

DOC-NTIA-OTIA (US)
Broadband Infrastructure Program

Moderator: Sarah Bleau
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Sarah Bleau:

1:43

Hi folks, my name is Sarah. I'm just jumping on to let everyone know that unfortunately for a portion of this webinar, if you are using the phone audio to dial in with that phone bridge for the audio of this webinar, you will not be able to hear a portion of the webinar. The solution that we do have is that if you're able to go to the GoToWebinar app from the Apple store or Google Play Store, you should be able to hear the prerecorded portion of the webinar. Again, we apologize for this, but that is the solution we have. We will get started here shortly. Please hold on for a few more minutes. Thank you very much.

2:42

Hello and thank you for joining us today for Broadband USA's webinar. I am Sarah Bleau with NTIA's BroadbandUSA Program.

2:52

As a reminder, the webinar is being recorded and will be posted to NTIA's BroadbandUSA Program website. Today's webinar focuses on NTIA's broadband infrastructure program and is the third of a four-part series.

3:07

Before we begin, I would like to review a few of the logistics. First, we will open up the webinar for questions and answers upon completion of the presentations. As you listen to each presenter, please use the question box in the lower right-hand [side of the] screen to submit your questions or comments.

3:27

Second, the presentation – along with a transcript and audio recording of today's session – will be available on our website within seven days of this webinar under the Events/Past Events tab. And, finally, please visit our BroadbandUSA website for information about our technical assistance program, including useful guides, products, publications, and other tools that can assist you with planning, funding, implementing, et cetera, your broadband project. We provide updated information, including our monthly newsletter and other broadband news.

4:05

Our presenters today are Katherine Bates, Jennifer Duane, and Tim Moyer, all from the BroadbandUSA team within NTIA. We are also joined by Amanda Pereira, who is from the First Responder Network Authority.

4:19

I'd like to tell you a little bit about each of our presenters.

4:23

Katherine Bates is back with us after being on loan to the Treasury Department, and she's acting as the team lead for this Broadband Infrastructure Program. Additionally, Katherine has worked with state and local governments to increase broadband access throughout the United States, focusing on unserved and underserved areas. Before joining BroadbandUSA, she worked with the large library systems on the E-Rate Modernization effort and also at ICF International, which is a global consulting firm. And she focused there on broadband, funding, planning, training, and technical assistance. Prior to that, Katherine spent about 10 years with a national association representing municipal interests, focusing particularly on information technology, broadband policy, and community and economic development. Katherine received her Bachelor's in Business and a Master's in Public Administration from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Please welcome Katherine.

5:26

Our second speaker is Jennifer Duane. Jennifer is a Senior Broadband Program Specialist for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, which we call NTIA, for our BroadbandUSA program, where she manages the office's grant programs, and facilitates inter-agency coordination to support efforts to streamline federal permitting processes. Jennifer joined NTIA in 2009 to develop policy for the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program, which is called BTOP. She then served for two years as Senior Advisor in the Office of Chief Counsel for NTIA, providing legal advice to NTIA offices on a variety of telecommunications, information technology, and commercial data privacy matters. From 2012 until 2017, Jennifer served as Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary on matters related to broadband and public safety.

6:26

Before joining NTIA, Jennifer served as a State regulatory attorney, and also Director of Federal Regulatory Affairs for Sprint. She earned an undergraduate degree in Economics from Penn State University, and a Juris Doctorate from the George Washington University Law School. Please welcome Jennifer.

6:47

Tim Moyer is our Director of Data and Mapping for NTIA's BroadbandUSA Program. Tim leads the NTIA's National Broadband Availability Map which is called NBAM and also provides program management and data analytics support for the NTIA BroadbandUSA Program. Previously, Tim managed a portfolio of infrastructure grants as part of BTOP. He is an expert in project and program management and has spent about 20 years with other telecommunication projects. Before joining NTIA, Tim worked at Sprint, where he was the Director of Project Management and Corporate Development and Spectrum Management as

well. He's earned a Bachelor of Arts and a Master's of Business Administration from Cal State University in Hayward. He's also earned a Master's Certificate in Project Management from the George Washington University and is a Certified Project Management Professional. Please welcome Tim.

7:51

And at last, we have Amanda Pereira. Amanda is an environmental and NEPA Specialist with more than 19 years of experience. She has worked on a wide variety of environmental and social issues, including environmental compliance, community development, socioeconomic impact analysis, and urban master planning. Her work particularly focuses on compliance with the *National Environmental Policy Act*, called NEPA, as well as other Environmental and Historic Preservation Laws through developing NEPA documents, developing program strategy, supporting compliance activities, drafting technical requirements, and conducting training on regulatory compliance. She has served as a project manager, lead author, or subject matter expert on numerous environmental impact statements and environmental assessments. She has worked extensively on NEPA for federal grants including BTOP and the Public Safety Interoperable Communications Grants programs. Please welcome Amanda.

9:03

Today our team will cover a variety of topics from key dates and important reminders about the program, and also a tool called the Indicators of Broadband Need, a public map which you'll get a demonstration of in a few moments. Then we hope you will have a much better understanding [and] some good insight into the environmental and historic permitting requirements. And finally, we will open up for Q&A upon completion here. Please type your questions into the lower right box, and we will do our best to respond to them with the remaining time.

9:38

And now, I am really excited to let you meet Katherine Bates. Thank you.

9:45

Katherine Bates:

Thank you, Sarah. I'm happy to be here today. I recently returned from detail at the US. Department of Treasury, where I was working on the broadband funding in *American Rescue Plan Act*.

9:56

I am happy to be back home at NTIA working on this exciting program that will increase broadband deployment in the US. This program is especially near and dear to me as it highlights the important work that state and local governments are doing to connect all Americans. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo understands the importance of connectivity and how it's tied to the success of the US economy.

10:18

It is a priority for the Administration and the Department of Commerce. She recently stated that today, Americans in rural areas and on tribal lands particularly lack broadband access. In urban areas there's a stark digital divide. A much higher percentage of white families use home broadband Internet than black and Latino families. Widespread affordable coverage promises to bridge those disparities, bring the benefits of the digital age to all, and transform our economy just as electrification did 100 years ago.

10:49

Like I said, it's an exciting time to be working to connect all Americans. One vehicle to do that is this program, NTIA's Broadband Infrastructure Grant Program.

11:00

I want to go over a few high-level details of the program before I hand it off to my colleague. The NOFO and FAQs are posted at broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov under Grants. We will have round four of FAQs coming out soon and we'll notify you when those are posted.

11:22

As most of you know, complete applications must be received by www.grants.gov no later than 11:59pm Eastern Time on Tuesday, August 17 (please don't do October). NTIA expects to complete the review, selection of successful applicants, and award processing by November 15th. The two important dates you must know are August 17th and November 15th.

11:54

We still need a few merit reviewers for this program and other NTIA grant programs because we conduct merit reviews for all the applications. This review involves teams of technical experts to look at the applications and review it on criteria specific to each program, so all three programs need merit reviewers. We are seeking qualified volunteers with expertise and experience in a wide array of broadband activities, including infrastructure and adoption. If you're interested, please e-mail a resume to grantreviewer@NTIA.gov. Again that's grantreviewer@NTIA.gov containing the following information: your name; your residence that includes the city and state; your e-mail and phone number; your employers, including the states where you were employed, your position title, and your years and types of experience, positions, and fields related to broadband activity. If you have any other questions about the merit review process and want to be involved, please e-mail those to the same e-mail: grantreviewer@NTIA.gov.

13:07

Thank you and now I'd like to turn it over to my colleague, Jennifer Duane, to talk more specifically about the grant program.

13:16

Jennifer Duane:

Alright, thank you, Katherine. I'm Jennifer Duane, Director of Grants for our Office of Telecommunications and Information Applications here at NTIA, and I'm going to be giving an overview of our Broadband Infrastructure Program.

13:30

Now, our previous webinar in June focused in-depth on the requirements of the Broadband Infrastructure Program and our Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), which we had released in May. I'm just going to give a brief overview for purposes of this webinar presentation on some of the key points of the program that I want to reiterate and highlight for this webinar session.

13:56

I just wanted to go over the program overview elements. First, it's a grant program [that has] \$288 million to available to award. The eligible entities are covered partnerships, which are states, or one or more political subdivisions of the state, and a fixed broadband service provider.

14:17

They are partnering to deploy covered broadband projects, which are defined as competitively and technologically neutral projects for the deployment of fixed broadband service that provides qualifying broadband service in an eligible service area.

14:37

We opened the application window with the release of our NOFO on May 19th, and we are accepting applications through August 17, 2021. This is a 90-day application window that was required under our statute that established this program in the *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021*.

14:58

So, I just wanted to reiterate some of the key definitions in the Act. First is the definition of qualifying broadband service. This is defined as download speed of not less than 25 megabits per second, an upload speed of not less than 3 megabits per second, along with a latency sufficient to support real-time, interactive applications.

15:23

Now, in our NOFO we added a bit more context to this definition with respect to the download and upload speeds of 25/3. We added the requirement that there must be the ability to deliver 25/3 simultaneously to every household in the eligible service area. With respect to latency, we added some more context around that definition, as defined as 95% or more of all peak period measurements of network round trip latency. That is between the customer premises and the closest Internet core peering interconnection point are at or below 100 milliseconds.

16:04

Now, this is consistent with how the FCC defines latency for purposes of its universal support programs and the download/upload speed is

consistent with how the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) defines that requirement for purposes of its Reconnect Program.

16:24

Another key definition that I want to highlight and reiterate during this webinar is the definition of unserved. That means households lacking access to qualifying broadband service, which I just discussed in the previous slide, and that no broadband provider has been selected to receive, or is otherwise receiving, federal or state funding subject to enforceable build out commitments to deploy qualifying broadband service in the specific area where the household is located.

16:54

And now the other key definition that I want to emphasize here is eligible service area, and that is defined in the Act as a census block in which broadband service is not available at one or more households or businesses in the census block.

17:11

To be eligible for grants under this program, the Act requires certain things that a covered partnership must submit. An application that describes the following: it must define the covered partnership. So we want to know the identity of the state and the one or more political subdivisions of the state, and the fixed broadband service provider that form the covered partnership. We want to understand the project that they're going to implement, the type of broadband project that they will deploy for purposes of this program.

17:45

The covered partnership will define the proposed service area that they plan to deploy the broadband infrastructure, and we also want to know if there's either federal or state support that the broadband service provider is receiving as a result of other federal or state broadband investment programs.

18:07

This information will be reported in the project narrative, which will be submitted along with the other application materials, and that is described in more detail in our Notice of Funding Opportunity.

18:22

The other requirement that I want to emphasize is that each covered partnership may submit only one application for this grant program. The covered partnership may include more than one provider of fixed broadband service in its application, and the provider of fixed broadband service may participate in more than one covered partnership.

18:46

Now, the Act defines a number of funding priorities and are listed here in decreasing order. The first priority is projects designed to provide broadband service to the greatest number of households in an eligible

service area. This is a priority that NTIA will be focusing on in its initial review of applications. The second priority is projects designed to provide broadband service in an eligible service area that is outside of an urban area, county, city, or town with more than 50,000 inhabitants. So, the intent here is to focus on more rural service areas.

19:30

The third criteria are looking at projects that are the most cost effective and prioritizing projects in areas that are the most rural.

19:38

And then finally, we'll be looking at projects that are designed to provide broadband service with a download speed of at least 100 megabits per second and an upload speed of at least 20 megabits per second.

19:51

So again, I want to emphasize some key application dates. As I mentioned earlier, the application deadline for this program is August 17, 2021. All applications must be received by 11:59pm [Eastern] through grants.gov

20:08

Pursuant to the statute, NTIA has 90 days to review and approve or deny applications that we receive under this program. So that puts our target date at November 15th, 2021. Now, the Act provides a very aggressive timeline for expending funds under this program, limiting it to one year after receipt. Now, we realize with broadband infrastructure deployment projects it's very rare that a broadband project will be completed within one year, and so the Act also provides for the ability of the Assistant Secretary to grant an extension for broadband construction projects. To qualify, the covered partnership must certify that it has a plan for the use of the grant funds, the Construction project is underway, or extenuating circumstances require an extension to ensure project completion. Now we fully expect to be granting these extensions, and we've also allowed covered partnerships to submit that request for an extension with their application.

21:18

The NOFO also indicates that no later than 90 days before the one-year award period, covered partnerships must submit those requests for extensions to give us time to review and evaluate those requests.

21:33

So now I'm going to turn the presentation over to my colleague Tim Moyer. He is our Director of Data and Mapping and he will be discussing our recently released Indicators of Broadband Need map.

21:48

Tim, over to you.

21:53

Tim Moyer:

Thanks, Jennifer. So, my name is Tim Moyer. I'm the Director of Data and Mapping here at NTIA. I'll be providing an overview of our new Indicators of Broadband Need map.

22:04

So over the next few slides, you're going to see examples of the indicators of need data that we've included in the map. I'm going to dig into those in detail, so, I just want to provide an overview here, and then we'll transition into the demo of the map itself.

22:20

So, you can see speed tests. We have American Community Survey (ACS) data. And at this point, I'm going to share my screen and take over.

22:32

So we start here at NTIA's BroadbandUSA website, select Resources, go to Data & Mapping, and we come to the Public Map & Tools section. We've got an overview here and then we can go directly to the map itself.

22:49

So, the Indicators of Broadband Need interactive map was designed to bring multiple, third-party data sources together to help the public better understand the digital divide and the connection between poverty and lack of broadband access or use.

23:04

So, I'm going to provide a high-level overview of the map so we can see how to navigate, and then I'm going to dig into the details.

23:11

So, when you first turn on the map, you're going to get this popup screen here that provides an explanation of what the map is. We'll select OK. Here we have the different indicators of need. You'll see that we have data at the county, the census tract, and the census block. We also have supporting information here from Minority Serving Institutions and Tribal lands. And as we dig into the details, I want you to keep an eye down here because when we zoom into different levels of geography, you'll see that this will change. And interestingly, the popups will change also. It's a dynamic map.

23:52

If we look at our legend, red is an indicator of need. Green means lack of an indicator of need, and gray means there's no data. We also have for our Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) color coded by institution type. And we can see here how the Tribal lands will be displayed.

24:11

Over here, we have a filter that enables us to toggle individual MSI types on and off, and I'll show you that in action in a little bit. And in our information section, we have an overview about the map.

24:26

An important disclaimer here: the data presented as is – we've collected third-party data. This is not data that NTIA generated ourselves, and so we're bringing that data together in a meaningful way. We've provided a way to access the underlying aggregated data that supports the map, and we provided layer by layer descriptions with links back to the source material.

24:50

Over here, you'll see a user guide. Again, we have information about the data layers themselves. Then for folks that aren't as familiar with GIS, this is a commercial off the shelf software package. And so we've got some instructions about how to do some basic GIS navigating and all the different sections here.

25:14

We also have a FAQs document, frequently asked questions for things that folks may find interesting. And this will be a living document that will grow over time.

25:26

So let's go back to the map. So what's interesting with GIS is layering. And so you'll see here that we have all of these layers toggled on right now. I'm going to turn a few of them off and then talk about them individually.

25:39

So we start with the 477 data. And the way we presented this is that we know that 477 data is presented at the census block, and the methodology is that if anybody at the census block is served, the whole block is served. And so that can lead to overstatement of broadband availability in some areas.

25:57

So what we wanted to do is find out the areas where the broadband providers themselves have identified in the 477 reporting that they don't have services that meet the 25/3 threshold. And so you'll see here that the areas in red don't have 25/3 infrastructure.

26:16

If we look at the Microsoft usage data, think of this as machine-to-machine type data. When we're asleep at night, if you have a Microsoft product that connects to the Internet, it can download security software and things like that. Microsoft has a way to measure the speed on the download. And so what we're saying here is that 75% or more of the people in the county that use Microsoft services are not downloading at 25 megabits. And so when we turn that on, you'll see that the areas that got redder reinforce the 477 data. But we also see lots of areas where the Microsoft data suggests that there are other areas that may not be at 25/3.

27:01

So, I'll toggle this back off and you can see the 477 data. And then when you bring the Microsoft data on, it's a little bit of a different picture.

27:10

So look at Measurement Lab. Measurement Lab is crowdsource speed test data. We see a similar story at the county level. It reinforces some of the 477 data, but also highlights areas that potentially are an indicator of need. When you combine all three together, you really see them reinforcing [one another]. And it's important to note that NTIA recognizes that there is no silver bullet, single dataset that's going to answer all these questions. There are challenges with any crowdsource dataset. So it's the layering of multiple data sets that reinforces and gives you more confidence as areas become redder that that's something worth digging into.

27:50

Now we'll look at the census tract level. We have Ookla speed test data. And you'll see that the Ookla also has lots of pockets that weren't identified in the 477 data, but also reinforces the 477 data.

28:07

I'm going to turn that off and we're going to turn over our attention to some of the survey data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. We see here that 25% of households report that they don't have Internet access at all.

28:26

In this we see that 25 percent of households say that they don't have some sort of computer device – either a computer, a laptop, or a phone that's connected to the Internet. This down here is very interesting if you look at the poverty dataset. It's going to take a second to render, but we have 20% or more of households are below the poverty line. And you're going to see a really interesting correlation here when I start turning on the Tribal lands and the Minority Serving Institutions. Minority Serving Institutions follow the poverty line. Similarly, you're going to see the Tribal lands populate here.

29:11

Now I mentioned that [we have the ability to filter] the Minority Serving Institutions, so I'm going to go over here. Maybe I want to see HBCUs, or maybe I want to see Tribal colleges. Depending on what your specific use case is, you can toggle things on and off and investigate.

29:36

So, I'm going to go back here and I'm going to turn these back off, and I'm going to go back with the 477 and the Ookla data. Now, everything we've done so far is at a macro national level, but we have the ability to zoom in to areas. And so I'll ask you again to keep an eye over here as the county tract and census block and will let you know the level of geography [that] we're at.

30:00

But I'm going to go look at East Carroll Parish, Louisiana and I'm going to click here. You'll see that we're at the county level. The search results, if I click here, is going to bring up a popup of information.

30:30

A few things that are interesting here. It's dynamic from the perspective that it doesn't matter which layers I have turned on – the popup will have information that's available at that level of geography. And so we'll see here that we're looking at Issaquena County, Mississippi and we also have East Carroll Parish, Louisiana because at this level of geography there were two in that general area. Looking at East Carroll Parish, we see that we have close to 7000 people. The survey data says that 55% of the households in this area don't have Internet access, close to 52% don't have some kind of computer device.

31:11

We see that the Measurement Lab (M-Lab) data actually says that at the county level, we do have 25/3 – it looks at 28/9 roughly. The Ookla speed test data is slightly lower than the 18/8 range, and then we see that Microsoft data there is saying that 10% aren't getting over 25 megabits on the download. What gets interesting now is if I zoom in and I go to a lower level of geography. As I zoom in here, you saw down here that we change to the tract. And so the popup now changed to the tract and now it's focused on the layers that have tract level detail.

31:57

So again we see here in Issaquena County. [There is a] little over one thousand people in that county. ACS is saying 58% [are] without Internet access, [and] 45% [are] without some kind of computer device. And the Ookla speed tests at this level of granularity is telling us 8/3, so certainly not 25/3. And then as we zoom to a little bit more, we're going to see that it'll change to the census block. It's taking a second here.

33:01

Apologies for the lack of performance.

33:14

Now you saw that the tract and the census block was activated. And so now when I click in here, I'm going to have census block information. So I see the 477 data and I also see census tract data.

33:34

So this is all a visualization, a way to navigate through the map. I mentioned that we also have the ability to download the data itself. What we've done here is provide three levels of geography. I'm going to go with the county as an example and we can download this. [I'll] bring it up. I can go here and do a nice simple filter, and then I can go find that dataset.

34:14

We'll go back to Louisiana here. Hit OK. Now we'll go to East Carroll. Click on that. Then we'll see that all that data is here: number of households, those who don't have a computer, poverty level, Ookla data population, Measurement Lab data. So depending on whether or not you want a visualization where you want to use this aggregated data for different reasons – [it] is all right there. That was important to us to be able to provide that underlying data.

35:00

And with that I'd like to now hand off to my colleagues over at FirstNet who will discuss the environmental and historic preservation concerns. Thank you.

35:11

Amanda Pereira:

Thank you and good afternoon. My name is Amanda Pereira and I'm a NEPA Compliance Specialist with the First Responder Network authority and I'm here to talk to you today about environmental and historic preservation requirements. So, environmental and historic preservation (EHP) requirements encompasses a lot of different subjects so we're not going to try to make you an expert in all of this today. But the main thing to understand is that your applications will need to contain sufficient information to allow for initial NEPA analysis and we'll talk a little bit about what that means a bit later. So in order to facilitate this analysis, your application will need to contain a detailed project description, including supporting documentation.

35:52

One thing to be aware of is that grant recipients will be required to obtain all of their federal, tribal, state, and local permits and approvals prior to beginning your project, but this does not need to be done pre-award. Funds may be withheld under a special work condition until EHP requirements are satisfied, and do keep in mind that environmental analysis is an allowable use of grant funds.

36:19

So we're going to give you an overview of some of the regulatory issues and some of the compliance network that EHP compliance takes place within. So, the *National Environmental Policy Act*, or NEPA, was passed in 1970. It's considered an umbrella law. What that means is that NEPA does not have a prescribed outcome. It does not have a mandate for conservation or preservation. What NEPA does require is a process – a process that allows the federal government to make an informed decision about the impact of its projects before it takes them.

36:52

So, because NEPA requires process, there are lot of other laws and regulations that can be complied with as part of that process. And it's everything from ones that you've probably heard of -- like the *Endangered Species Act* -- to ones that are maybe a little more specialized like the

Farmland Protection Policy Act. So there are a lot of ways that the NEPA process actually helps us to be more efficient in terms of completing EHP requirements within the one process.

37:22

So NEPA and the *National Historic Preservation Act*. They both require the government to examine the impacts of its proposed actions before taking them, so it's about informed decision-making. NEPA is triggered by several things. Among others is the use of federal funds, and that does include grant funds. NHPA requirements can be addressed as part of an NEPA compliance process. However, even if an initial NEPA analysis shows that there's minimal requirements for addressing environmental impacts, NHPA consultation requirements may still apply. So again, both NEPA and NHPA review, including consultation, must be completed before an action can begin.

38:07

This slide discusses three levels of NEPA review.

38:10

The first level is a categorical exclusion. Categorical exclusion, or CATEX, is a category of actions that the agency has determined will not have an individual or cumulative significant impact on the environment. If a categorical exclusion cannot be applied to the project, then the next level of NEPA analysis is an environmental assessment. An environmental assessment is a brief document that is intended to analyze the impact of a project on certain number of resource areas, such as biological resources, cultural resources, water resources, infrastructure, et cetera.

38:47

If the analysis determines that there will be no significant impact to the environment, then a finding of no significant impact, or FONSI, will be developed and signed by NTIA. This is the Agency's decision document. If an EA concludes that there will be significant impacts to the environment, or if it is suspected at the outset that significant impacts would occur, then an environmental impact statement will be developed.

39:13

An EIS is prepared for those projects where there will likely be a significant impact on the environment. It is the most comprehensive and time-consuming method of NEPA analysis.

39:25

The final decision relating to the analysis is called a Record of Decision or ROD. Again, NEPA does not contain any mandate for conservation or preservation. There's nothing that says that federal government may not fund a project that has impacts the environment, but it does state that the process must be followed. So with an EIS, this process is codified in the ROD.

39:50

This here is a flowchart that gives you kind of an overview for the NEPA process. If you're a visual learner like me, things like this will be very helpful in terms of giving you a sense of flow of the information and how a decision goes from the proposed action all the way through agency action. So we'll give everyone just a few seconds to take a look at this, and we'll be happy to answer questions about it later.

40:15

We're not trying to make you NEPA experts today, but what we do really want to do is try to make you experts at how to provide a good project description. A good project description will provide enough detail about the potential impacts of the project on the environment to allow NTIA to conduct that initial NEPA analysis that we've been talking about. So how do you do that?

40:38

Well, there's a few things that will be really, really helpful. So first, describe what the project is, and just use as straightforward language as you possibly can. So construction of a 150-foot monopole communication tower, for example.

40:54

And then you're going to need to describe where the project is proposed to take place. And there are two definitions of the word where that we use. One is the physical location – that would be a street address or latitude and longitude if a street address is not applicable. And the other is the physical description of the site and its surroundings. Is it taking place in developed land or open space? Are there adjacent natural resources such as rivers, wetlands, forests? Are there protected lands nearby? Is there's something that is owned by a federal agency, by a Tribe, by a state government, or local government? All of these things will give NTIA an idea of the level of coordination that's going to be required in order to complete the environmental compliance requirements for the project.

41:44

Next, describe how the project will be implemented. For example, it will require one acre of ground disturbance at an approximate depth of five feet. The installation of a concrete pad, an equipment shed, and an emergency generator with a one thousand gallon above ground fuel storage tank.

42:03

Language like that that is very straightforward [and] very descriptive will provide NTIA with the sufficient detail to make an initial determination. Also, please do include ground level and aerial photographs. [Include] Project plan drawings if you have them, Aerial photographs can be something as simple as a screenshot from Google Earth or a similar program.

42:25

For new construction projects, it is highly recommended that you include a floodplain map from the FEMA Map Service Center. Those are available for free download and we've included the URL there. And a wetlands map from the US Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wetlands Inventory, also available for free download at the URL provided. If you do have questions about how to use these websites, then please do let us know.

42:52

This is the most popular question that we get with EHP compliance requirements: timelines. As with most questions regarding EHP compliance, the answer to how long will this take is, it depends. Timelines will be affected by the complexity of the project and the number of consulting parties as we discussed in previous slides: if there are Tribes involved that need to be consulted with, there are other land managing agencies whose land will be impacted by the project that need to be consulted with, [et cetera]. So, all of these things will factor into the amount of time required to address the compliance requirements for the project. The timelines that we're going to discuss in just a second don't take into account other outstanding agency approval processes. That includes things like consultation under NHPA, or the *Endangered Species Act*, permitting from the US Army Corps, et cetera. But do please keep in mind that environmental analysis is an allowable use of grant funds.

43:56

So, based on NTIA receiving a complete record, or a complete application, and a good project description containing all the characteristics we just talked about, we have some approximate timelines to provide you with just for reference in your project planning.

44:14

Categorical exclusion will be developed by NTIA. It assumes that NTIA receives a sufficient project description and that there are no extraordinary circumstances associated with the project. An extraordinary circumstance is characteristic of the project. That means that something that might otherwise qualify for categorical exclusion doesn't because there could be potential resources, sensitive resources impacted. Assuming that none of those exist, and depending on workload and all of these other things, approximately 30 to 45 days to develop a CATEX.

44:51

If a CATEX is not able to be applied to a project, then an environmental assessment, as we discussed, would need to be prepared.

44:59

The grant recipient will develop the environmental assessment, in coordination with NTIA, depending on the complexity of the project, depending on the resources involved in the project, and the number of consulting parties. Environmental assessments, generally speaking, can take approximately 3 to 12 months to develop and deliver to NTIA.

45:21

If an environmental assessment is not appropriate, an environmental impact statement would be required and the grant recipient would develop those in coordination with NTIA. There are extensive public and agency involvement requirements that apply and they take a year or more to develop and deliver to NTIA.

45:40

In my personal experience, one year for an environmental impact statement is rare. It usually takes much longer. And if your project seems to be one that would require an environmental impact statement, NTIA may want to speak with you about re-scoping your project so that you can still meet your objectives but minimize your environmental impacts and not need to develop an EIS.

46:05

So, with that, I'll turn it back over to the moderator, and will be happy to take questions later. Thank you so much for your time.

46:20

Sarah Bleau:

All right. Thank you, Amanda. Thank you to the panelists.

46:23

We're getting ready now for our live Q&A. We have with us Jennifer and Amanda, who just finished talking to you about the environmental and historic requirements. We're also joined by Ming who I'd like to point out. He's joining us from the NIST office. He is a Grants Officer, so I think that his participation in this Q&A will be very helpful.

46:52

Before we get started on the Q&A, I would like to point out there were many, many questions. There were a lot of great questions. I was having a hard time keeping up, but there were a lot of questions, I know that.

47:04

And I'm sorry – it's frustrating when you plan to spend a few hours hearing about the Broadband Infrastructure Program, and you can't hear it because the audio platform is not working, or it's fuzzy. It's frustrating when you've set aside that time and you are unable to participate. I want you to know that within seven days, we will have the recording, we'll have a transcript of this webinar, and we will also have materials.

47:31

A lot of people were asking about Amanda's NEPA information. All of that material will be available on our website, BroadbandUSA, if you go to Events-Past Events.

47:44

I'd also like to point out on that website, we've got our FAQs for this grant program.

47:52

Jennifer, correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe we're just about ready to get the fourth round posted and we are anticipating more, right?

48:02

Jennifer Duane:

Yes, I'm working on finalizing that draft and getting it through our clearance process with legal and hopefully we will get the posted this week, if not, tomorrow. Ideally, I'd like to get it done tomorrow, but no later than this week for the fourth round.

48:18

Sarah Bleau:

OK, thank you. And please take a look at that – there have been some very thoughtful questions. We've been doing these webinars very often between this program, we've got the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program, and we've also got the Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program. So there are a lot of FAQs that have been answered, so I encourage you to please take a look. One more question that came up a few times. Today, we're talking about the Broadband Infrastructure Program, and in one week on [July] 21st and [July] 22nd, we will do two more webinars for the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program. Important to note that next week, on [July] 21st, in the Tribal Broadband Connectivity program [webinar] our team is going to take a deep dive into the [Standard] Form (SF) 424 family.

49:09

So, there were a lot of questions today about how do I fill out this form? And, honestly, I looked at it, too, and I would have the same question. It's not easy. So, please, I encourage you to take a look at the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program [webinar], which is occurring in one week on the 21st, as we are going to dive into all the details about the SF 424 [and] what you need to complete.

49:34

So, with that, there have been a ton of questions, and I am going to do the best possible job to get all of them to our panelists. We've got about 40 minutes. If we don't get to your question, please don't take it personally. There are some really great questions here.

49:57

So with that, I am going to begin.

50:04

Jennifer, there were a couple of questions that I think that we can knock off pretty quickly, because these were questions contained within the FAQ documents – like about applicants and covered partnerships. Here's a question that we have [from] a non-profit organization in Florida: in order to apply for the grant, is it correct that they need to partner with a local county or government agency, and that they would be the principal applicants?

Jennifer Duane:

50:37

Yeah. The covered partnership definition in the Act is for a state, or one or more political subdivisions of the state, partnering with a fixed broadband service provider. They would be covered partnership. The lead applicant – we're asking that to be the governmental entity.

50:53

So for a non-profit, unless there is something in the Florida statute that defines a non-profit organization (depending on what you are) as a political subdivision (which it might be the case) – you would need to partner with a governmental entity or a political subdivision or the state in order to be part of the covered partnership that would be filing the application.

51:19

And Sarah, we do cover this in our FAQ in terms of noting that the Act, or the NOFO does not define what a political subdivision is. We're asking, if there's any doubt, to provide us with the statutory reference as part of your narrative.

Sarah Bleau:

OK, thank you. And I think, Jennifer, that that kind of answered two other questions. One of them being all things being equal, would having a state as the lead applicant be a stronger application rather than a smaller political subdivision? I think that that's answered in the FAQs, correct?

51:55

Jennifer Duane:

It's hard to say what's stronger. A state doesn't have to be a part. If it's just a political subdivision partnering with a fixed broadband service provider, that's fine. We are encouraging coordination and consultation with the state broadband office, just to indicate, to coordinate, and making sure that the projects that are being put forth are strong.

52:23

I can't say that having a state as part of it makes it stronger. If it's just a political subdivision and a fixed broadband service provider partnering, and there's a lot of unserved households in that eligible service area that they're proposing to serve, that's our first priority factor that we're looking at, so that in itself could make it a strong application.

52:49

Sarah Bleau:

OK, thank you. One more that I believe has popped up in the FAQs, Jennifer, and then I will take you out of the hot seat. Along those lines, if a cover partnership is with a town, and a broadband provider, such as any telecom communications company, the state does not have to be part of the partnership. Is that correct?

Jennifer Duane:

That is correct. So, under the Statute, it can be a state or a political subdivision. So, if a town or county, which is defined as a political subdivision in that particular state partners with the fixed broadband

service provider, then that meets the definition of a covered partnership and they would be eligible to apply to this program.

53:30

Sarah Bleau:

Thank you. Tim, we're going to switch gears over to you.

53:33

I saw that Carole posted the URL to the public facing Indicators of Broadband Need map. Thank you for doing that demo. I hope that everybody has had the chance to dig into that.

53:46

Here's a question for you, Tim. Can you talk about how accurate is this data?

Tim Moyer:

53:54

So, the data is taken as is from each of the sources. The 477 data is the latest data available, collected directly from ISPs via the 477 process.

54:07

We know that there are limitations on that process when it comes to the census block methodology, where one block, if anybody in that block is sure the whole block is served. But we kind of mitigated that by looking at it the opposite way of saying where service providers that acknowledge they don't have service. So we feel pretty confident about that layer of data.

54:30

The Ookla data is very, very robust. We have the ability to drill down and get location. The Measurement Lab (M-Lab) is pulled together. If you go to the About section, you can go to the source [and] the M-Lab is a consortium. It's almost like academia – Google, combining with a bunch of other folks. And both companies' methodologies, while different, are well-known and have strong backing. And then if you look at the Microsoft data, that's basically system machine to machine. So, it's just tracking the time it takes to download that package. One of the limitations on the crowd source data, the speed test, is the fact that it is user driven. So if you don't have a speed test in the area, what does that tell you? Not sure.

55:21

But Microsoft, we chose that because it is almost automatic [for] people all over the country – it just happens while you're asleep at night. Your computer turns on and it does that download. So we feel pretty confident in the data, the challenge is the interpretation.

55:38

You look at the 477 data and taking it at face value that that area is not served 25/3. What happens when you layer an indicator of need when the crowd sourced on it? Can you definitively say there's no infrastructure? No. You can't definitively say that. What you can say is

that, especially when you see all three of those indicators support the same answer:

56:00

While the 477 says one thing, these other areas that you would assume are served because they're not in red. If they pop up on red, maybe it's a usage issue, maybe it's an affordability issue. Maybe there are a lot of other things, but they're deserving of being investigated more is our point.

56:20

And so, it's bringing that poverty information, highlighting that digital divide, and looking at the difference between access and use.

56:29

Sarah Bleau: Thank you. And Tim, just to kind of piggyback on that, there's a question that just popped up here.

56:37

Just clarifying, isn't the speed of downloads dependent on what the subscriber's purchasing, not necessarily capable of? And I think you kind of answered that.

Tim Moyer:

This is kind of the point I was alluding to. The infrastructure may be there, and it may have capabilities to serve a certain speed. But if folks aren't signing up for it, that's worth investigating also.

57:01

So maybe there are other things, other policy choices, which we can make as federal agencies that can mitigate those challenges, because if the reality is that they're not utilizing 25/3, that tells us something. As federal agencies, we should be looking into that.

57:18

Sarah Bleau: OK, thank you. All right. I am going to switch gears a little bit and go back over to Ming. Thank you for joining us today.

57:37

A question that came up is, are operating costs included on Standard Form 424 C?

Ming:

58:02

I'm unmuted now. Can you hear me?

58:04

Sarah Bleau: Yes.

58:05

Ming: Thank you for the question. So, yes.

58:08

Yes, the 424 C may include administrative costs charged to the award. Some examples of those administrative cost expenses would be: accounting, auditing, budgeting, and some general legal expenses. So to

answer that question: yes. Operating costs can be included in those 424 C forms. It generally would be in line 1 of the forms – general expenses, administrative expenses, and legal expenses.

58:48

OK, thank you. Jennifer, a question that has come up a couple of times today, and in other webinars, that I think we talk about in the FAQs.

Sarah Bleau:

59:00

But this definition of rural being 50,000 inhabitants. We all know that there are some counties that are 50,000 people, but that have extremely rural remote pockets where people are far away. Can you talk a little bit about what an applicant should do in that case? If it's a county of 50,000 people, is it worth still applying for the program if they've got pockets of severely remote people?

59:30

Jennifer Duane:

Yeah, I just want to emphasize that those are our prioritization factors. So, they're not eligibility factors. The fact that a service area has a population of more than 50,000 [people] doesn't disqualify you from applying for this program or designating that area as a proposed service area. It's just [that] the intent of the Statute was to focus on more rural areas initially and prioritize those areas. So it's just a factor that will look at, but it doesn't preclude an applicant from proposing a proposed service area that encompasses areas that exceed that 50,000 inhabitant threshold that's listed in the prioritization factors in the Act.

1:00:17

Sarah Bleau:

OK, thank you. I'm going to switch over to Amanda, and I wonder if you can talk a little bit about whether applicants are required to submit US DOC's NEPA environmental questionnaire and checklist.

1:00:34

Amanda Pereira:

That is not required as part of the application. You're certainly welcome to submit it if you feel comfortable doing so. But in general, the characteristics that we described, a good project description and supporting documentation, are sufficient for the application stage. You're absolutely welcome to provide more information if you'd like as supplementary information. It's all good information.

1:01:00

But if it's something that you don't necessarily feel you have the resources to do well, or have a high familiarity with or high level of comfort, don't feel like you need to. The most important thing is going to be about project description with photographs and supporting documentation.

1:01:17

Sarah Bleau:

OK, thank you. Ming, just a moment ago you talked about operating costs and the Standard Form 424 C, and a question popped up as a result of that. If those administrative expenses you mentioned would be separate from the indirect cost dollars?

1:01:36

Ming: If you have indirect costs that apply to the award – that is applicable to the award – indirect cost is separate from the direct administrative expenses.

1:01:49

So, what the indirect cost covers, the costs basically, not directly allocated to the project. But if you have direct expenses pertaining to the award that are applicable, reasonable, and allowable, those expenses would be included in the direct administrative expenses.

1:02:15

Jennifer Duane: Ming, just to add on that. So that's basically the personnel that are working directly on the project. So there are incurring costs that are directly related to implementing the project. That would be included as administrative costs within the SF 424 C as direct cost.

1:02:35

Ming: Yes, thank you Jennifer. Yes, that's absolutely correct.

1:02:40

Sarah Bleau: OK, thank you very much.

1:02:46

Tim, there's a comment here. Is the ACS data based on what individuals report? I am wondering if that includes people who say they are not served because they choose or cannot afford to pay for service rather than it not being available. Can you talk a little bit about why we have the ACS data? Or can you talk about that more, please? You're on mute right now, Tim.

1:03:14

Tim Moyer: A common phrase in this pandemic. You're on mute.

1:03:18

So yes, that's a very good point that the question is asking about access. But how the individual interprets that question is open. And so whether it's an infrastructure response, or they've chosen not to sign up. That is true. It's still an indicator of need to us, and from our perspective, this is not all about infrastructure.

1:03:43

This is about bringing these datasets together to help us shine a light on the digital divide and look at both access and use. If folks aren't signing up for the requisite speeds, that's an issue in and of itself also. We're hoping that these data layers are not determinant. We're not saying that there are absolute answers. What they are is, especially when you see the combination of these layers – if the ACS data and the speed data from M-Lab and the speed test data from Ookla all support the same indicator, it's worth investigating more.

1:04:22

We're not looking at taking any individual layer as absolute, but the combination to highlight and say, OK, we should go in and look more.

1:04:33

Sarah Bleau: Thank you, Tim.

1:04:36

I do hope that everybody takes the opportunity to grab that URL and go check out the Indicators of Broadband Need map that the team did put a lot of thought into. You can zoom into Alaska [and] you can zoom down to census block levels. It does tell an interesting story that we're trying to capture there. Thank you, Tim.

1:04:56

Tim Moyer: Also, to remind folks to go to the About tab because we have direct links back to the source material so you can learn everything about that underlying data. Any challenges and limitations, it's all there.

1:05:12

Sarah Bleau: Thank you. Amanda, I've got a question for you. Do you have any estimated cost for the levels of environmental reviews that you can share with us?

1:05:27

Amanda Pereira: Well, not really. Because it's going to depend so much on the amount of review required. If the project qualifies for categorical exclusion, then that's something that NTIA [develops] based on the data you provide.

1:05:46

Environmental assessments, it can be a wide range. If you have the resources to do them in-house versus if you need to go to a consulting firm. A reasonable cost for environmental analysis is also going to be tied to the complexity of your project. If there's a lot of resources that are going to be impacted, there'll be a lot of analysis required. Not to be obtuse, but I don't really feel comfortable sort of putting a dollar amount on that because the range is significant.

1:06:22

Certainly, if folks have questions about their specific projects as they move along, we can try to provide more advice. But we also don't want to be what might be considered like an inappropriate guideline or something like that may not be applicable, because it's going to depend on the consulting firms in your area and all kinds of things. So unfortunately, it is very hard to get that price that goes with that.

1:06:51

But I understand that's obviously a considerable concern, especially when you're talking about using grant funds that are finite for your environmental analysis. And that's actually another reason why we try to discourage people from pursuing a project that would require an

environmental impact statement because the analysis that would be required would be both time consuming and expensive.

1:07:16

So, again, if you do have a project that looks like it might require an EIS, we may want to speak to you about seeing if there's a way to re-scope it to minimize the environmental impact while still meeting your objectives.

Sarah Bleau:

1:07:28

Thank you, Amanda. I apologize for putting you on the spot there, I know that that's a tough question and you want to be helpful.

Amanda Pereira:

No, it's a common question. I just feel bad that I can't be more helpful on that front. There are so many factors, I can't give a reasonable estimate.

Sarah Bleau:

1:07:48

Thank you. Jennifer, going back over to you. We've talked about that the funds must be expended within 12 months of the grant. There was a question earlier: is the program anticipated to have an annual cycle?

1:08:07

I think that might be getting at something else, but I want to ask that. And also, if you can clarify what marks the end of the period of performance – if it's finished with construction, expenditure of the funds? Can you talk about the 12 months that people have to use the funds please?

Jennifer Duane:

1:08:29

As far as we know, this is a one-time appropriation. And it's possible that maybe other funds could be appropriated by Congress, but for this particular grant program it's one time amount. Congress specified a one-year timeframe to expend funds within one year after receipt. So assuming you get an award under the program, and our NIST grants office, where Ming is representing, they will issue the grant award documents. So upon receiving your funds, you'll have one year to expend them unless the Assistant Secretary grants an extension of that award period.

1:09:08

And, as we've talked about, and as you heard from Amanda, any project that has environmental considerations, it's very unusual or unlikely that it will be completed within one year. So when you come in for an extension request, you will tell us how long you think it's going to take you to complete your project – whether it's going to be one year, or two years or more. So then we would issue an extension and give you a new award period which would be up to another year, another two years, or three years, depending on what you indicate is the additional time you'll need to complete the project. That's completing the activities that you indicated you would perform as part of this project.

1:09:59

So if you're constructing a broadband network, when you complete the network, you finish the project. If you've finished expanding the funds

before then, we'll need to understand what the ramifications are. But completing the project means [that] whatever you said told us you're going to build or construct, you finish that within the timeframe for the award period. So one year is currently the award period, but in all likelihood we will be giving extensions, and there'll be another 2 or 3 years that's available to grantees to complete their projects.

1:10:41

Sarah Bleau:

Thank you. I think that that goes in well with what Amanda was talking about with the cost and the time for the reviews. We all are very aware of the fact that construction projects can take a long time. So, we understand that.

1:10:57

Jennifer, there's also the concern [that] we don't want to duplicate any funding. So, there's two questions:

1:11:09

One, for example, if a service provider is receiving money from the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) Program; or two, if the federal or state government is receiving any kind of funding – should all of that information be listed in the application?

1:11:28

Jennifer Duane:

Well one of the requirements is for the covered partnership to indicate what other federal or state support that they're receiving. And there were specific acts listed in the Act with respect to the FCC programs. I don't think the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program was listed there, because – I don't think it was – I think it was passed at the same time as this. And I think that's a discounted service. So if it's not deploying infrastructure, it wouldn't necessarily need to be reported.

1:12:02

We're trying to look at not duplicating federal funds that go toward funding broadband infrastructure, and it's also limited to the proposed service area. So if a fixed broadband service provider that's part of the covered partnership is receiving federal funds for that particular post service area than they should tell us in their project narrative.

1:12:29

Sarah Bleau:

Thank you. Ming, I think that this one is right up your alley. If you can talk a little bit – the statement is that applicants are asked to provide generic financial information.

1:12:45

The question is: is that information about the project, or for the broadband provider or applicant? What exactly would NTIA like to see with these financial projections?

1:12:58

Ming: Let me try to answer that. If not, maybe Jennifer can help us. So, the NOFO basically requests that in Section 4B of the NOFO, basically requesting that the applicant to provide a pro bono from our financial information and analysis, such as the balance sheets and income statements and cash flows to basically help the program to understand the viability of the recipient or the applicant. So that statement is basically requesting from the applicant, if I'm correctly stated.

1:13:47

Jennifer Duane: Yeah, that's right, Ming, and I think the reason we're asking for that as well [is]— some of evaluation criteria, and, when we're looking at a project, is the applicant's organizational capability. That includes both prongs of the covered partnership. We want to make sure that an entity is viable to perform the activities called for within the project [and] that the project will be sustainable. We're wanting to receive information that will allow us to evaluate the project and the components of the covered partnership as part of our evaluation criteria.

1:14:22

That's really what that financial information is getting at – to help us in that ability to understand the qualifications and the financial resources of the fixed broadband service provider, or other pieces of the covered partnership.

1:14:42

Sarah Bleau: Thank you. I have to say, after sitting on a few of these webinars and listening behind the scenes, these questions are outstanding. You can tell that the window is closing, because these are really great, specific questions. And I know that we're all very grateful that there's so much thought going into this, so, thank you.

1:15:03

Amanda, there's a question for you. During the environmental study, do we still have to consult with local Tribe councils like we do when we are building a new tower?

1:15:16

Amanda Pereira: Yeah, so if there are any projects being proposed that will impact Tribal resources, whether present day or historic under the *National Historic Preservation Act*, Tribal consultation is a requirement.

1:15:29

So that can be a consultation through the THPO or the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, but that will be a requirement under NHPA, among other laws, as part of the process.

1:15:42

Sarah Bleau: Thank you. OK, Jennifer, a question popped up about asking what the location of – I guess for Ming and Jennifer – the location of the grant application. I know that the NOFO is published on our website and that

applications must be submitted through grants.gov. Can you take a minute just to talk about having the DUNS number and going into grants.gov and what that actually looks like?

1:16:09

Jennifer Duane:

Sure. All the application materials are on grants.gov, a part of the application package so that when you're filling that out, all the forms can be accessed through that. When you're ready to submit your application, you can load all the different attachments up there.

1:16:29

There will be a DUNS number requirement for the lead applicant. The UEI, there is a transition taking place, but right now the DUNS number is still valid for grants.gov.

1:16:49

And then the Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) is that the acronym, Sarah, that you mentioned? UEI? I think I might have misheard what you said. OK, no, I don't know that I could add onto that.

1:17:10

Ming:

So, yeah. Just to add to what Jennifer described. So, in order for the applicant to submit the application for a brand-new entity, they obviously have to obtain a UEI, formerly known as a DUNS number. So you're obtaining a DUNS number and then you have an EIN number and that's when you can register in sam.gov. In order for you to receive an award, or even submit an application, you need to have a sam.gov account, and then you submit the application through the grants.gov.

1:17:44

So, just to remind everyone that you don't want to wait until the last minute to get all those [registrations] on sam.gov and grants.gov because sometimes they take a little time to get registered and you don't want to wait at the last minute. And even sometimes the grants.gov [website is] down for maintenance for a couple of days. So, just a reminder that try to get registered as soon as possible so that you don't wait until the last minute.

1:18:12

Jennifer Duane:

I know like in other contexts that we've gotten some questions given the nature of this as a covered partnership is who can actually go onto grants.gov and fill out the application. And so grants.gov does have this concept of Workspace so the applicant can assign different users' different roles. If you're having multiple entities serve as part of the covered partnership, they can be given access to grants.gov to help complete the application. My understanding is that the lead applicant, which would be the state entity or the political subdivision, has to be the one to click the submit button on grants.gov to authorize the the filing of the application, but other entities that are participating as part of a covered partnership can get access to grants.gov and help with compiling the application materials.

1:19:14

Sarah Bleau:

And Jennifer, is it as straightforward as just going to grants.gov, and then in the little search box, you can look up, for example, Broadband Infrastructure Program?

Jennifer Duane:

Yes, you can go in and enter the funding opportunity number, which is NTIA-Broadband-Infrastructure-Program-21, you can put that number in as a searchable item, or search the CFDA number or the Directory Assistance Listing number in grants.gov and that should bring up this particular program and all the accompanying materials.

1:19:48

Sarah Bleau:

OK, thank you. Amanda, a question came up here: a NEPA EIS is a potential outcome of an environmental assessment. The other potential outcome is a finding of no significant impact. And so, keeping that in mind, Jennifer and Amanda, how would NTIA reviewers determine an EIS was a likely outcome of an EA?

Amanda Pereira:

1:20:16

Well, so let me just make sure I'm understanding the question.

1:20:21

So, an environmental assessment can either conclude that there are significant impacts, or they're not. So if it concludes that there are significant impacts, then that's when you would move into an EIS. Typically, when we're reviewing a project, we can get an understanding or an idea of the level of impacts that are likely to occur. And if it's going to be something where an EIS is needed, we can typically determine that at the outset so that you don't have to do an EA and then do an EIS. That doesn't actually happen very often, but you have to do one because of the other.

1:21:00

So if you complete an EA and the process and the analysis determines there won't be any significant impact to the environment, and NTIA would develop the finding of no significant impact, and your NEPA process is concluded at that point. And then for an environmental impact statement, again, it's a much more complex process that concludes at the Record of Decision, but it's not very common, but you have to do an EA. You can just start doing an EIS if we conclude that one is likely to be needed, that they're likely to be significant impacts. So, there's not necessarily that one has to precede the other.

1:21:38

And in fact, I wouldn't recommend that you not try to approach it that way. That would add a lot of unnecessary time and cost if it looks like a project is going to have significant impacts. If re-scoping is absolutely not possible and funding is available, you would want to move straight to an EIS – that would be much more efficient time wise. Does that answer the question?

Sarah Bleau:

1:22:02

Yeah. That's really helpful. Thank you. Thank you.

1:22:08

Jennifer, are the funds going to be granted upon award or as a reimbursement?

Jennifer Duane:

1:22:17

So if we make an award what we'll be doing is recommending to our grant's office, NIST, what projects we're proposing to award and NIST will do some risk assessments. They will issue the award documents, and applicants will [have an] established account in the Treasury, the ASAP, the automated standard applications for processing.

1:22:46

And usually, the lead applicant or the recipient of the award, which would be the lead applicant in this case, will be able to draw down directly from ASAP. If there are cases where there might be circumstances where an applicant may be put on reimbursement only, that's something that we'd have to take on a case-by-case basis. But for the most part, applicants will be able to directly draw down the grant funds that they're awarded from the ASAP account. Ming, do you have any other insight you want to add on that process?

Ming:

1:23:24

Yeah, thanks, Jennifer. Thank you for describing perfectly. So, basically, unless there's a specific condition that are put on the award that put the applicant or recipient in Agency review, then the award will be advanced payment and the funds will be available in the account. The lead applicant will be able to draw down funds for anticipated expenses within 30 days. So, basically, yes. There will be advanced payment, unless there's a specific condition that put the entity on Agency review, and it will be reimbursement only.

Jennifer Duane:

1:24:18

Yeah, sorry. It would be up to the lead applicant to disperse the funds to other sub recipients or vendors that are working on a project there. [The lead applicant] be the only one that would have access to the ASAP account.

Sarah Bleau:

1:24:36

I think you just heard a big sigh of relief in the audience. Thank you.

1:24:43

Ming, here's another question for you that's pretty unique – I haven't seen this one before. The question is: if we are providing service to an eligible location and receiving revenue from the customer, would the project income include the gross revenue to the customer or just the incremental difference in revenue?

1:25:07

Ming: So I think that's kind of tied to the Program Income Section of the 2 CFR 200. So, basically, if you are doing a peer performance of the award. If you earn any program income supported by the activity resulted from the federal award then that needs to be included as part of the budget form, which is, there's a line for projectable program income in 424C Form, line 15. What was the second part of the question, Sarah?

1:25:40

Sarah Bleau: If it should be reported as revenue from the customer? If it's the gross revenue from the customer or the incremental difference in revenue?

Ming: That would be reported as program income, as a gross program income, generated from the project entity. I mean, with the 424C form at this point, you are basically projecting the program income that will be generated during the period of performance. And if any differences that needs to be reported on your SF 425 Financial Report, that's going to be semi-annual reporting.

1:26:24

Sarah Bleau: OK, thank you. And just a reminder, it's in one week from today, on Wednesday the 21st, same time, same place – go to our website, take a look at the upcoming events, and you'll see the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program. Register for that and it is a solid hour where we are going to be talking about the 424 forms. So come, bring your questions. It's going to be a lot of fun when we do that.

1:26:53

Jennifer, I know that you talked about one year, and the ability for extensions, because we understand construction takes a long time. I mean, it's a well-known fact supply chain, right now, there are delays. Sometimes it's taking 30 to 40 weeks to get equipment or fiber, or whatever it is. The question is: does showing a timeline of such lengthy intervals hurt your application?

1:27:27

Jennifer Duane: I mean, it's the reality. When you request an extension having that timeline of what is going to take to order supplies will be part of the decision making process to grant the extension and determine how much additional time will be needed to complete the project.

Sarah Bleau:

1:27:47

OK, thank you. Again, for anybody who's not familiar with the application process, go to grants.gov and there's a pretty handy search bar in the upper right-hand corner where you can look for the program that you're interested in applying for.

1:28:12

I'm going to ask Tim one more question, because I think that the map is extremely helpful for me, and I appreciate your time, so, I'll give you another question.

1:28:28

This is good because I think one of the really great things about the Indicators to Broadband Need map is that the data is downloadable. You can actually pull [and] extract [from the] county level. Whatever the data [you're] interested in that you see there in the map, you can download it. So, Tim, the question is to download the data, do you have to be zoomed in to the block level of the map? Can you talk about how you pull down those results please?

1:28:53

Tim Moyer:

If you go to the About section, we actually have the CSVs pre-packaged for you. So when you click on that link, if you remember in the video, I clicked on the county level. You have to download three separate spreadsheets, but just hit download, and you save it on your computer, and you've got it forever. Now if you want to print your screen you need to, whatever area of geography is your interest, zoom to that level. You click a pop up, and then you could do a screenshot of that, and you could create a series of screenshots, if you wanted to. We do not have printing capabilities, [which] was more of a custom option versus the commercial off the shelf option and we did not put our efforts there. We wanted to have the efforts more providing that data.

1:29:48

Sarah Bleau:

Thanks. And Tim, I think it's worth if you just spend another ten seconds talking about the fact [that] this is not a single source, silver bullet kind of thing. There's a few different layers built into this. Just because your hometown might show up as green, that does not equate to a binary "That means you have broadband." Can you talk about that for a second, please?

1:30:13

Tim Moyer:

If you start with the 477 data, and that's where the service providers have indicated that they do not have service at 25/3 that does not mean that all of the other areas have it. That's the challenge.

1:30:28

The methodology at the census block level overstates areas and so bringing in the other crowdsourced datasets is our best first effort to highlight essential areas that are the gaps. And so a singular dataset may highlight something, and the other two don't, and so it's still worth investigating.

1:30:53

Our perspective is when all three of those crowdsourced layers tell you the same answer, that's a pretty strong indicator. And so you could be a lot more confident that area, for whatever reason, [such as] infrastructure, they're not signing up for the package, [et cetera]. We don't know that answer with this level of data, but we do have a strong indicator that the people in that area are not getting 25/3, and it's worth investigating more.

Sarah Bleau:

1:31:21

Thank you. There were many more questions.

1:31:25

We're going to wrap up in about 45 seconds here, really quickly. I just wanted to thank our panelists, and thank you to the audience. These were great questions, and we appreciate your time and patience. I know that it's frustrating when you can't hear automatically, so thank you for bearing with us. The recording, the material, a transcript, will all be available on our website in about seven days. And on our next slide here, I wanted to call to your attention [that] we've added some webinars.

1:32:01

Originally, we were planning on doing webinars through July, but we've added another round of webinars. So you'll see the Broadband Infrastructure Program – we'll have another webinar tomorrow, which will be the same content with another live Q&A. So bring your questions. We'll also resume again on August 4th and 5th.

1:32:22

The applications are due for this program August 17th. So last-minute questions, please bring them in on August 4th and 5th. Additionally, we've got more webinars setup for the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program and the Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program. They all begin at 2:30pm Eastern, so if you take a look at our website at the grant programs, you'll see in upcoming events, this is where you can sign up for these webinars.

1:32:51

We've got three rounds of FAQs posted for this Broadband Infrastructure Program. The fourth round, which Jennifer mentioned, should be up there shortly. And questions that we've compiled today, we will put back to the team, and we'll have answers. We'll do our best to get out as many answers to the FAQs as possible. So, please, it is worth your time taking a look at the three FAQ rounds that are posted. The fourth will be there shortly, and then we'll be working on another. And on the following slide, we have a little bit of contact information.

1:33:31

Again, thank you for joining us today. If you would like to reach out to us, here's an e-mail and a phone number. Thank you, we'll see you tomorrow, or next month, and have a great day.

1:33:44

All: Bye. Thank you.

END TRANSCRIPT.