bandwidth and latency requirements as detailed out in the BEAD NOFO?

Response: Projects must be supported with sufficient backhaul to meet the BEAD program's speed and latency requirements.

10.21. Is an Optical Networking Terminal (ONT) an eligible cost? Is a router with or without Wi-Fi capability an eligible cost?

Response: Yes, customer-premises equipment (CPE) is an eligible cost. Page 39 of the BEAD NOFO further defines eligible costs related to last-mile deployment projects.

10.22. Can applications utilize multiple technologies?

Response: Yes, so long as the technology meets the minimum required of 100 Mbps downstream and 20 Mbps upstream.

10.23. For Licensed Priority and Unlicensed Priority, please confirm that we only need to include tower information that is part of our application.

Response: Please submit all information according to the instructions outlined on the licensed and unlicensed fixed wireless evidence templates located on the ConnectMT site, which includes tower information and performance information to each BSL. Additionally, a project design is required to be submitted in addition to the evidence excel template file for both Priority and Non-Priority broadband projects.

10.24. How is Montana classifying Citizen Broadband Radio service (CBRS), General Authorized Access (GAA) tier?

Response: Montana classifies CBRS GAA as a licensed-by-rule technology, consistent with NTIA definition. CBRS GAA use is considered licensed for the purposes of the BEAD program.

10.25. Must all Priority Broadband Projects meet scalability requirements?

Response: Yes, Montana follows statutory guidelines for evaluating whether use of technology for a given project meets meet the statutory scalability requirements contained in 47 U.S.C. §1702(a)(2)(I)(ii). It may be determined that a given application is not a Priority Broadband Project for a particular project area because the relevant technology cannot easily scale to meet evolving connectivity needs, but it may also determine that a different application in a different project area using the exact same technology is a Priority Broadband Project because it falls within the guardrails set forth in NTIA's Restructuring Policy Notice.

10.26. For scaling purposes please confirm that 3GPP Bonding techniques for non-contiguous spectrum is allowed.

Response: Yes, this is acceptable.

10.27. If two LFW applications are designed and submitted for the same project areas both utilizing CBRS, will a provider utilizing PAL space beat out someone utilizing GAA? I'm not sure that GAA is actually considered Served under the BDC, but it's not very protected.

Response: There will be no determinations based on technology tiers. The new criteria is based on priority, cost, and secondary scoring.

10.28. **How do we support the requirement to provide service to wireless towers supporting 5G and advanced services if the locations do not have Location IDs and are not on the Locations list? There are over 100 towers in some Project Areas and with the requirement to service them with sufficient capacity, they will represent a high cost per location that will impact an average cost calculation.**

Response: The provider should show calculations to provide the requested service to a single tower location within the project area. The provider could use a hypothetical location for the tower location within the project area.

10.29. **Please confirm that if the applicant uses licensed spectrum in connecting to the BSL in its network design, that any unlicensed spectrum used to assist and/or increase its capacity via carrier aggregation is (1) allowed; and (2) does not make the application an "Unlicensed Priority Application."**

Response: Yes, an application using licensed spectrum in the last-mile connection to each BSL can be considered a licensed fixed wireless application. Additionally, use of unlicensed spectrum to augment throughput or capacity is allowed.

10.30. **Please confirm that bonded Band 48 CBRS PAL license when using a contiguous CBRS GAA is considered a "Licensed Use" for a "Licensed Priority Application".**

Response: Yes, a CBRS PAL license bonded with contiguous CBRS GAA is considered licensed use.

10.31. **For scaling purposes, please confirm that 3GPP channel bonding techniques for bonding non-contiguous spectrum is allowed and can be assumed to be developed by the OEM if the OEM commits to the development.**

Response: Yes, 3GPP channel bonding techniques for bonding non-contiguous spectrum is allowed provided the OEM commits to the development.

10.32. **Please confirm that an applicant who is a current Licensed Spectrum Holder that obtained licenses from recent FCC Mid-Band Auctions may, as part of their showing an ability to scale as required under the Priority Licensed Application, assume it has the ability to acquire additional licensed spectrum capacity similar to what it already owns in future planned FCC Auctions.**

Response: Licenses or spectrum that is not currently available to the applicant should not be considered as clearing spectrum is time-consuming regulatory process and may not be complete by the BEAD build out requirement date.

10.33. **Please confirm that the requirement to (1) Provide at least 240 Mbps download and 48 Mbps upload capacity to each Broadband Serviceable Location (BSL) is a requirement under normal operating conditions including but not limited to normal oversubscriptions techniques so long as such techniques less than 20 to 1.**
Response: Yes, 240 Mbps down/48 Mbps up capacity requirements must be met under normal operating conditions provided the oversubscription ratio does not exceed 20:1.

10.34. **Please confirm the conditions under which 240 Mbps download and 48 Mbps upload capacity to each BSL is measured for the purpose of determining that a FWL application qualifies as a Priority Application including if the performance requirement met if each BSL may independently achieve 240 Mbps downlink and 48 Mbps uplink while other BSLs are idle; AND separately that 12 Mbps simultaneous traffic is supported to all BSLs (BEAD and non-BEAD users), but not at the same time?**

Response: Yes, the application can may be considered a Priority Broadband Project under these circumstances, if all other priority requirements are met.

10.35. **Is the scalability requirement for 240 Mbps downlink and 48 uplink considered under full- or half-duplex conditions?**

Response: The majority of fixed wireless systems are Time Division Duplex (TDD) and requirements will be evaluated on TDD configurations.

10.36. **Refence is made to the Certified Engineer Stamped Technical Attachments in our previous applications for "Capacity Calculation & Narrative" and N41 and N48 Link Budget Calculation. Please confirm that reliance on these technical calculations are specifically allowed when calculating the capacities and speeds of our planned Priority network.**

Response: This document does not fulfill the requirement of completing the licensed fixed wireless design template.

10.37. **Can you please verify that the cost per location is based on the amount of BEAD requested dollars?***

Response: Yes, that is correct. The cost per location is evaluated based on the amount of BEAD funding requested for the full project. We will take the funding request amount and divide it by the number of BSLs proposed to be served.

11. APPLICATION – ENVIRONMENTAL AND HISTORICAL COMPLIANCE

11.1. In addition to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Montana has the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). Which law takes precedence?

Response: Applicants must adhere to NEPA first, and MEPA second as federal statutes supersede state law.

11.2. Are there any resources available if I have questions regarding permitting or other agency-specific issues?

Response: Yes. For permitting or other agency-specific questions, please reach out to the agency directly. More details can be found at each of the links below:

- [National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)](#)
- [National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)](#)
- [Montana State Historic Preservation Office (MT SHPO)](#)
- [Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program](#)
- [Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)](#)
- [Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)](#)
- [Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC)](#)

12. AGREEMENTS

12.1. Is any additional collateral beyond the Letter of Credit required as part of the application?

Response: Although a Letter of Credits helps to ensure completion of the project, it is not considered collateral. As this is a grant program, there are no specific collateral requirements, but applicants should note that the government holds an interest in all grant-funded assets and awardees must get permission to sell or dispose of the funded assets.

12.2. If an applicant submits an application comprised solely of a high-cost Census Block Group (CBG) that is exempt from the match requirements, is a Letter of Credit still required?

Response: Yes, a Letter of Credit is a required component of all applications.

13. REPORTING

13.1. Has NTIA provided guidance on what will be required for internal reporting (items such as payroll, wage licenses, etc.)?

Response: NTIA is currently updating guidance. MBO anticipates subgrantees will be required to submit reports to the state, at least semiannually, for the duration of the subgrant to track the effectiveness of the use of funds provided.

Subgrantee reports must include the following items:

- Description of each type of project and/or other eligible activities carried out using the subgrant and the duration of the subgrant
- A list of addresses or location identifications (including the Broadband Serviceable Location Fabric established under 47 U.S.C. 642(b)(1)(B)) that constitute the service locations that will be served by the broadband infrastructure to be constructed and the status of each project
- Identification of new locations served within each project area at the relevant reporting intervals, and service taken (if applicable)
- Identification of whether each address or location is residential, commercial, or a community anchor institution
- Description of the types of facilities that have been constructed and installed
- Description of the peak and off-peak actual speeds of the broadband service being offered
- Description of the maximum advertised speed of the broadband service being offered
- Description of the non-promotional prices, including any associated fees, charged for different tiers of broadband service being offered
- List of all interconnection agreements that were requested, and their current status
- Any other data that would be required to comply with the data and mapping collection standards of the Commission under Section 1.7004 of title 47, Code of Federal Regulations, or any successor regulation, for broadband infrastructure projects
- Inclusion of an SF-425, Federal Financial Report and meeting the requirements described in the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions, Section A.01 for Financial Reports
- Compliance with any other reasonable reporting requirements determined by the Eligible Entity to meet the reporting requirements established by the Assistant Secretary, and certify that the information in the report is accurate

13.2. Are assets purchased under this program subject to federal interest?

Response: Yes. The Federal Interest Period as defined in the draft grant agreement will last until December 31st of the 10th year after the acceptance of the Closeout Report by the Department of Commerce (DOC) and NTIA. If awarded a grant, please review the final grant agreement as this requirement may change. The State will determine if there will be additional filing and reporting requirements with regards to the Federal Interest at a later date.

13.3. Can you confirm the number of years that post completion reporting will be required? *

Response: Subgrantee reporting will be required for four years after the date on which the subgrantee receives the subgrant and 120 days prior to the end of the period of performance for MT BEAD in accordance with 2 C.F.R. 200.344. After this date, any additional reporting is dependent upon the application's technology type.

14. TRIBAL CONSIDERATIONS

14.1. What should applicants do if census block groups intersect with Tribal Lands?

Response: Applicants that submit applications for project areas that are partially or wholly located on Tribal Lands must secure written permission from the Tribe or Tribes that own the land. This will be a required component of the Main Round application submission, where applicants will be asked to indicate via a checkbox certification whether a project area falls within Tribal Lands. If it does, the applicant must submit a Resolution of Consent or other formal demonstration of consent from each Tribal Government, either from the Tribal Council or other governing body, upon whose Tribal Lands the infrastructure will be deployed.

14.2. Can funds awarded to tribes be used as matching funds for BEAD?

Response: Funds awarded to tribes may be used as matching funds for BEAD *only* if they are from federal programs in the Infrastructure Act explicitly listed in the BEAD NOFO. The NOFO states: "Except as expressly provided for in the Infrastructure Act, funds from other Federal programs (including funds from the Commission's Universal Service Fund programs) may not be used as matching funds. The Infrastructure Act expressly provides that matching funds for the BEAD Program may come from a federal regional commission or authority and from funds that were provided to an Eligible Entity or a subgrantee for the purpose of deploying broadband service under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (Public Law 116-127; 134 Stat. 178); the CARES Act (Public Law 116-136; 134 Stat. 281), the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Public Law 116-260; 134 Stat. 1182); or the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (Public Law 117-2; 135 Stat. 4), to the extent permitted by those laws. Eligible Entities are encouraged to consider terms and conditions that may be associated with potential sources of match funds and how those may impact the project overall. For example, if an Eligible Entity utilizes federal regional commission funding as a match, the project will need to comply with all BEAD programmatic requirements and any requirements imposed by the federal regional commission. Likewise, Eligible Entities that use funds from the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds or Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund as the source of matching funds for the BEAD Program must comply with the requirements of both the BEAD Program and the relevant Treasury program. Loan funding issued through a federal agency, such as through the USDA ReConnect Program, may also be used as match funding." (See BEAD NOFO Section III.B.3 p. 21.)