

State Leadership and Cross-sector Collaboration for Expanded Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure

From: New Mexico Broadband Connections (nmbroadbandconnections@benton.org)

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The New Mexico Office of Broadband Access and Expansion submitted an application for \$33 million in federal broadband funding and supported several complementary applications from New Mexico broadband providers. Altogether, New Mexico applicants are seeking over \$100 million from the \$1 billion [Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Grant Program](#) to expand critical “middle mile” broadband infrastructure ahead of historic state and federal investments in universal “last mile” access to homes and businesses.

“Middle mile broadband infrastructure is like the interstate highway system of the 21st century,” said Office of Broadband Access and Expansion Director Kelly Schlegel. “It supports connectivity across our state—and around the country. Robust middle mile broadband infrastructure will accelerate our push for universal broadband connectivity and it will help us focus available state and federal funds on building out local networks to homes and businesses. We look forward to working closely with our broadband provider community to identify broadband access and infrastructure gaps, to craft collaborative solutions, and to direct resources efficiently and effectively.”

The Office of Broadband Access and Expansion (OBAE) was active on the middle mile broadband front earlier this year. It issued a request for information (RFI) to take stock of middle mile assets and needs across the state, including among public agencies, private broadband providers, and various other stakeholders. A second RFI was issued to coordinate applications for the Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Grant Program, for which OBAE offered letters of support for applicants—along with the opportunity to forge compelling cross-sector collaborations.

In early October, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) announced that it had received 235 applications seeking over \$5.5 billion in federal grant support—confirming the staggering need for middle mile broadband infrastructure investment nationally. Responses to New Mexico’s RFIs confirm our need, as well, for strong investment in robust, redundant, and resilient broadband infrastructure along priority corridors throughout the state.



Timeline for the Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Grant Program

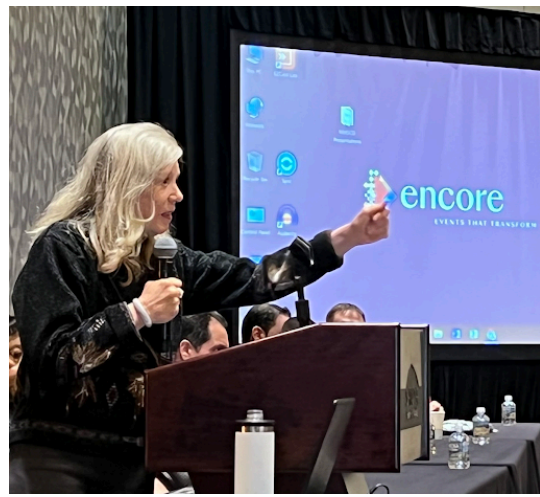
The Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Grant Program complements the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program and the Digital Equity program—all of which were made possible through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), otherwise known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL).

From the Director's Desk

The New Mexico Office of Broadband Access and Expansion has been working hard to build capacity, review Connect New Mexico Pilot Program applications, and prepare for the arrival of historic federal resources, among other priorities. Part of this preparation includes year-long outreach and engagement toward our broadband and digital equity plans—due to our federal funding partners in Fall 2023.

This preparation also includes perfecting our state-driven approach to broadband mapping. First, our [New Mexico Broadband Map](#) and [Mapping Review](#) resource continues to benefit from new data and updates; we’re asking all New Mexico broadband providers to participate in our data collection and

processing collaboration with the University of New Mexico Earth Data Analysis Center (EDAC). Second, we'll be providing clear guidance to our providers, communities, tribes, and other stakeholders on how best to [challenge federal mapping](#)—including the broadband serviceable location “fabric” and resulting federal broadband access maps.



Director Schlegel discussing broadband finance

Please stay tuned for more information from our office on these efforts—by reviewing this newsletter, [visiting our website](#), or reaching out to us directly.

Together, we're connecting New Mexico!

Kelly Schlegel

Director

Office of Broadband Access and Expansion

Connect New Mexico Council Visits Clovis

On October 12, the Connect New Mexico Council held its monthly hybrid meeting at the headquarters of Plateau Communications, located in Clovis. Those council members participating in person had an opportunity to tour the provider's central office and hear first from local residents and other stakeholders interested in sharing their perspectives on broadband and digital equity. This included the state's plans for building capacity to meet its goal of universal access to affordable, reliable, high-performance broadband throughout New Mexico.



OBAE staff discussing broadband mapping in Clovis

The meeting agenda included discussion of the Connect New Mexico Pilot Program, opportunities for tribal outreach and engagement, and updates from each of the Connect New Mexico Council's six working groups: digital equity and inclusion; grants programming; mapping, data, and evaluation; permits, rights-of-way, and pole attachments; regional planning and community engagement; and tribal outreach and programming. Future editions of our *New Mexico Broadband Connections* newsletter will feature the work of the council and its working groups.

Director Schlegel Presents to New Mexico Indian Affairs Committee

Earlier this month Office of Broadband Access and Expansion (OBAE) Director Kelly Schlegel presented to the Legislative interim Indian Affairs Committee at a hearing held at the Santa Fe Indian School. Director Schlegel was asked to provide testimony along with other panelists representing Sacred Wind Communications, the Navajo Nation, and other industry service providers.

Director Schlegel was asked to provide an update on OBAE's priorities as it relates to resources and support for tribal and pueblo communities for enhancing connectivity. There was a productive exchange among committee members and presenters about the role of OBAE for ensuring high standards of service and access to resources as part of the office's primary mission.

Annual Report on Access, Equity, and Data Collection



Connect New Mexico Council and Office of Broadband Access and Expansion
Governor Michelle Lujan-Grisham

Meeting its October 1 statutory deadline, the Office of Broadband Access and Expansion (OBAE), in coordination with the Connect New Mexico Council, reported progress toward meeting its statutory obligations per the Broadband Access and Expansion Act ([Senate Bill 93](#)) and the Connect New Mexico Act ([House Bill 10](#)). Just as important, the report noted significant progress toward meeting the broadband moment—the unique confluence of historic state and federal funding opportunities, cross-sector and public interest alignment, and vision for universal access to reliable, affordable, high-speed internet statewide.

The report marked the first in a series of annual updates intended to summarize, on a county-by-county basis, “access to and quality of service of broadband across the state.” The report builds on the 2020 broadband plan—the [State of New Mexico Broadband Strategic Plan and Rural Broadband Assessment](#)—and anticipates creation of a State Digital Equity Plan and Five-Year Action Plan as required to leverage the state’s full share of federal broadband and digital equity funding per the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Initial federal funding—along with the robust statewide engagement, data collection, and planning it will support—is expected to commence coordinated, year-long activity in October 2022.

Although the State Digital Equity Plan and Five-Year Action Plan will guide future investment of federal funds, these plans will be completed to align with and meet similar statutory requirements and legislative interests established in state law. Much of this work lies ahead, but OBAE knows—through various data sources—that New Mexico faces significant barriers to universal broadband access and true digital equity:

- An estimated 196,000 New Mexico households lack access to broadband service of at least 100/20 Mbps—the standard federal benchmark for “underserved” and threshold for use of federal funding.
- 26 New Mexico counties are considered to have high or moderate levels of “digital distress”—that is, significant households relying upon mobile broadband and/or lacking access to computing devices.
- Demand among qualifying New Mexico households for the Affordable Connectivity

Program (formerly the Emergency Broadband Benefit) is considerable, with the state consistently ranking among the top three in participation among households with school-aged children seeking monthly subscription assistance (now \$30 per household, \$75 for tribal households).

The report summarizes known measures for broadband access and digital equity including OBAE progress toward digital equity planning and programming; similar progress toward implementation of the state broadband plan; identified obstacles to an integrated system of permits, licenses, and rules for broadband access; recommended statutory, regulatory, and policy changes; and the status of broadband grant programs, including those expanding access, pursuing digital equity, and supporting local planning. To view the full report, [click here](#).

[Read the Full Report](#)

USDA's ReConnect Round 4 Accepting Applications, Hosting Informational Webinars

The USDA Rural Development Rural Utilities Service (RUS) is hosting its last two "[Ask Me Anything: ReConnect](#)" Q&A sessions before the application window closes on November 2, 2022. Each webinar will provide an opportunity for attendees to ask questions about the Program. USDA RUS staff will answer as many questions as time permits. If you wish to attend both sessions, you must register for each individual event.

The webinars will take place on:

- Thursday, October 27th from 1:00PM to 2:00PM Eastern. [Register here!](#)
- Monday, October 31st from 1:00PM to 2:00PM Eastern. [Register here!](#)

The ReConnect Program offers loans, grants, and loan/grant combinations to facilitate high-speed internet in areas of rural America without sufficient access to broadband. To learn more about the ReConnect Program, please visit <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect>.

In 2022, New Mexico [received](#) more than \$100M for rural high-speed internet. Projects include:

- \$3.7 million grant to Continental Divide Electric Cooperative for Cibola and McKinley counties, including Laguna and Acoma pueblos
- \$11.7 million grant/loan to Tularosa Basin Telephone Company for Lincoln and Otero counties, including the Mescalero Apache Nation
- \$14.7 million grant to ENMR Telephone Cooperative/Plateau for Chaves, Colfax, De Baca, Guadalupe, Harding, Lincoln, San Miguel, Socorro, Torrance and Union counties

- \$28.9 million loan to Peñasco Valley Telephone Cooperative for Chaves, Eddy, Lincoln and Otero counties
- \$44.9 million loan to Valley Telephone Cooperative for southwest New Mexico and southeast Arizona

News & Articles

Oct 26 | [Sen Martin Heinrich \(D-NM\) Welcomes FCC's New Pilot Program To Make It Easier For Tribal Libraries To Secure Funding For Broadband](#) (Sen Martin Heinrich)

Oct 23 | [Health Action New Mexico Helps Rural Communities With Broadband Access](#) (KRWG)

Oct 21 | [Hoopa Valley Tribe is Closing the Digital Divide](#) (Benton Institute for Broadband & Society)

Oct 19 | [FCC's ACP Pilot Programs Coming Soon](#) (Benton Institute for Broadband & Society)

Oct 19 | [Dollars to Megabit, You May Be Paying 400 Times As Much As Your Neighbor for Internet Service](#) (The Markup)

Oct 18 | [Don't Discount the Investments in Internet Infrastructure that Content and Application Providers are Making](#) (Benton Institute for Broadband & Society)

Oct 12 | [Michigan All-In on Closing the Digital Divide with American Rescue Plan Support](#) (Benton Institute for Broadband & Society)

Oct 12 | [Health Care Improvements Made in Four NM Communities, Including Telehealth Projects and Equipment Purchases](#) (USDA Rural Development)

Oct 11 | ['Yes' on Amendment 2 = broadband and jobs](#) (Rep Anthony Allison, Rep Christine Chandler Op-Ed in Albuquerque Journal)

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Resources

[New Mexico Office of Broadband Access & Expansion](#)

[Connect New Mexico Broadband Grant Program Map](#)

[NM Broadband Speed & Quality Testing](#)

[Affordable Connectivity Program \(ACP\) Consumer FAQ](#)

[FCC Outreach Toolkit for ACP](#)

For questions, email nmbroadbandconnections@benton.org.

Looking for more broadband policy news? The Benton Institute for Broadband & Society offers a free, reliable, and non-partisan daily digest that curates and distributes news related to universal broadband. You can [subscribe to this service here](#) to learn how broadband delivers opportunities and strengthens communities.

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