Carole Garner:

1:48
Hello, and thank you for joining us today. We will get underway with the webinar in just a couple of minutes. Before that, I did want to direct your attention to the slide on the screen and make sure that you knew if you have dialed in on a phone for your audio option, you will not, unfortunately, be able to hear the first portion of our webinar. The workaround for that is if you do have a mobile device, you can download the GoToWebinar app onto your phone and you will be able to hear the audio portion of the first part of our webinar through the app.

2:27
If the only option for you to hear the webinar is by a dial-in phone, then you will be able to hear the second part of the webinar when we get into questions and answers. And, also, just wanted to note that a transcript and the recording will be available by August 11th, if you choose to not participate today because of this issue. Thank you so much. We'll get underway soon.

Susannah Spellman:

3:12
Hello, everyone. Welcome to the Broadband Infrastructure Program webinar for this August. This will be the last webinar before the applications are due on August 17th. My name is Susannah Spellman and I'm with the NTIA's BroadbandUSA program. As a reminder, this webinar is being recorded and will be posted to NTIA's BroadbandUSA Program website.

3:32
Today's webinar focuses on NTIA's Broadband Infrastructure Program, and is the fifth of a many-part series. Before we begin, I would like to review the logistics for today's webinar.

3:43
First, we will open up the webinar for questions after the completion of the presentations. As you hear from each presenter, please use the question box on the right-hand side of the screen to submit your questions or comments.

3:55
Second, the presentation, along with a transcript and audio recording of today's session will be available on the BroadbandUSA website within seven days of this webinar under the Events-Past Events tab.

4:07
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, and implementing your broadband project. We provide updated information including our monthly newsletter and other broadband news.

Our presenters today are Jennifer Duane, the Director of Grants for NTIA, Natalie Romanoff, a Grants Management Specialist with NTIA, and Katherine Bates, the Team Lead for the Broadband Infrastructure Program within NTIA.

Our first speaker is Jennifer Duane. Jennifer is a Senior Broadband Program Specialist for NTIA's BroadbandUSA Program, where she manages the office's grant programs and facilitates interagency coordination to support efforts to streamline federal permitting processes. Jennifer joined NTIA in 2009 to develop policy for the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program, otherwise known as BTOP. She then served for two years as a Senior Attorney Advisor at 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 to 2017, she served as a Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary on matters related to broadband and public safety. Before joining NTIA, Jennifer served as a State Regulatory Attorney, and then Director of Federal Regulatory Affairs for Sprint Corporation. She earned an undergraduate degree in Economics from Penn State and a Juris Doctorate degree from the George Washington University Law School.

Our next speaker, Natalie Romanoff, is a member of NTIA's Office of Public Safety Communications serving as the Program Director for the State and Local Implementation Grant Program (SLIGP) 2.0 grant program and is on a detail to OTIA to support the new broadband grant programs. Natalie has more than 15 years of experience in grant and program management, and has a Master of Public Administration degree from George Mason University.

Our last speaker is Katherine Bates. She is back with us after being on loan to the Treasury Department earlier this summer and spring, rejoining us as the Team Lead on the 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 coming to NTIA and the BroadbandUSA program, she worked with large library systems on the E-Rate Modernization Effort at ICF International, a global consulting firm. Where she focused on broadband funding, planning, training, and technical assistance.

Prior to that work, she worked for a decade at a national association representing municipal interests, focusing our efforts on information technology, broadband policy, and community and economic development. Katherine received her bachelor's in business and Masters of Public Administration from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

7:00

So real quickly, our agenda today is to go over the high-level programmatic aspects of the Broadband Infrastructure Program, that will be led by Jennifer. And then Natalie Romanoff will go through the application, including the pre-submission activities, how to complete the forms, how to submit, et cetera. And then Katherine will go through some of the FAQs that we've been getting over the last couple of months and also provide information on where you can find links to new FAQs. And we'll again discuss some of the top FAQs that we've been getting. After that, we will open up for Q&A and take in questions from you that you provide in the chat during the presentation in the Q&A section. And now, we turn the presentation over to Jennifer Duane.

Jennifer Duane:

7:47

Thanks, Susannah. I'm Jennifer Duane, Director of Grants for NTIA and as I've done in the June and July webinars that we had on this program. I'm going to spend a few moments in this webinar highlighting some of the key definitions and requirements for the Broadband Infrastructure Program.

8:06

Now, the Broadband Infrastructure Program is a grant program where NTIA has $288 million available to award to covered partnerships. And those are defined as a partnership between a state, [or] one or more political subdivisions of the state, and a fixed broadband service provider. Now, the covered partnerships are required to deploy covered broadband projects, and these are projects that are competitively and technologically neutral to deploy fixed broadband service that provides qualifying broadband service in an eligible service area.

8:46

NTIA opened up the application window for this program on May 19th, 2021, with the release of its Notice of Funding Opportunity. The statute required us to give a 90-day application period to accept applications, so we will be accepting applications for this program through August 17th, 2021.

9:09

Now, I just want to highlight a couple of key points and definitions for the program.

9:15

The first is qualifying broadband service, and that is defined in the Act as the provision of broadband service that provides speeds of 25 megabits per

second download and three megabits per second upload, and a latency that supports real-time, interactive applications. In the NOFO, NTIA also added a few more clarifications to that definition. We indicated that the speed requirement of 25/3 means the ability to provide 25/3 simultaneously to every household in the eligible service area. And we define latency to mean 95% or more of all peak period measurements of network, round trip latency are at or below 100 milliseconds.

10:12
The other definition that I want to emphasize is the definition of unserved. Now, unserved under the Act means a household lacks access to qualifying broadband service (which I just discussed), and 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 by date certain (even if such service is not yet available, provided that the federal or state agency providing the funding is not deemed the service provider to be in default of its buildout obligations under the applicable federal or state program).

11:03
The next key point I want to emphasize on this slide goes to eligibility. Now, an eligible service area is defined under the Act as a census block in which broadband service is not available at one or more households or businesses in the census block. Now, to determine that eligibility, we will be looking at the information that the FCC has provided in its maps, the FCC Form 477 data, and we'll also leverage NTIA's National Broadband Availability Map in determining what qualifies as an eligible service area. Along with other data sources that we have in the map, or that we have available to us.

11:48
The eligibility also gets to the eligibility for this program, and to be eligible to submit an application under this program, we need to understand who the covered partnership is [and] what the covered broadband project will be. That includes the speed(s) at which the project will be, or at which broadband service will be offered, along with the cost of the project. That also means identifying the proposed service area for funding.

12:24
And then there's also the requirement in the Act that the applicant, the covered partnership, identify any state or federal support that the fixed broadband service provider that is part of the covered partnership is receiving for the proposed service area that's identified in the application.

12:43
The NOFO also includes a lot of other requirements that are required to submit with your application. So, I'll just, rather than go through them as

part of this webinar, I'll just refer you to look at the NOFO for all the key requirements of an application that has to be submitted for this program.

13:04

Then, the last point on this slide is the prioritization factors. Now, the Act identified several funding priorities. And NTIA is prioritizing the first funding priority that was identified in the Act, and that is to provide qualifying broadband service to the greatest number of households in an eligible service area. And we're going to be sequencing applications as they come in to identify those that are focused on this initial funding priority when we review applications for funding. The other priorities are focused on providing broadband service to areas that are more rural in nature. So, the Act talks about looking at areas that include areas other than those that have 50,000 inhabitants. And that is just a prioritization factor. It's not an eligibility factor.

14:10

So, applicants that have areas that are including counties or other areas that have more than 50,000 inhabitants are still eligible to apply. It's just they are not covered by this funding priority that's been identified in the Act. And then there's also the requirement that we look at, projects that are the most effective, cost effective, and prioritizing those that are in rural areas. And then, the final prioritization factor is the speed level, and we'll be looking at applications that propose broadband service providing speeds of 100 megabits per second download in 20 mega megabits per second upload.

15:01

So, I want to spend a couple of minutes talking about eligible uses of funds. Now, grant funds may only be used to pay for allowable costs. And those are defined as costs that are reasonable, necessary, and appropriate and allocable to the project. Costs may be direct or indirect. So direct costs are those that are directly traceable to the project. Indirect costs are more akin to overhead. An applicant that wants to include indirect cost in its project proposal must provide that as part of its budget and they must have a Department of Commerce (DOC) approved indirect cost rate or be applying for one or just use the de minimis indirect costs of 10%. And this is all detailed in the NOFO sections on the application submission requirements.

15:58

Now, the Act identified several eligible uses of funds and these are also set forth in more detail in the NOFO. So, the covered partnership may use grant funds to fund the cost of construction, improvement, and/or the acquisition of facilities and equipment required to provide qualifying broadband service. And this includes infrastructure for backhaul, middle, and last mile networks. And we tried to craft these eligible use categories

fairly broadly to make sure that they can encompass as many activities that are necessary to deploy broadband infrastructure as possible.

16:40
Another allowable cost is the cost of long-term leases. And these are for facilities that are required to provide qualifying broadband service and this includes indefeasible right-of-use (IRU) agreements. So, we say that the terms can be longer, greater than one year. But basically, the applicant needs to provide payment for the cost of the lease during the award period of performance, which is one year, or longer if you receive an extension by the Assistant Secretary.

17:15
Also, cost of engineering, design, permitting, and work related to the environmental and historical and cultural review process are allowable. In our July webinar, we went into more detail on the requirements associated with the environmental and historical and cultural reviews. So, I would refer you back to those first [webinars] for more detail on what would be covered under environmental and historical and cultural reviews.

17:43
Also, personnel costs, including salaries and fringe benefits for staff that are working on the project. These are all allowable costs. And so, folks that are working as project managers, program directors, grant administrators, financial analysts that are working directly on the project may be paid for with grant funds under the program.

18:04
We also allow for reasonable pre-application expenses or grant preparation and cost, but they may not exceed $50,000. Then there's, of course, the catchall of allowable costs which are necessary to carrying out the program activities of an award, but they do not include ineligible costs.

18:26
So, just as we have eligible costs, we also have ineligible costs. And there are two categories. One that applies to all members of the covered partnership, and one that applies just to the fixed broadband service providers that are part of the covered partnership.

18:41
So, with respect to the covered partnership, they may not use grant funds received under program to purchase or support any covered communications, equipment, or services, as defined in Section 9 of the *Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Act of 2019*. So, basically, they may not procure equipment that may pose national security risks. Also, profits or fees and other incremental charges above actual costs are not allowable under the program.

19:12
Then, the covered partnership may not use grant funds, directly or indirectly, to support or oppose collective bargaining. Now, with respect

to the provider of broadband service, that is part of the covered partnership, they may not use funds to repay or make any other payment related to a loan that's made by any public or private lender. They also may not use funds as collateral for a loan made by any public or private lender. And they may not use more than $50,000 of the grant amounts to pay for their preparation of the grant. Also, they may not use funds for previously incurred administrative costs or previously purchased equipment or construction activities undertaken prior to the award.

19:58

Then finally, costs may not be used to locate any funding that the provider has received to deploy broadband service at locations that are used to meet an FCC Universal Service Fund deployment obligation.

20:16

So, as I mentioned before, we are accepting applications for this program. They must be done [in] grants.gov and they must be received no later than 11:59 PM eastern daylight time on August 17th, 2021.

20:32

So, now I'm going to turn things over to my colleague, Natalie Romanoff, and she's going to go into a deeper dive on the application package that is required under the program. And looking at each of the standard forms that are required, and along with the budget narrative and detailed budget justification. She'll go into a bit more detail on that. So the slides that I covered on eligible uses and ineligible uses will factor into that discussion because when you're completing your budgets, you need to make sure that they only contain costs that are eligible for funding under the program. So, with that, I will turn this over to Natalie for her presentation on the application review materials. Over to you, Natalie.

Natalie Romanoff:

21:21

Thanks, Jennifer. Today, I'm going to walk through several aspects of the Broadband Infrastructure Program application. While there are many steps in the federal grant process, today I'm going to focus on completing pre-application activities and submitting the application in grants.gov.

21:41

While you're gathering your application materials, it is extremely important your organization has an active SAM.gov registration. If your SAM.gov registration is inactive, it may take up to 30 days to re-activate your account. You must have an active SAM.gov registration to receive federal funding.

22:01

In addition to SAM.gov, you need to make sure you have access to Workspace in grants.gov for your entity. This will mean you need to have a username and a password. It could take several days to rectify grants.gov access issues. So be sure to check and make sure you have access to the

system for your organization as soon as possible in case you need to make any changes.

22:24
Lastly, to ensure you have a complete application, use the "Content and Form of Application" section in the NOFO to verify your application is complete before you submit it. Incomplete applications will not be accepted. This slide is pulled directly from page 26 in the NOFO and provides details on how to register in grants.gov.

22:46
The biggest takeaway is that the state or political subdivision will need to have their active SAM.gov registration and a DUNS number in order to register and apply in grants.gov.

22:58
The Broadband Infrastructure Program will be using all of the standard forms, SF-424 family for the application. All of the standard forms will be found on grants.gov. The standard forms that you will be required to complete are the SF-424, SF-424C, SF-424D, and applicable lobbying forms.

23:21
In addition to the Standard Forms, the Broadband Infrastructure Program requires specific programmatic and budgetary information as part of the application package as being in the right column. These forms will be created by you and are not standard or pre-created forms. The documents include a project narrative, a budget narrative, and detailed budget justification. An indirect cost rate, if you're using one, letters of commitment, map of the proposed service area, pro forma financial information and analysis, and network diagrams and system diagrams.

23:59
Now, I will do an overview of some of the application documents. For the next several slides, I will walk you through the SF-424, which is required with your application. Not all of the highlighted sections are required, and some of the non-highlighted sections are highly encouraged to be completed. I will walk you through what sections to complete.

24:21
In Sections 1 and 2, you will indicate that your submission is an application and new. Section 3 will auto-populate when you submit your application in grants.gov so you do not need to complete that field. You are also not required to complete Fields 4, 5A, 5B, 6, or 7.

24:43
The next section you will need to complete is Section 8, which is the applicant information.

24:49

The legal name you enter into the SF-424 must match your SAM.gov registration. Similarly, the EIN, organizational DUNS, and the address must also be associated with the legal name listed in your SAM.gov registration. Section E is not required but is recommended. It is recommended that the applicant complete the Department name and/or division name for the entity applying for the federal funds, especially if the applicant at the state.

25:21
Next section that is required is Section F, which is the name and contact information of the person involved in the application. Typically, this is the authorized representative. You will need to enter their name, title, phone number, and email address. The organizational affiliation field is optional but recommended.

25:43
In Section 9, you will need to enter your eligibility status as your type of applicant. More information on eligible entities can be found in the NOFO on page 9.

25:55
In Section 10, you will complete the name of the federal agency as the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

26:04
You do not need to complete Section 11, which is the CFDA number.

26:09
In Section 12, you'll complete the Funding Opportunity number information as the Broadband Infrastructure Program. This is found on the first page of the NOFO, and in grants.gov.

26:22
Section 13 is not required to be completed. Section 14 is not required, but it's highly recommended to be completed if you will have multiple areas affected by the project. You can add a Word document or an Excel sheet if you have more than one area affected by the project. Section 15, you will enter a descriptive title for your project.

26:45
Section 16 is required to be completed. You will enter the congressional district for where your project will be located in Sections A and B. You can attach a spreadsheet or a Word document if more congressional districts will be impacted by the project.

27:01
If you do not know your congressional district, please go to www.house.gov to search to find your congressional district.

27:11
The proposed start and end date should be listed as a one-year period of performance, starting after November 29th, 2021. Please be aware that

only your official award document from NTIA will determine your period of performance. This that you enter will not be your Period of Performance.

Section 18 is the funding section. In row A You will enter the total federal amount that you are requesting. If you are providing a match, enter the match amount in the correct field, either B, C, D, or E, depending on where the funding will be coming from.

Question 19 is required; this program is subject to Executive Order 12372.

If your state has a designated intergovernmental review or SPOC, please indicate field A and complete when you've sent your application over to that person for review. If your state does not have a designated intergovernmental review SPOC, you can select B and submit your application without state review.

Please visit whitehouse.gov's Federal Financial Management page to see a list of the current state intergovernmental review SPOCs.

Question 20 is required. If your entity is delinquent on any federal debt. you need to check Yes and provide an attachment explaining the debt.

Question 21 is also required. The list of certifications and assurances can be found in the SF-424D.

The last section, the authorized representative information, must also be completed. You need to fill in the name, first name, last name, title, telephone number, and email address. The authorized representative must also sign and date the form.

In addition to the SF-424, you must also submit Standard Forms SF-424C and SF-424D.

The next several slides, I will talk about the SF-424C. The SF-424C is one of three project budget documents you will need to submit with your application. You will submit this form along with the budget narrative and a budget detail justification. The SF-424C is found on grants.gov. The budget narrative and detailed justification are not standard forms, so you will need to create these documents to submit with your application.

In the SF-424C, you will complete column A, total cost; [column] B, costs not allowable for participation; and column C, total allowable cost.

29:56
Column A is where you will input the total cost for your project by cost classification. This will include your federal funding request, any maps you will provide, and any other funds needed to complete your project.

30:12
Column B is where you will input the amount of funding that is not allowable, but you are using to support this project. This could be other sources of federal funding, such as a federal grant, or funding for activities that are not allowable under this program but you plan on completing with outside funds.

30:30
Column C is the total allowable cost for each cost classification, which is column A minus column B.

30:40
When you submit your application, your budget narrative and budget detail justification should mirror the SF-424C budget document. The budget narrative is typically a Word document where you give detail to each type of charge for your project. Typically, this detail includes a description of the activity or fee, the cost basis, the cost unit, the number of units, and the total cost.

31:08
The budget detail justification is typically an Excel document showing the type of cost, quantity, unit cost, and total for each line item. If you will be providing match for the project, you will need to indicate this match on both the budget narrative and budget detail justification and clearly delineate what will be matching cost and what will be federally funded costs.

31:32
I will quickly go through the cost classifications on the SF-424C.

31:37
Row one is for your administrative and legal expenses. Unlike the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program, the Broadband Infrastructure Program does not have a cap or a maximum percentage of total charges for the cost classification. Some examples of administrative expenses include costs attributable to accounting, auditing, budgeting, and general ledger services, or facility occupancy costs like rent or utilities.

32:06
Typically, your indirect costs will fall into this category. Row two is for charges for land, structures, right of way, appraisals, and other similar charges. This may include structures like a utility cut or rights of way permits needed for construction activity. Row three is for relocation

expenses and payment. This could include charges related to moving equipment from one building to another.

32:32
Row four is for architectural and engineering fees. These fees could be for plans or designs to be developed. If you're not sure if the fee is specifically for architectural or engineering activities, you can list the other fees in row five, which is other architectural and engineering fees.

32:50
These fees could include testing fees for the network or equipment, or field study fees. Row six is for any project inspection fee, or fees directly related to project inspection. Any administrative or filing fees should be included in your administrative and legal expenses section, which is row one.

33:13
Row seven is for site work costs. This could include costs for the site work, site preparation, or site utility work necessary for your project. Row eight is for demolition and removal fees. Any environmental fees associated with the demolition should be included in the administrative and legal section, which is row one.

33:33
Row nine is for construction costs. You should input all costs [for] the construction activities for your project, which will include taxes and any delivery fees.

33:44
Row 10 for equipment costs. These should be any costs for equipment for the project, but not for equipment components for the network that are associated with construction activity. If you have small office machinery, you can also put those costs in this row.

34:00
Row 11 is for miscellaneous charges. If you have a charge that does not fit into any of the previous costs classifications, you can put it in this row. Be sure to give a detailed description of the costs so NTIA understands what you are planning on charging to the award.

34:16
Row 13 is for contingencies. Contingency fees are not reimbursable by federal funds.

34:25
Row 15 is for project or program income. If you believe you will have program income as defined by 2CFR200.307, you can enter the estimated amount here. Please remember that only program income during the period of performance should be indicated on this row.

34:44

Row 16, column C will be the total allowable cost for your project, which is inclusive of the federal charges and match contribution.

34:54
Then, in row 17, you will enter the percentage of the federal share for your project. If you're not providing a match, your project will be 100% federally funded; therefore, you will enter 100 on the line in row 17.

35:10
If you are providing a 10% match, you will enter 90 into the row in line 17 because the federal share will be 90% of the total cost. After entering the percentage in row 17, [then] row 17, column C should show the total federal assistance you will be requesting. This number should match the federal assistance number in your SF-424.

35:39
I would like to recap some of the important budget considerations for this program.

35:44
You are not required to provide a match program for this program. However, NTIA will favorably consider applications that propose to contribute a non-federal cost share or a match of at least 10% of the total eligible costs for a project. Your match may be either cash or in-kind.

36:03
No matter what type of match you propose, you must document your capacity to provide the match in your application. If you are providing the optional match with the program, be sure to account for this in your SF-424 and SF-424C.

36:20
As I mentioned before, column A of the SF-424C will include all your costs for your project for each of their cost classifications. If you're planning on providing match, be sure to include this in column A, along with your federal funding request.

36:35
The Broadband Infrastructure Program does not have predefined percentages for the cost consideration. This means that NTIA does not require or have caps on how much can be budgeted for each cost consideration. This extends to the administrative and legal cost consideration. The Broadband Infrastructure Program does not have a ceiling amount or ceiling percentage on this category.

37:00
Pre-application expenses are allowed under this program; however, they may not exceed $50,000. Allowable pre-application expenses include activities or expenses related to preparing an application between the publication date of the NOFO and prior to the date your award is issued by

NTIA. Lobbying costs and contingency fees are not reimbursable by the program.

37:27
In your application, you must clearly identify any pre-application costs in both your budget narrative and budget detail justification. Additionally, pre-application costs are incurred at the sole risk of the applicant; it will not be reimbursed by NTIA if the proposed project does not receive a grant award.

37:48
As I mentioned earlier, there are several nonstandard forms that you must submit with your application package.

37:54
The first is the project narrative. This is a 20-page single space document describing the key elements of your proposed project. The full requirements of the project narrative can be found beginning on page 13 of the NOFO.

38:09
There are many different requirement sections that must be addressed, so please follow the NOFO to ensure that you provide all the relevant and necessary data.

38:19
The budget narrative and budget detail justification document that I described earlier are also required with your application. Please be sure that your detail spreadsheet can fit on letter sized paper.

38:33
If you're interested in charging indirect costs to the award, you will need to submit an indirect Cost Rate Agreement from a cognizant Federal Agency. Each applicant must also submit a letter of commitment from an authorized representative from each member of the covered partnership.

38:48
Additionally, maps, pro forma financial information, network diagrams, and system diagrams must also be submitted with your application.

38:59
Now, I will talk about submitting your application.

39:03
The NOFO has specific requirements for the format of your nonstandard application form, such as the project narrative and budget narrative. More detail on your application format can be found on page 17 of the NOFO.

39:18
You will need to submit your application through Workspace on grants.gov. Please be sure that you have an active SAM.gov registration prior to attempting to submit your application in grants.gov. Late or

incomplete applications as well as applications submitted by fax, email, mail, or courier service will not be accepted.

39:39
Now, I'll turn the presentation over to Katherine to discuss the program FAQs.

39:47
Katherine Bates: Thank you, Natalie. I really appreciate Natalie's willingness to help out on the Broadband Infrastructure Team as her knowledge of federal grants is vast. She's been a great resource for us.

39:58
Now, I want to first talk about the exciting part. What happens after you turn in your application? There is a three-step review process that NTIA will follow.

40:07
First is the initial administrative and eligibility review of completed application packets. At this point, any application submitted by anyone who is not an eligible applicant will be eliminated from further review.

40:22
If there is missing or incomplete information from the applicant, we will notify them. An applicant will have seven calendar days to submit missing materials. If the applicant does not remedy these deficiencies in a timely manner, NTIA may deny the application.

40:39
As stated in the NOFO, we will first sequence applications that address priority one.

40:46
This priority, which is proposing a covered broadband project that is designed to provide broadband service to the greatest number of households in an eligible area. These applications will then be evaluated against the objective criteria set forth in Section 5A of the NOFO to determine their further eligibility for award.

41:09
To the extent that funding remains available, after we complete the review of priority one applications, we will then review applications that address priority two and continue with this priority sequencing process until we have awarded all available funding.

41:25
Then those applications will move to merit review (so the second box) where at least two objective reviewers that have demonstrated expertise in broadband deployment will review and score the applications. The reviewers may be federal employees or not.

41:41

During the review process, the reviewers may discuss the applications with each other, but will score the application from 0 to 100 on an individual basis. Application scoring over 70 points will be considered qualified for funding. So after the merit review is complete, those applications that were scored as 70 or above and qualified for funding will move to programmatic review.

In this review, NTIA program staff, such as myself, will use available data from the FCC as required in the Act to validate eligible service areas.

The FCC Form 477 data is a data layer in NTIA's National Broadband Availability Map (NBAM), and we will rely on this data, along with other datasets contained in the NBAM, and any other available information to validate applicants' proposed service areas is meeting the Act's definition of an eligible service area. We'll also provide a comprehensive review, ensuring that the application meets all objectives set out in the NOFO. At this point, NTIA staff may request supplemental documentation and will re-evaluate the application package based on all of the available information presented.

Applicants will have 10 calendar days to submit any additional information to NTIA. As you can see, the process is very thorough, and NTIA will be very busy this fall.

Now onto the fun stuff.

If you have a question, I bet [the] NTIA website has the answer. We have been posting FAQs on our website on a fairly regular basis trying to capture the most common questions we have received, and even including some not so common ones. NTIA staff is happy to answer your questions, but I would recommend consulting our FAQs first before sending an email to us.

If your question is not answered directly in the FAQs, I bet something close to it is in there and you can infer the answer.

The FAQs are organized by category, including the categories listed on the slide: Program Overview, Eligibility, Other Broadband Funding Programs and Eligible Service Areas, How to Apply, Evaluation of Applications, Grant Award and Reporting Requirements.

Some common questions are listed here and the answers can be found in the FAQs, such as what constitutes a covered partnership? Who's the lead

applicant? How's the funding going to be handled? How will NTIA determine if an area is eligible? Are there any mapping requirements? Are the service areas that are to be served by non-wireline broadband services eligible for this program? Will we need to have an environmental review completed prior to submitting the application? Is minimum broadband speed based on advertised or actual speeds? If there are supply chain issues, can NTIA extend the period of performance? All of these questions and many more can be answered on the website.

44:54

The easiest way to navigate the FAQs is to perform a keyword search, such as on environmental, or FCC, unserved, latency, et cetera. Whatever you're looking for, just type in a keyword, and if the question is on there it will pop up. If you can't find the answer, then contact BroadbandUSA at BroadbandUSA@NTIA.gov.

45:20

We will have another set of FAQs that will be posted very soon and expect that we will have one more set posted a week before the application is due, so check the website regularly.

45:32

And now I'll turn the webinar back over to Susannah to moderate the Q&A session for all those questions that are not found in the FAQs. Thank you for joining us today. And now I'll hand it to Susannah.

45:56

Susannah Spellman:

Hi, everyone. I'm waiting for everyone to come online. I've been going through a lot of the really great questions that you have been sending us. Thank you.

46:06

Note, if for some reason we don't get to your question, it's probably a large part, because it has been answered in the FAQ. So definitely search those FAQs – we posted where you can find those FAQs in the chat box – or they're upcoming in FAQs. Or for maybe some of them, we don't know the answers yet, but we're going to take those questions back and include those in upcoming FAQs.

46:34

So, with that being said, I am going to jump right into it. So we have had a lot of questions about the state SPOC. I think one of the things – I'm going to shoot this to Katherine. I think folks want to understand where they can understand whether or not their state has a SPOC and where that contact information is.

46:59

I think I have a website that I can link, but if you can go ahead and take that question, and I'll put that in the chat.

Katherine Bates:

Sure, so Susannah is going put the latest information we have, which is probably not the most up to date information we have. And I believe there's 15 states, three territories, and DC who have SPOCs. So if you are going to apply for federal funds, and you are in one of these states, even if your application might cover more than one state, please contact them.

47:33
But I'd also recommend anybody who's applying for this program to let their state, what we call state broadband leader, which is the people who manage broadband in your state and we have contacts in every state for that. I would recommend that anybody applying, contact their state broadband leader, which the information is on our website at BroadbandUSA.gov. It is a longer website address. But on our website under Resources, if you go to States and you click on your state, it'll come up with a name. And I would just, if you're going to apply, I would make sure that that person knows, in addition to the SPOC that is mentioned in the application. So, not every state has a SPOC, but every state does have a state broadband leader.

Susannah Spellman:

48:28
Thank you. And I am actually going in there and putting in that list to those state contact folks right there. Yes.

48:37
OK Jennifer, we've had some questions about *Davis Bacon* and prevailing wage requirements. Specifically, there's a couple of sub questions to this, so bear with me.

48:49
Is a broadband service provider that is partnering with the lead applicant required to comply with the *Davis Bacon* prevailing wage requirements? The NOFO language makes it sound like complying with prevailing wage requirements is encouraged, but not required. Will a project be rejected if the budget does not comply with those requirements?

Jennifer Duane:

49:09
Thanks, Susannah. Yeah, that's a great question. So, *Davis Bacon* is not a requirement of this program. In order for *Davis Bacon* to be a requirement, it would need to be specifically stated that way in our statute authorizing this program. It is not. We are encouraging compliance with *Davis Bacon* and in paying prevailing wages but it's not a requirement. We have made it a selection factor, which means that we have the ability, if we have two similarly situated projects, that if one is paying prevailing wages and the other is not, we could select that project ahead of the one that is not offering prevailing wages. But it is not a requirement. So it's not something that we would be rejecting out of hand if and if an applicant did not propose to pay *Davis Bacon* prevailing wages.

Susannah Spellman:	50:04 So just to follow up on that, if a broadband provider is not required to pay the prevailing wage, which it sounds like that's the case, should the provider nevertheless factor the prevailing wage into its contingency costs, which is on the field or line 13 on the SF-424C?
Jennifer Duane:	50:22 I mean, if they're not paying the prevailing wage, then they wouldn't need to factor that in. Maybe I'm misunderstanding the question.
Susannah Spellman:	50:33 OK. Yeah, I'm not sure.
Jennifer Duane:	I don't know. If you're not paying for the prevailing wage then you don't need to include it or factor it into your budget.
Susannah Spellman:	50:41 Right, OK. Thank you. And then, are the labor rates what the broadband provider will pay for labor to uptake the project required to be disclosed?
Jennifer Duane:	50:51 I mean, I think, you know, in that we have in the detailed budget, a spreadsheet and budget narrative. I mean, we want to understand the details about the budget, so I think the more information that's provided I think that's appropriate. Yongming (Ming), do you have any insights in terms of that question?
Yongming Qiu:	51:14 Yeah, I think that's a great question there. Like you mentioned that there's no information that explains the costs in the budget narrative. It would be helpful for us to understand whether or not those costs are reasonable and necessary and allowable to the project. So, obviously, a detailed justification would help us understand what the cost is associated with and whether or not it is programmatically allowable.
Susannah Spellman:	51:44 Thank you. And, oh, go ahead, Jennifer.
Jennifer Duane:	51:47 I agree with Ming. At NTIA, one of the things we need to review is to make sure that the costs are allowable. So, the more detail that's provided in the detailed budget spreadsheet, in the budget narrative to help us make that determination is desired for our review.
Susannah Spellman:	52:07 And I was amiss in not introducing Ming, who's joining us here from the NIST's Grants Office. He is our partner from NIST who will be working to help us administer the grant. So, thank you, Ming for jumping in there. And I apologize for not introducing you earlier in the conversation.
Yongming Qiu:	Thank you for having me.

Susannah Spellman:

52:26

No, thank you. If there's grant questions, he's your man. Load him up. OK, so following along with grants questions. So, this had to do a little bit more with the budget.

52:39

Specifically, and I think, Jennifer, what level of details are NTIA looking for in a detailed budget justification and budget narrative? Are granular cost details needed for each category? For example, do applicants have to break out costs per foot of trenching, or are high level cost details sufficient, such as just providing the general trenching costs without providing distance and cost per foot?

Jennifer Duane:

53:03

I think we want to understand – the SF-424C is a very high-level budget, and you're grouping all these costs into these very broad cost classifications. So the budget narrative, the detailed budget spreadsheet, is your chance to break things out and let us know what costs are exactly going into those classification so we can compare them to the eligible uses in the NOFO to understand whether those costs are eligible. So, again, the more detail you can provide better for us in reviewing those costs to ensure that they're necessary, reasonable, allowable, and allocable, which are the determinations that we need to make under the OMB cost principles to make sure that these costs are eligible under the grant program. And I would err on the more information, the better for purposes of that determination.

Susannah Spellman:

54:00

All right, thank you. Katherine, we have a question about what should be included in the pro forma balance sheet.

54:07

Specifically, they asked, should we provide information that both partnership organizations specifically the political subdivision and the service provider are managing, or does it mean providing some type of financial protections of what the business expense revenue would be for the project locations that will be built with [these] grant funds?

Katherine Bates:

54:32

So that's a long question, but that's good, it's a very good question. We've had a lot about what to include in the pro forma and more is better. Inundated is not, if you've got – we don't want the whole municipal budget, by any means, we want the project budget.

54:54

But we also have to have proof that the project is going to be successful if funded. So just keep it that way. We did not put specifics about what to put in the pro forma in the budget, but more is better. Too much is not, if that makes sense. Jennifer, do you want to chime in on that?

55:18

Jennifer Duane: Yeah, that's exactly right, Katherine. I think you want to focus on the evaluation criteria as well when you're determining what information to provide. You put yourselves in the place of a reviewer or looking at your application.

55:31

Some of the evaluation criteria that reviewers will be looking at include applicants' organizational capability, the reasonableness of the budget, [and] the sustainability of the project. And so, the financial information that you want to provide, you want to gear those toward the evaluation criteria in the NOFO and make sure that you're providing sufficient information that a reviewer can assess that, yes, this, both as lead applicant and then the fixed broadband service provider there, it's going concern, it's financially stable, it has resources to undertake and complete the project. You know, and the projects are going to be sustainable. It's going to be generating revenue. These are all the things that a reviewer is going to be focused on when they look at your application. So you want to make sure that you provide sufficient information for reviewers to assess that.

56:19

Susannah Spellman: All right. Thank you.

56:21

Alright, Jennifer. Another question because I know you are our point of contact for EHP. So how should we approach environmental impact costs that arise during construction after award funding? So for example, right now, this potential applicant has a statement saying that they will comply with the required requirements, and any unexpected costs will be covered by the county. Is that sufficient, or does the applicant need to factor environmental costs into contingency funds?

56:52

Jennifer Duane: I mean, you can definitely factor that into contingency funds or contingency costs, that there may be unanticipated costs associated with environmental compliance. We don't expect an applicant to have all their environmental approvals and permits in place before the time of application. There will be a period where we will be conducting an environmental review.

57:18

We will most likely impose a specific award condition on the award to make sure that the environmental is complete before we issue or release funds to perform construction activities. And then there's always an opportunity to amend budgets once they're approved, once you're awarded. And, as, you know, experience additional cost, there is an opportunity to amend the budget accordingly.

57:47

Ming, do you want to add anything else on that front end from a grants office perspective?

Yongming Qiu:

57:54
Actually, what was the question, I'm sorry.

Jennifer Duane:

57:58
Oh, it's about the environmental and what factor costs in for that. If you don't have anything, I just thought if you wanted to weigh in on some of the budget discussion.

Susannah Spellman:

58:14
So, I've seen a couple of questions come in, and I'm going to take this. I'll give the moderators – oh I'm the moderator! – the presenters a quick break. It's been a long week, guys.

58:24
In regards to the application, regarding the eligible service area, and if folks have lists of census blocks or images of area maps, Google Earth Images, et cetera. They're wondering if they have to be included in the page count, or can they be attached as separate addendums? And they can be attached as separate addendums and excluded from the page count. Right, Jennifer?

Jennifer Duane:

Yes, that is correct. Yes.

Susannah Spellman:

58:54
All right. So Ming, we have a question about indirect costs. If the lead applicant will be relying on the fixed broadband provider as a subrecipient, are both entities administrative costs direct? The lead applicant does not have an indirect cost rate eligible for inclusion in the budget. Are there limitations in the total amount? Go ahead.

Yongming Qiu:

59:20
So, generally if you are including indirect costs to the budget, you will need to provide – either you have a negotiated indirect cost rate or use a sort of a certification from the state. In most cases, from a state that if you receive over $35 million of federal funds then you're required to negotiate a proposal.

59:43
So, if you don't have an indirect cost rate, and there is no specific line for indirect cost where – administrative cost line will be the appropriate line to include the indirect cost. Whether it's the lead applicant, or in this case here, the fixed broadband partner as a subrecipient, you will be included in the section there. On SF-424C, there's no contractual award line on the form, that way you can put it. So, that's where, probably, the most appropriate line to include the cost.

1:00:19
The important thing is that a detailed budget needs to be itemized and details justified [and] all costs within the correct cost category.

The answer to that question is that there's no limit for administrative costs for the program. So as long as it's necessary and justified, that would be sufficient.

1:00:45

Susannah Spellman: Thank you, Ming. OK, here's a tricky question. I think, Jennifer, we've had some of this come up in the FAQs, but this is a little bit different.

1:00:55

They're saying that if the political subdivision wins an NTIA Broadband Infrastructure [Program] Grant listing a covered partnership, do they still have to place bids for every service cited in the grant? How are the partners that they listed guarantee they get to work with the project if the company wins the bid?

1:01:15

Jennifer Duane: I mean, I think for purposes of the application, they just need to identify the fixed broadband service provider, and we're leaving it up to the political subdivision to put the steps in place to do what they need to do on their end to make sure that they follow their procurement requirements in terms of getting the collaborators and other project participants involved in the project. So just for our purposes, we just need to understand who the fixed broadband service provider is going to be, just name it in the application, and then provide a letter of commitment. But any kind of other formal agreement or procurement that needs to go through, that's up to the up to the political subdivision.

1:02:07

Susannah Spellman: All right, thank you. Katherine, if there is a consortium that is in the covered partnership that includes a county, a city, and a broadband provider, can the city be the primary/lead applicant?

1:02:23

Katherine Bates: Yes. I like how Susannah always gives me questions that are yes or no.

Susannah Spellman: I think this was associated with it, but the next one gets a little trickier.

1:02:33

Katherine Bates: Yes, the lead applicant has to be the governmental entity. If it's a consortium and you've signed the consortium agreements and everybody's OK with that, then it can be either the city or the county, whoever is going to take the lead. I imagine that's the case, and quite a few because a lot of cities have more capacity than counties do.

1:02:58

Susannah Spellman: So, here's another follow up question. Can noncontiguous political subdivisions be in a single consortium?

Katherine Bates:	1:03:08 Yes.
Susannah Spellman:	So, these subdivisions are not next to each other in the state, but they may be in a different county, so that's OK?
Katherine Bates:	Right. And you will have that. And you just have to identify your unserved areas, and if you have one fixed broadband provider is your partner. Yes, it can be on two separate sides of the state. They can, yes. As long as you have an agreement in place.
Jennifer Duane:	1:03:33 Yeah, there's no requirement that their proposed service areas be contiguous. They can identify several, and they can be anywhere within the area under which the political subdivision has control, whether it's the city, county, or the state.
Susannah Spellman:	1:03:48 Right, and you could have multiple service providers be partners, correct?
Jennifer Duane:	That's correct.
Susannah Spellman:	1:03:54 So here's another question. Jennifer or Katherine, when designing a last mile fiber project for the proposed service area, can the last mile be to the curb for each passing household in the project area, or does it have to actually go up to the actual dwelling unit?
Jennifer Duane:	1:04:16 We're trying to ensure that our first priority is to connect unserved households, so, that's not to say that that wouldn't be something that we wouldn't allow. I mean, our priority for the program is to connect unserved households.
Katherine Bates:	1:04:36 And if they're doing that in the narrative, I would think what they would need to do is explain how that connection to the house was going to happen. Like, if it's another program that you're partnering with, maybe the provider has one or the city is going to underwrite it, or something. But I think that connection – because it's really number of households that are going to be served – to take it to the street or the driveway, you need to explain more.
Jennifer Duane:	1:05:08 Yeah. So, like I said, we wouldn't outright say no, but we just need to understand what the plan is, and what the plan would be for connecting unserved households.

Susannah Spellman:	1:05:23 Alright. This is a tricky question. I'm not sure what the context is but Ming, I'm going to throw it at you because it has to do with the standard forms. I got a question here. What do we attach in section 14 for the project area details?
Yongming Qiu:	1:05:45 Section 14 of what form?
Susannah Spellman:	1:05:47 I don't know, we don't have that context.
	1:05:52 Section 14 details. I'm not sure what that means. I'm not sure if I'm understanding the question correctly.
Jennifer Duane:	1:05:58 Are they talking about [section 14 in] SF-424, which is the areas affected by the projects? I think Natalie went over that in her presentation. She said, you know, you can add attachments on the map, or whatever the service areas, it's not required, but it's recommended or appreciated.
Yongming Qiu:	1:06:21 OK, so, yeah, I mean, I think that's section 14. Section 15, that's where you attach the budget narrative and budget justification per the instruction of the NOFO. But for section 14, we went through that, if that's what the question was.
Jennifer Duane:	Yeah, line 14 is areas affected by the project. And then description title [in] number 15. Then right after that is the attachment button to attach all the attachments.
Susannah Spellman:	1:06:58 OK. Here's a question: is real estate considered in-kind cost? For example, a school district is providing space on its property for building a tower. Would that space be considered in-kind?
Jennifer Duane:	1:07:13 Yeah, if the space was going to be contributed to the project, then it could be considered an in-kind match.
Susannah Spellman:	1:07:23 Oh, we've got another question about pages. Everyone wants to write a lot for this grant. I think I know the answer, but I'm going to defer to Jennifer and Katherine and Ming. Are only the pages with text explanation required to be numbered? So, I'm assuming these are pictures of the service areas, or pictures of maps, or even the list of census blocks that probably talking about?
Jennifer Duane:	1:07:52 Yeah, there's only the page limit that is associated with the project narrative. So [there] would be a page numbering for that. But for any

attachment, there's not a page limit requirement for those. If it's easier to understand, you can certainly number the pages of your attachments so we know they're supposed to be in a specific order. So, yes [you can] number them, but it's not necessary a requirement.

Susannah Spellman:

1:08:25
So now I'm going to start digging into some of the questions that have been popping up while we've been doing the Q&A, so bear with me folks as I kind of go through them.

1:08:33
Here's a question about items having to be in trust, per page 37 of the NOFO. Do electronic equipment purchase for $25,000 have to be put into trust?

Jennifer Duane:

1:08:49
So, what pages of the NOFO? Is that property disposition requirements? Yeah. So, I mean, anything that you purchase with grant funds, there's a federal interest that's attached to it. So, anything that's greater – the unit cost greater than $5,000, if it's a piece of equipment, than the federal interest would attach to that. So, what that means is that there are certain use and disposition requirements that apply. So the assets need to be used for the purpose of the project.

1:09:21
If at any time it's no longer used or useful, you would need to come in and get approval from NTIA and NIST grants office to dispose or sell of the asset. But so, if it's a piece of equipment, and the unit cost is more than $5,000, then yes, there's a federal interest in those assets if they were purchased with grant funds.

Susannah Spellman:

1:09:44
Thank you. This is a question for Ming. This is a common question. I know he answered it yesterday on the webinar. If awarded, does the money go to the applicant in one lump sum or in advance?

Yongming Qiu:

1:09:59
Thank you for that question. So the answer to that question is if the application is selected for award, there would be specific award conditions to the award. So unless otherwise stated in the specific award conditions, advance payment will be made to the authorized nonfederal entity. And also the funds will be made available and pre-authorized to the automatic standard application system, which is our ASAP payment system, where the nonfederal entity has access to drop down funds as needed to cover the costs for the project.

1:10:42
However, the prime recipient is the only one that will be have access to the federal drop-down federal funds from the ASAP system. In that connection, the prime recipient will be responsible for reviewing the subrecipient and vendors invoices and make payments to the subrecipients

or vendors. So the award will be made pre-authorized to ASAP and the funds can be drawn down on an as needed basis through the ASAP system.

Susannah Spellman: 1:11:10
OK, great. I have a couple questions about – I think I've got an answer to this, Jennifer. Tell me if I'm wrong. Someone wants to know if they can submit the budget Excel justification in landscape format. I don't see why not as long as it is that it's an 8.5 [inches] by 11 [inches] document, correct?

Jennifer Duane:
Yeah, that's right.

Susannah Spellman: 1:11:33
OK, and Ming, you're very familiar with grants.gov. But I also want to share with everyone that grants.gov has fantastic training online [and] a really helpful help desk that's staffed 24 hours. So if you have some questions about some of the forms or the actual application that you are using to fill out the application for this grant program, definitely look at grants.gov for a lot of those questions to be answered, too.

1:12:00
But we do have a question here, Ming.

Jennifer Duane: 1:12:01
And if I could just add, we do get a couple of questions and if you're experiencing problems, like if you can't access the opportunity, I mean, it setup that you can apply to this grant opportunity. If you're having problems with that, contact the helpdesk on Grants.gov. This is not an NTIA system. We know we've tested it. We know that you should be able to go on and submit your application package right now. And if you're having issues, I would contact the grants.gov helpdesk.

Yongming Qiu: 1:12:33
Just to add to what Jennifer said. I know that we have been getting a lot of questions regarding, you know, they are not able to upload some of the forms to the grants.gov portal. So there are instructions in the NOFO. It's on bottom of page 16 and top page 17 in the NOFO where you address some of the questions regarding attaching other documents – a project narrative, and budget to the application. To attach it, [in] the SF-424, line 15, like I mentioned earlier, if you click on the attachment, then you should be able to open up a zip file, that's where you upload the documents for the budget narrative, budget justification, and other documentation to support the proposal.

Susannah Spellman: 1:13:32
So that is actually dovetails perfectly to another question we got in regards to uploading attachments. So one of the potential applicants wants to know if they can upload the attachments one at a time, or do they have to wait until they have completed all of them to upload them?

Yongming Qiu:
1:13:50
I believe you can actually, you mean upload the attachments to the SF-424, right?

Susannah Spellman:
1:13:55
I believe, so, yes. That's the only area that you can do uploads. Yeah.

Yongming Qiu:
1:14:00
So, you, if you attach additional documentation to the SF-424, you can actually upload one at a time or all at a time. So, once you click attachment, you should be able to add, delete, or remove the ones you don't need. And you can upload the ones you need in there.

Susannah Spellman:
1:14:21
Here's another question. Does a subcontract bid have to be broken down in the budget worksheet?

Jennifer Duane:
1:14:31
The subcontract bid?

Susannah Spellman:
1:14:34
Yeah, they're probably thinking the details of that actual bid in the subcontract, you know? I'm assuming that they have a bid to trench and pull fiber through a conduit. Do they have to have those costs broken down, like what's the trenching part, what's the conduit piece, and what's the blowing fiber piece, for example?

Jennifer Duane:
1:14:58
Yeah, I mean, it would be helpful to know that, as we're going through, make sure that the activities and the costs are allowable.

Susannah Spellman:
1:15:07
So, here's another question. I think, Katherine, you talk a little bit about this in the FAQs. But it is a good question, and I think Katherine and Yongming might be able to help here. Somebody's worried that what if they find out their attachments aren't accepted days after they submit their application on 8/17?

Katherine Bates:
1:15:28
Ming, correct me if I'm wrong, but we would contact the applicant as soon as we do the initial evaluation, initial review that I mentioned, and say, something must have happened, your attachments weren't uploaded. Can you please go back and upload them? Yes, we would cure that by reaching out to them. So don't worry about it, if technology sometimes isn't always 100%, as we know.

Susannah Spellman:
But there is a timeframe for that, right?

Katherine Bates:
It's seven days. So once we reach out to you, you have seven days to get the information to us.

Yongming Qiu:

1:16:08
Yeah. So, that's generally pertaining for non-substantive information that is easily cured or rectified during the admission process. If the documents required in the NOFO that is not incomplete, unless it is non-substantive information that we require to review the proposal.

Katherine Bates:

1:16:33
But we would contact them, Ming, and say, we didn't get this.

Yongming Qiu:

Yeah, we encourage you to check your application package – make sure you have all the required forms; all the required documentation is attached before you send it.

Susannah Spellman:

1:16:51
All right. Here's a tricky question, Jennifer. It has to do with potential overbuild. So, another carrier has an existing middle mile in the project area, but it's long-haul transport only. Can we use this grant to overbuild the middle mile and provide services to the end user?

Jennifer Duane:

1:17:13
I think we'll have to evaluate that, and once we get it – we have an obligation not to duplicate funding, so I think it's hard to say one way or the other from a hypothetical, but we need to understand what the nature of the overbuild was. What current speeds are being provided, versus what would be provided under this new proposal.

1:17:41
So it's not something we would reject outright, but we would need to do a little bit more evaluation of what the proposed build was and what the contemplated overbuild would be to make sure that we're not duplicating federal funding and we're not duplicating costs that are paid for with another federal fund.

Susannah Spellman:

1:18:05
OK. Katherine, if a municipality is an ISP that's offering high speed broadband, can they go for this grant without a partnership?

Katherine Bates:

1:18:16
They would have a partnership. The city would have to be the lead applicant. So, the city is the lead applicant. Then, the ISP, which is usually a subset of the city, would be the Internet service provider. So, it would still be considered a partnership that way. So, it's just kind of bifurcating the two which I'm sure in the city finances and everything it is separate, too.

Susannah Spellman:

1:18:46
OK, thank you. Alright, so I have a long question here, OK.

1:18:53
The census block information for our effective project area downloaded from the NTIA Indicators of Broadband Need map, does not show actual

speeds, but at rather advertised speeds. The census tract information for the same area, which should include the effected census block, shows a median speed well below 25/3. Will that suffice to meet the definition of an eligible service area?

Jennifer Duane:

1:19:20

Definitely provide that information in your application. As Katherine mentioned during a programmatic review, we will also be validating that information against information that we have in our National Broadband Availability Map which has a little bit more data – in fact, a lot more data layers – that you would be seeing in the Indicators of Broadband Need map that we made publicly available. So provide that information [and] any other additional information that you have to substantiate the claim that the area is unserved. And we will also do our own validation using the tools that we have available.

Susannah Spellman:

1:19:55

All right. So, Jennifer, here's another question, and I'm pretty sure we address it in the FAQs, but I think it's kind of tricky, and this has to do with the FCC RDOF program. Specifically, the applicant says some small portions of the project area may have received federal monies through the RDOF program; however, no work has begun, and we do not know what work, if any, will be done. How does that affect our application in these areas?

Jennifer Duane:

1:20:27

We're prioritizing unserved locations and the definition of unserved is that the area lacks access to qualifying broadband service and no other broadband provider is receiving federal or state support or been selected to receive.

1:20:42

So if the area has received or RDOF funding, that's not just precluded outright, but it's just means that we need to do additional research, digging into what exactly has been sort of – what's the timing of that deployment. And we have our weekly coordination meetings with the FCC and USDA. so we will be enduring to make sure that we're not duplicating funding that these agencies, the FCC or USDA, are already committed to funding. So it's something that we'll need to take a closer look at to make sure that those particular areas would be eligible for funding under our program.

Susannah Spellman:

1:21:25

All right. So what if the state does not want to participate in the program? Is the broadband provider allowed to apply on their own? And I know that answer is no, but Katherine, what are some other opportunities for them? Should they work with other localities?

Katherine Bates:

1:21:50

You're supposed to let me say no, because I only do the yes or no questions. If the state does not want be your partner on the covered

partnership, then reach out to the county. Reach out to the city, reach out if there's a regional planning commission. Anything that's an instrumentality of the state which varies from state to state. So you might need to look into that. Reach out to any other government entity and see in that covered area, in the area that you're going to apply for. So, it doesn't have to be the state.

Jennifer Duane:

1:22:21
But you do need a governmental entity.

Katherine Bates:
Yes, I'm sorry, I didn't finish that. It has to be a covered partnership and the lead applicant has to be – kind of, it has been really long week – and the lead applicant has to be that government entity. So, you need to make sure that, when you're talking to them, to let them know that they would have to be the lead entity.

Susannah Spellman:

1:22:45
Ming, here's a grants question for you about the SF-424 suite of forms. If there is a third-party writing and administering this grant, is it included in the administrative area of the SF-424C budget form, or should there be an SF-424B attached for that portion of the budget?

Yongming Qiu:

1:23:13
I think the pre-application costs allow up to $50,000, I believe in the NOFO, where only if you are selected and awarded that you are basically reimbursed for that cost. If the award is not selected, then basically you are at your own risk for incurring pre-award costs. To answer that question, that cost can be included in the administrative costs in the SF-424C, section C, but the justification has to be included in your budget narrative to explain the cost of each item, including the category.

Susannah Spellman:

1:23:59
Right. Here's a question about indirect cost rate, so I'm going to throw it at Ming again. Local governments that don't receive funding [at] an excess of $35 million, are not required to negotiate an indirect cost rate. If said local government submits a certificate of indirect cost rate, would that suffice?

Yongming Qiu:

1:24:19
Yes. So, for a state or government entity, if you do not receive $35 million [in] federal funds, you are not required to provide a negotiated rate proposal. So you would submit a certification to justify the indirect cost rate you're charging to the award, and explain how it's calculated based on the base of the modified total direct cost base.

Susannah Spellman:

1:24:46
OK. I know, Jennifer, this is something that you've seen in other grant programs you've worked on, but I think this is still something that we should share with folks. We got a question about [whether] applicants [are] able to mark confidential any budget details in their budget narrative

and/or detailed budget justification they provide since this would be a highly sensitive business information.

Jennifer Duane:

1:25:09
Well we don't make the application materials at a whole public. The only thing that we would [make public is] the executive summary that you submit as part of your application. That will be public. All the other materials that we have are not made public. But anything that you want to highlight as confidential, you may do so. The NOFO has a provision. I think it's – I forget which section – but there is there is a provision that talks about confidential business information and to designate that as such.

Susannah Spellman:

1:25:47
All right, we've got another question about in-kind match. If the service provider owns poles on which the fiber will be strung, could that be considered as an in-kind contribution?

Jennifer Duane:

1:25:58
Yes.

Susannah Spellman:

1:25:59
All right. Oh, this is a tough one. I don't know if this falls into contingencies or not, but you tell me. How do we account for unknown inflationary costs? For example, we have an estimate now, but the bid ends up coming in 10% to 15% higher.

Jennifer Duane:

1:26:18
Yeah, and that's where you would put in the contingency costs in line item 13 of the SF-424C. As we mentioned yesterday, we do have a FAQ in the works talking about the contingency costs and how to look at them. The general percentage that NTIA, we're looking in concert with our sister agency the Economic Development Administration (EDA) is to roughly use an estimate of 10% to 15% for contingency costs. But we'll explain that in the FAQ that we will hopefully get cleared this week and we'll post it to the website.

Susannah Spellman:

1:26:58
All right, I've got one last question I'm going to give it to Katherine. If the ISP is an entity of the city, is a partnership required being that we are a department of the city?

Katherine Bates:

1:27:11
Yes. I'm looking at Jennifer because she got to highlight my yes/no in the covered partnership.

Jennifer Duane:

Yes. We do address that in our FAQs. And so the concept of a partnership means two different entities. So if you are a municipality and you have your own broadband service provider unit of the government, you still need another entity to form the covered partnership. That's not to say that your own entity can't participate in the project and help with it, but in order to form a partnership we need two different entities: a governmental

entity [such as] the state [or] political subdivision, and a fixed broadband service provider. And the two are not affiliated with each other. And I think that we have an FAQ on that in our second set of FAQs or third set that is posted on the website.

1:28:18

Susannah Spellman:

Another question snuck in, and this is important because a lot of people have been really worried that the one-year period of performance is just not enough time. So the question is: you stated on line 17 on the SF-424 to put the project start date and end date as a one-year period of performance. If you know your project is going to take more than one year to complete, do you complete your project plan with the number of years you know it will take to complete the project? Or do you make the project fit within the one-year time period?

1:28:47

Jennifer Duane:

So, right now and this is because obviously we know that a construction project is not going to be completed in one year. The reason it says one year is because it's in the statute that funds must be expended within one year. So right now, everyone has a one-year period of performance, an award period. If you know your project will not be completed, then you can request an extension from the Assistant Secretary. And the statute in the NOFO lays out the elements of this extension request. You need to say that construction projects underway, you have a plan for the funds, extenuating circumstances prevent you from completing this project within one year.

1:29:31

So your budget should still use costs associated with a one-year award period, because that's all you have right now. I would put in your extension request, explain how much additional time you're going to need and explain, like if it's another two years, explain that in the extension request. We allow that to be submitted with the application. But right now, everyone has a one-year award period. And so you should structure your budget that way. But in your extension request, you can describe how long it's really going to take into a constructive project, and what you envision, how many more years you're going to take, and how you envision costs being allocated over that time period.

1:30:20

Susannah Spellman:

Thanks, Jennifer. Go ahead, Katherine.

1:30:27

Katherine Bates:

It's not on this question. I have a follow up to the municipal question. I didn't get to do my pitch that if this program, because it is only $288 million, we imagine it's going to be oversubscribed by a substantial amount. So if this program does not work for you as the municipality and the municipal broadband provider, there is other money out there.

1:30:52

There's the Treasury State and Local Fiscal Relief funding that a lot of states and localities are using for broadband, so contact your state. There is also money in the Capital Projects Fund of the American Rescue Plan that Treasury's administering [and] that money is going to go directly to states and they should be having, as they said this summer. So, it's still summer. And they'll put out the guidance on that. And that money also goes directly to states. So, I encourage you, if this program doesn't work for you or you don't get funded, to contact your state and talk to them about your project.

1:31:33

Susannah Spellman:

That's a great point. Thank you, Katherine. So, we're just hitting up at four o'clock. Thank you so much for joining us. Please see those links that I posted in the chat. One of them is to the state broadband points of contact that Katherine was talking about. The other is to the webpage for the Broadband Infrastructure Program that has all the FAQs [and] past webinars that are posted. And within the next week, we will post a copy of the presentation materials, the transcript, and a video if you want to watch us all perform again. Thank you so much for participating. And if we didn't address your questions, we will be working our hardest to get them included in FAQs that will be released over the next week or so. But thank you again, and have a wonderful afternoon.

1:32:20

All:

Thank you.

END TRANSCRIPT.