



Office of Broadband Access and Expansion

Connect New Mexico Fund

Webinar Series

Topic: Scoring Guide

January 12, 2024

Topics

- Purpose of Scoring Guide
- Review Process
- Legislative Directive
- Scoring Categories
- Recommendations
- Walk Through

Purpose of Scoring Guide

- The scoring guide aims to achieve several objectives.

Methodical, Structured Approach

- Provides a methodical, structured approach to comprehensively assess an application's potential to achieve the purpose of the Connect New Mexico Fund.

Consistency

- Enables an individual reviewer to apply a consistent evaluation standard across multiple applications and ensure a consistent evaluation approach across various reviewers.

Transparency

- Provides applicants and stakeholders detailed transparency regarding the evaluation criteria and weight of the individual factors.

Incentivizes Awardee Alignment with Program Objectives

- Directs applicants to develop a comprehensive strategy and implementation plan that achieves the program objectives.

Enables Due Diligence Process

- Allows program staff to identify and resolve a significant weakness during the diligence process (for an otherwise strong application).
 - E.g., lack of budget or project plan details; insufficient corroborating details regarding matching contributions

Review Phases

- The review process involves a three-part process.

	Application Review	Due Diligence	Final Selection
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate an application based on a standard set of comprehensive evaluation criteria Eight major categories and 25 sub-categories that sum to 200 points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further assess and/or resolve key deficiencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budgetary details and opportunities to lower upfront costs Reasonableness of pricing Inclusion of low-cost option Grant requested commensurate with demonstrated financial need (e.g., funding gap in the business case) Consideration of justification for waiver of the minimum match requirement (if applicable) Request for further information that is found to be missing, incomplete, redacted, unclear, or requiring clarification Unserved/underserved challenge by incumbent ISP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider other factors that serve the public interest, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding a diversity of projects across organizations, geographies, technologies, and business models Socioeconomic development priorities Broadband strategic planning activities and coordination with other federal funding programs Alignment with policies, programs, and priorities as recognized by the Governor of New Mexico
Owner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team of at least three subject matter experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OBAE staff and contractors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OBAE and State Leadership (Governor's Office)
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projects that receive a relatively high percentage of the total score move to due diligence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resolution of such issues enables application to move toward final selection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final selection of strongest applications that best achieve program purpose and offer other distinct strategic advantages

Application Review Process

Overview

- Applications will be reviewed by a team of subject matter experts in the broadband sector.
- Each application will have at least three reviewers. These reviewers may be OBAE employees and contractors.
- During the review process, the reviewers may discuss the application with each other but not their scores, which will be determined on an individual basis.
- Projects will be scored based on the scoring criteria listed in the Scoring Guide.
- Projects that receive a higher proportion of the available points, especially relative to the average scores in a particular wave, then move into the Due Diligence phase.

House Bill 262

- House Bill 262 directed the broadband office to consider the following factors when approving grants from the Connect New Mexico Fund.
- The Scoring Rubric encompasses all these factors for consideration.

Table A

- The extent to which the project:
 - Connects unserved and underserved populations of New Mexico, with priority given to projects that will connect unserved populations;
 - Meets or exceeds the baseline standards established by the federal communications commission;
 - Leverages existing infrastructure;
 - Complements or coordinates with the statewide broadband plan;
 - Leverages regional collaboration;
 - Fosters digital inclusion;
 - Stimulates in-state economic development, including the creation of jobs and apprenticeships;
 - Leverages in-kind or financial support from local agencies or entities, federal assistance funding or federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, federal Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 or federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 funding; and
- For a grant award to a private entity:
 - the extent to which the grantee contributes matching funds or in-kind support for the project,
 - the number of existing residences to which internet services would be made available as a percentage of the total number of existing locations to which internet services would be made available by the project
 - the extent to which the project fosters digital equity

Scoring Categories

- Two hundred points are allocated across eight major categories, which are divided among 25 sub-categories.

A) Project Impact	36
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadband Impact: The degree of: a) unserved and underserved locations passed by wireline or covered by fixed wireless or alternative technologies; b) unserved locations relative to underserved locations; c) the magnitude of speed increase relative to existing service speeds • Note: Locations are defined as residents and businesses per the NOFO. 	16
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive Community Impact: The degree to which the network serves the broader community, including community institutions, government facilities, backhaul for commercial mobile and public safety networks, backhaul to data centers, network resiliency and redundancy, etc. 	8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential Impact: The degree to which eligible residential locations are connected relative to the total locations being targeted. 	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socioeconomic Development: Opportunities for the project to foster DISTINCT and UNIQUE social and economic development across targeted communities (e.g., housing development, business or population retention, community institution connectivity, infrastructure resiliency or redundancy, public safety, local employment, community programs to drive online adoption for telehealth or distance learning, etc.) 	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree of Economic and Community-Specific Hardships: The level of economic distress based on key indicators, such as unemployment rates, poverty levels, income levels; considers other hardships (e.g., wildfire damage, threats to community safety, etc.) 	4
B) Community Engagement	20
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and Regional Community Partnerships: Partnerships with local and regional community organizations, businesses, government entities, and other broadband service providers to help achieve the project mission and maximize community impact 	8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Support: The degree of community support from beneficiaries (e.g., connected residents, businesses, community institutions), community leaders, and other local interests 	8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Financial Contribution: Financial and/or in-kind contribution from local government, community organizations and individuals 	4

Scoring Categories

C) Economic Efficiency	28
• Matching Contribution Degree: The degree to which the matching contribution is above the minimum 25% requirement	8
• Financial Need: Demonstration that absent subsidy support, the project could not move forward after considering total capital investment, reasonable non-state match, other business case inputs (e.g., recurring revenues and costs) to yield a reasonable return on investment for a publicly funded project. Also considers the fairness of the match being contributed in light of these factors.	8
• Project Cost Efficiency: Demonstration that the collective set of decisions across technology selection, network design, procurement processes, and strategic planning yields the most cost-effective budget	8
• Leveraging of Existing Assets: Leverage of existing and planned network assets and facilities that would otherwise require expenditure (e.g., middle-mile)	4
D) Project Readiness	20
• Network and Technology Details: Details of network design, route map, technology architecture, and integration with regional networks	8
• Detailed Budget: Detailed itemized budget that lists the quantity and cost for every line item and brief narrative on purpose and reasonableness of expenditure	8
• Detailed Project Schedule: Details of project activities, milestones, target dates, dependencies, and identification of all major risks and detailed risk mitigation plan	4
E) Organizational Qualifications	16
• Organizational Experience and Capability: Demonstrated experience and capabilities in executing similar projects	8
• Local and/or Regional Workforce Participation: Prior experience with and planned strategy for hiring local staff and leveraging local/regional firms and contractors to design, plan, deploy, and operate the project	8

Scoring Framework (continued)

F) Marketing and Services Strategy	32
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pricing Competitiveness: The degree to which prices are commensurate with rates in competitive, urban markets 	12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse Set of Service Offerings: The breadth of service offerings to accommodate a diverse set of customer segments and other supporting services 	8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Acquisition and Retention Strategy: The level of detail and comprehensiveness regarding plans to capture, support and retain customers and customization of strategy for different customer segments (e.g., residents vs. institutions) 	8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open Access Policies: A) For last-mile networks, policies and programs to offer wholesale services to other retail last-mile service providers; b) For middle-mile, policies and programs to provide wholesale services, including dark-fiber to other network service providers. • ** Note: For middle-mile segments, NOFO requires grantees to provide interconnection and wholesale services to service providers; dark-fiber must be provided to government entities for government usage. 	4
G) Adoption Assistance	24
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordability Assistance Programs: Collective set of programs and policies to foster affordability for all community segments • Note: OBAE requires applicants to participate in the FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program and other future programs to enable affordability for designated low-income residents. 	12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Inclusion Programs: Programs and strategies to enable adoption, including devices, digital literacy, outreach, community networks, etc. 	12
H) Project Sustainability	24
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Viability: Assessment of business case (e.g., comprehensive, detailed showing of revenue and cost elements) and financial strength of applicant 	12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network Capacity and Scalability: Total capacity available today and capability of network to efficiently scale to accommodate future bandwidth demand 	12

Recommendations

Tips

- Ensure your responsiveness to the evaluation criteria is reflected throughout the answers in the application.
- Meet the three C's across all your responses: clarity, credibility, and comprehensiveness.
- Highlight the factors where you offer distinct advantages (e.g., high matching contribution, innovative community partnerships to promote digital equity, budget efficiency, leverage of existing assets, sharing fiber with mobile and public safety networks, grassroots support with personalized support letters, etc.).
- For non-fiber projects, showcase how the alternative technology does the following: provides reliable 100/20 Mbps at the “busy hour”; constitutes a future-proof solution (i.e., scalable to 100 Mbps symmetrical speeds); overcomes critical barriers to fiber deployment (e.g., exorbitant upfront costs, business case challenges, critical barriers preventing deployment – permitting, environmental, inability for buried or aerial placement).
- Expect that many great projects may not receive an award due to the heavy capital costs required to achieve universal service relative to the available funds. The \$675 million BEAD fund will provide future opportunities.

Walk Through

https://connect.nm.gov/uploads/1/4/1/9/141989814/connect_nm_fund_scoring_guide_12-12-23_final.pdf