

# CONNECT NEW MEXICO COUNCIL MEETING

Virtual

Thursday, March 19, 2026, 1:30 p.m.

## 1. Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting of the Connect New Mexico Council was called to order by Kevin Hopper, at 1:35 pm, on Thursday, March 19, 2026, in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Mr. Hopper introduced himself and reviewed general rules and procedures regarding the meeting, including use of the Zoom application. He announced that the recording of the meeting will be posted in a new website location on <https://connect.nm.gov>

### Members Present

Luis Reyes, Chair	Katherine Crociata
Jason Clack	Steve Grey
Eli Guinnee	Jim Ruybal
Launa Waller	Godfrey Enjady

### Members Absent

Leonard Manzanares	Isaac Bush
Nora Sackett	Mona Martinez
Joseph Navarette	

### Others Present

Jeff Lopez, Broadband Dir.  
Kevin Hopper, PIO for OBAE  
Natalie Runyan, GIS  
Mitch Hibbard, Kyle Immel, Beatriz Palacios, Erica Masker, Jerry Smith, Roy Soto, Tom Luparello

## 2. Approval of Meeting Agenda

**MOTION:** Mr. Hopper called for a motion to approve the Agenda for today's meeting. Mr. Guinnee so moved, seconded by Ms. Waller. There being no opposition, the Agenda was approved.

## 3. Chair Comments – Luis Reyes

Mr. Reyes welcomed Mr. Hopper to the group and thanked him for his work organizing today's meeting.

Mr. Reyes congratulated Director Lopez and his staff on the legislative session, noting that the Governor has signed the bills and Director Lopez will be reporting on this later in the meeting. He asked Director Lopez to pass this thank you along to his staff. Mr. Reyes noted how important the work with the Legislature is, especially with respect to the affordability issue. He also thanked Director Lopez for the ongoing work regarding BEAD, and stated he hoped this is moving along well. Mr. Reyes commented that there are great opportunities in the future with the funding provided and how this can make transformative changes to the communities being served. He again thanked everyone for participating in today's meeting.

## 4. Working Group Updates

a. Digital Readiness & Adoption – Eli Guinnee

Mr. Guinnee reported that the Abierta Digital Readiness Summit, the third annual summit as part of the Digital Readiness & Adoption Working Group, just took place at Dona Ana Community College in Las Cruces, which was a wonderful event. He expressed thanks for all

of the OBAE support from Ms. Nevarez and Director Lopez. He thanked Mr. Robert Del Plain, with the City of Las Cruces, the Mycelia Foundation and others for their help with this event. He stated there were over 100 attendees, a very good turnout, and each year the summit gets better. Topics covered were digital literacy efforts around the state, cybersecurity, and AI, which was a hot topic. This has provided a lot of momentum for this working group to keep going, and it is thriving, continuing to make connections and bringing in new members. This group meets the third Thursday of each month at 11:00 a.m. and interested parties can contact Mr. Guinnee to be added to the meeting attendee list and receive all of the updates. At the next meeting in April they will focus on AI, continuing this discussion.

Chair Reyes thanked Mr. Guinnee and called for any questions. There were none.

b. Legislative & Policy – Katherine Crociata

Ms. Crociata stated she has not had anyone sign up for this working group, so she does not have much to report. She would appreciate hearing from other Council members who are interested in serving in this group. She stated she did not want to provide duplicative reporting on the legislation that will be covered later in the meeting but offered her congratulations on the legislation which was just signed. She again asked interested parties to reach out and let her know if they are interested in joining this group.

Chair Reyes noted how important policy will be in driving the success of this initiative and encouraged anyone interested to contact Ms. Crociata. Director Lopez stated that OBAE General Counsel, Cassandra Brulotte, is ready to be staff support for this group and he will facilitate direct contact between Ms. Crociata and Ms. Brulotte, and Ms. Brulotte may have recommendations outside of this Council who might be interested in this working group. Ms. Crociata thanked him for this information.

c. Mapping & Right of Way – Launa Waller

Ms. Waller stated that she did not have anything to report as this group is still getting organized.

d. Tribal Working Group – Godfrey Enjady

Mr. Enjady reported that the Tribal Working Group has been working on getting an agenda out for tribes to be able to participate more and this has been progressing month by month. They are currently trying to plan a three-month agenda. His main concern is getting the new ACP program information out for the tribal entities, which has two sides, one of which is for tribes to be able to participate in this through a provider and the other is for some tribes that do have ISPs, how they can participate as a provider, trying to get ETC, how to do this. These will be some of the topics the group will be working on in the next three months.

He noted other issues affecting tribes, such as NTIA asking for audits as grants are closed out for tribes who are completing their projects. He stated that he is about half-way through his project. He commented that he is having some difficulty with permitting involving the railroads. He advised that tribes will need to be sure they are complete on their records retention, especially for NTIA as tribes get closer to finishing their projects and the close-out details involved with this. The working group has been addressing these issues in their monthly sessions to provide an outline and path of success for tribes, as well as staying informed about any new issues that arise.

Chair Reyes had a question about ET designation for tribes and pueblos and if this goes through the PRC. Mr. Enjady stated that is correct. Chair Reyes asked if this is a long process. Mr. Enjady replied that he talked with Mr. Eugene Evans about this yesterday and

what this process will actually be and he (Mr. Enjady) is in the process of outlining this as he has previously gone through this in the past, however, the PRC functioned very differently back then, and the current PRC is not quite as public about their activities. He surmised that the process would still be the same, but Mr. Evans is going to try to work on this as well. He reiterated that tribes have to be a separate entity enabled to waive sovereign immunity and gave the example of his company, which is separate from the tribe, and is a tribally chartered corporation, so the company was able to waive the sovereign immunity as a corporation, not as a tribe. This separation is necessary in order to participate with the PRC. He is not sure if every tribe in New Mexico has a constitution that allows for tribal corporations to be established. The working group is willing to work with tribes to get them through this process. Chair Reyes thanked him for this information and asked if there were any questions for Mr. Enjady. There were none.

## 5. **Update from OBAE – Jeff Lopez**

### a. Legislative Update

Director Lopez thanked Mr. Hopper for stepping into the role of facilitating these meetings. He added that DoIT is continuing to explore department support for the Council, which has been part of the plan, for OBAE to more fully support this Council. Director Lopez stated that in planning for the next legislative session he is looking for areas where OBAE can better align with this Council, as both were created in parallel back in 2021, so as Ms. Crociata organizes the Legislative Working Group this is something being considered, how to improve the formal coordination between OBAE and this Council, as the working relationship is a very good one.

Director Lopez reported that as Chair Reyes has already reported, the last legislative session went very well. The Office had two primary requests; 1) Extension of the Connect New Mexico Fund, which was signed into law as part of HB2, meaning all of the state programs, the Community Connect Program, Student Connect and the GWEP Program will all have a one-year extension. 2) SB152 - He expressed his thanks to Chair Reyes, Ms. Waller, Mr. Enjady, Mr. Guinnee and others in the meeting and on the Connect New Mexico Council for their support of this legislation. OBAE, in coordination with the PRC, assisted in drafting this. This makes its permanent home with part of the permanent fund, the State Rural Universal Service Fund, to support broadband affordability in perpetuity. He commented that he does not have a firm timeline to share on implementation of this, as this is at the discretion of the PRC. He highlighted the upper parts of the bill which maintains the \$12 million Broadband Fund at the PRC, which was underutilized last year, but will be available in future years to fill gaps that might remain or support operations and maintenance of broadband networks. This will also maintain access reduction support payments that currently exist and will continue in the future.

Specific to LITAP Director Lopez stated he had a conversation earlier today with Mr. Enjady about the tribal component, which is one of the first steps OBAE is taking to support establishment of the Low Income Telecommunications Assistance Program, to make clear the process to become a telecommunications carrier. Again, this is under the authority of the PRC, but the intent is to clarify this process as much as possible and make public information available regarding the specific steps and requirements under the State ETC. The intent is to make sure everyone in New Mexico can participate in LITAP and to make sure every internet service provider is able to become an ETC and provide that service to customers in their footprint. He stated that the rulemaking for LITAP has to be complete, per statute, by the end of 2026, so he is hoping some formal timelines from the PRC will be forthcoming by mid- to late summer. He added that his understanding of the legislative intent is that this is structured to replace the lapsed Affordable Connectivity Program. He commented that he will be working to demonstrate the success of the ACP, the success and lessons learned from Lifeline and identify other state programs which have had success, with lessons learned, to present a full

scope of options to the PRC in the rulemaking process.

Director Lopez reported that he was in Washington, D.C., last week as part of the NTIA State Broadband Leader Network Summit, which is held every six months. He stated that there was good discussion with a lot of input from NTIA, but not many external panels. There had been a promise for guidance on the remaining non-deployment funds under the BEAD program, but they did not meet the deadline, so this group is still awaiting guidance from NTIA. He noted the press release from OBAE this past week about this and he had sent a letter to NTIA Administrator Arielle Roth on February 17<sup>th</sup>, outlining what the State would like to see in terms of guidance for that program, and this was published in the press release that was made publicly available this past week. He stated he would share a link to this so everyone will have access to it.

Regarding the BEAD timeline the final proposal was submitted 09/06/2026, which NTIA approved in late January and is still at NIST, which is where the financial verification is done for the Notice of Award (NOA). Once the NOA is issued the State will have to sign an agreement with NTIA, and OBAE can begin signing agreements with the sub-grantees. All of the information has been released publicly regarding both the preliminary awards sent to NTIA in September and what was approved by NTIA in late January, which is a total of \$382 million for 31 projects throughout the State. He reiterated that this is an approved proposal and it will be for grant agreements to serve every small business and every household throughout the State. This information is an important point of discussion for this Council, as all of this data was based off 2025 numbers, so the mapping information from the FCC, verified by Ms. Runyan and the GIS and mapping team, was a point in time picture. There is a new version of that data from the FCC, which is being reviewed to assess the status of locations which may have been removed or added. This will be an ongoing process where every 4-6 months there will be a cadence of updates on locations, reporting from ISPs, and making sure there is a plan to connect every location. There will be enforceable commitments for 100% locations identified in 2025, but not necessarily the new versions of the maps, which is an important part of the policy discussion going forward. This is why it is very important to maintain the broadband program with the PRC so there will be state resources available if needed to fill these gaps. He added that he would like to see the BEAD program achieve its mission of primarily fiber first, and funds in place if needed to fill gaps, but this will be at the discretion of the federal government and NTIA in that case. However, now there are two other possibilities, the PRC fund, and hopefully more funds through OBAE, and of course this will always need to be part of the legislative discussion if OBAE and this Council would like to send a proposal to the legislature to fill these gaps in the future. He added that there have now been 53 states and territories approved by NTIA with 32 of these approved by NIST and have signed their agreements, which places New Mexico roughly in the middle of the process nationally.

Chair Reyes called for questions or comments from Council members.

Chair Reyes had a question regarding the ACP through the PRC and the rulemaking process. Director Lopez responded that this is correct. Chair Reyes observed that in this process the public will have an opportunity to comment on the process. Director Lopez added that there will be a docket opened for the rulemaking, with notice of the proposed rulemaking and then the docket will be opened for what members of the public, OBAE and other neutral parties would like to see from the LITAP program. Chair Reyes asked if this is to be completed by the end of 2026. Director Lopez replied that by statute the rulemaking must be complete by the end of calendar year 2026.

Chair Reyes called for any further questions from the Council on Director Lopez's report. There were none.

**6. Public Comment - Luis Reyes**

Beatriz Palacios asked to address the Council. She introduced herself as a new faculty member at UNM, in computer science. She commented that a lot of her work has overlap with the working groups of this Council, so she wanted to attend the meeting to see where there is interest and where there is space for her to join with good overlap of her work. She stated she will also be teaching a networking course next semester so she is hoping to connect some of the topics in the class with what is happening in New Mexico. She added that a lot of her interest is bridging technical issues with community needs, etc., so she is interested in making connections here. She thanked the Council for all the work they are doing.

Chair Reyes thanked her for attending and introducing herself, as well as for her interest in the work of the Council. He encouraged her to contact Mr. Hopper for any additional information she might need. Mr. Hopper stated he would put his email and phone number in the meeting Chat. Ms. Palacios thanked them.

There were no other comments offered.

**7. Adjournment:**

**MOTION:** There being no further business before the Council, Chair Reyes called for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Grey so moved, seconded by Ms. Waller. There being no opposition, the meeting adjourned at 2:06 p.m.