

Internet for All Webinar Series: Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program

Moderator: Arica Cox

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Arica Cox

01:32: Hello. I'd like to welcome you to our Internet for All webinar series. My name is Arica Cox and I am a Telecommunications Policy Analyst with the Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, or NTIA. I will be serving as today's moderator.

01:51: Today we will be providing a deeper dive into the application process for the new Enabling Middle Mile broadband infrastructure program, also known as Middle Mile. Looking at our agenda, we'll start today's session with welcoming remarks from the Associate Administrator of the Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth, Doug Kinkoph. We will then receive special guest remarks from Special Representative for Broadband Andy Burke.

02:18: Middle Mile program director Sarah Bleau will then cover the program's uses of funding, review and scoring processes, and application components process.

02:28: Finally, we will move into a moderated Q and A session where Sarah and I will be joined by Scott McNichol, a grants officer with the National Institute of Standards and Technology. I'll now turn it over to Doug Kinkoph and Andy Burke.

Andy Burke

02:46: Hello and welcome. I'm Andy Burke, Special Representative for Broadband for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. I want to thank you for joining us I'm so glad you're all here with us today to be part of this historic moment. Because of the work of dedicated people like you and broadband offices across the country, millions of American families will finally have access to affordable reliable high-speed internet for the very first time.

03:15: It's great to be working on an issue in Washington DC where the President is showing incredible leadership and we actually have a bipartisan group of lawmakers on Capitol Hill who agree that this is a top priority and are willing to fund it.

03:31: You know, the digital divide has plagued our country for more than 20 years, and now we finally have the funding, the resources, and the capacity to do something about it. And we will be successful because of people like you. This is an all hands on deck effort, and we need all of our partners on board to accomplish our goal: reliable, affordable access to Internet for all, coupled with the skills to use it for economic, social, and educational mobility. Together will build the path toward a brighter American future. Thank you again for being here today and for your commitment to this mission.

Doug Kinkoph

Thank you, Arica. Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Doug Kinkoph and I'm the Associate Administrator for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth. Thank you for joining us

today. Today's webinar on the Middle Mile program is part of the Internet for All initiative.

For decades we've talked about the digital divide, however, the last couple of years alone have shown that a strong internet connection is vital for our country's infrastructure. The goal of the Internet for All initiative and the middle mile program is to close the digital divide by providing all Americans with access to high-speed, reliable, and affordable internet. Strong Internet connectivity powers opportunities for individuals, communities, and industry.

This \$1 billion program gives eligible entities the ability to leverage existing resources to connect unserved and underserved communities. And I look forward to reviewing proposal in a while project when our application portal opens on June 21. Now I'll pass it to our Middle Mile program director, Sarah Bleau, who will go over the program in greater detail. Thank you for joining us this afternoon.

Sarah Bleau

05:56: Hi, my name is Sarah Bleau. I am here with NTIA and I am excited to talk to you very quickly with an intro about the middle mile program that we've launched here at NTIA. Today we are going to talk about the \$1 billion middle mile program called Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure. It is a program that was designed to expand middle mile infrastructure to reduce the cost of connecting unserved and underserved areas.

06:26: We talked about this last week in the webinar, but I'll just touch on it again quickly for you. Middle mile is that, there's last mile, which connects to households and community anchor institutions and there's the big behemoth Internet backbone. We're not touching those things with this program. We are doing the middle mile which is just that carriage between last mile and the Internet backbone.

06:54: This program is open to a lot of different entities, including government utilities, TELCO companies, nonprofits. And some examples of funding which we'll talk about more later include construction, acquisition of facilities equipment, engineering costs, personnel, and other costs that are necessary to make this program work for you.

07:17: Down here on the timeline you can see that we launched our NOFO, we made it public on May 13. We will open up the application on our grants portal in about a month. And those applications will be done no later than the end of the day, on September 30 of this year.

07:36: We will begin making awards no sooner, no earlier, than March 1 of 2023, and this is a five year term so, for deployment, that is what you can expect. Again, we talked about this last week but middle mile includes least dark fiber, it might mean carrier neutral submarine cable landing station, it might be a an undersea cable, for example. It might be wired like those or it might be wired less it could be towers, it could be microwave links, it could be fiber to the towers. There's a lot that you can do with middle mile.

08:19: Middle mile funding is available to many entities and partnerships. The term eligible entity could be governmental. It might be state or local political subdivision. It might be tribal or native. It could be an industry entity such as a tech company, TELCO company, a co-op, public utility district. It might be a nonprofit or other association. And it could be a partnership of two or more of any of those entities.

08:54: The Middle mile program will support broadband access affordability and adoption across all Americans. The program is designed to build new infrastructure, to bring traffic to remote unserved or underserved locations. The program is designed to make the Internet more affordable for end users it because you're creating opportunities for last mile providers who will then offer more cost-effective services to end users.

09:25: This is driving adoption and equity. These projects will occur in diverse geographies and priority communities such as unserved, underserved, remote, and high poverty areas. And here, you see, this is really about everybody. This is about the individual who will benefit because the cost of their Internet plan has been brought down because of the middle mile program. This is about community anchor institutions who will benefit as a result of this. This is about the tribal and local and state governments. This is about the TELCO providers and community organizations who can all apply for this program.

10:06: So Now I'm going to talk a little bit about the uses of funding. And this is going to be up to \$980 million and we expect that the actual awards will be between \$5 and \$100 million per project. That's not a maximum or minimum, but we do ask, if you're asking for federal funding that's outside of that range, then provide an explanation why you need something other than that.

10:35: The grants can be used for construction, for acquisition of facilities and telecom equipment, its engineering, permitting, rights of way. We're historically looking at the environmental reviews. It might be your workforce. It might be fringe benefits for staff. And it's up to \$50,000, less than \$50,000 on pre application expenses. Those will be expenses that were incurred after the NOFO was published and before the grant has been awarded.

11:07: Here you'll see this as a five year timeline. If we anticipate that no awards will be made before March 1 of next year, then by the end of year two, 40% of the project must be completed. I won't read this to you, you can see by the end of year five we're asking that 100% of the project be completed. There is a potential to request a one year extension. And what you see here is that there are we understand there are qualifying circumstances that, and you will be asked to explain, to demonstrate that you have a plan for the use of the grant funds that the project build out is underway, or that there are extenuating circumstances which require an extension of up to one year. And if you can put that all together in a request than the Assistant Secretary might grant that.

11:58: So now we're going to get into the real meat that we haven't talked about all together just yet, the review and scoring process. This is all contained in the NOFO. I wanted to take a few minutes we at NTIA want to take some time explaining this the way that we're looking at it. In the NOFO it describes three different stages of review. There's the initial eligibility review, there's the merit review, and there is the programmatic review. In that first step, the eligibility review, what we're looking at is to make sure that your application is complete and that you meet the eligibility criteria. I'll dive into this in just a few minutes.

12:40: The second stage is merit review. And here we will have merit reviewers taking a look at your project purpose and benefits, as well as the sustainability. Your project will be rated anywhere between 0 and 100.

12:55: And then third, we have programmatic review, which is when the NTIA staff might reach out to you the applicant to ask for some additional information and we will assess your project. And use weighted scores for ranking. Those, if we take a little half step back, I want to point out that between merit and programmatic that those projects, those applications, which score an average of at least 80 points in merit and meet two of the five statutory criteria will be prioritized in the programmatic review.

13:33: And we'll talk about that in a few minutes also. Finally, I want to point, it's important to point out that the Department of Commerce can select projects for funding based on this ranked list, what comes out programmatic based on your score, with potential adjustments for geographic diversity and diversity in award size.

13:55: So, first, the eligibility review. Eligible entities must meet five eligibility criteria. The first one, which is a mouthful, we will talk about more on the next slide, but this is demonstrating that you are financially, technically, and operationally capable of supporting this kind of a project, that's number one. Number two, you must certify that the project will be capable of supporting retail broadband service.

14:26: Number three, you must commit to a match or a non-federal cost share of no less than 30% of total project cost. Tribal and native entities may request a partial or complete waiver.

14:42: Fourth, you must make a binding commitment to prioritize one of these three things: Either one, connecting middle mile infrastructure to last mile networks in unserved areas. To connecting non contiguous trust lands. Or three, offering wholesale broadband service at reasonable rates on a carrier-neutral basis.

15:08: And the fifth eligibility criteria is about interconnection. You must offer interconnection in perpetuity where it is technically feasible, on reasonable rates and terms. So now I'm going on to this next slide we're going to talk more about this first criteria.

15:28: And we're looking for you to show us that you are capable of carrying out the project in a competent manner. And we're looking for you to show, to demonstrate that you have the financial, managerial, technical, and operational capability to carry out this project and operate this network.

15:47: Regarding the financial capability, we are looking for certification attesting to your capabilities. We're looking for a letter of credit, we're looking for financial statements.

15:57: On the managerial capability, we're looking for resumes of key personnel. We're looking for our org charts and we're looking for a narrative that will describe your managerial readiness.

16:11: On technical capability. Again, we are looking for certification attesting to your qualifications. We're looking for network designs, route maps, project costs, build out timelines, and milestones for completion, and a capital investment schedule to back that up. We are looking for compliance with laws. We are looking for operational capability. Here again, we're looking for certification attesting to your operational qualification. And additional certifications if you've operated something like this in the past. And then finally, we want to know about ownership and we will be looking for details around ownership for any party that is greater than 10% of your stock.

16:58: Moving on to the second phase overview which is merit. I mentioned earlier that there are two buckets that are going to be judged or scored rather in the merit review. That is project purpose and benefits, and that is worth 60 points. And then project sustainability, which is worth 40 points.

17:19: Number one on project purpose and benefits: deploying to on or underserved areas or improving affordability in existing markets can get you up to 20 points. So that's building new to on or underserved areas or two, improving affordability in existing markets is for 20 points.

17:43: You can get 10 points if you offer non discriminatory interconnection in perpetuity, where feasible. Another 10 points if you offer open access to that funded infrastructure, which is being built in perpetuity. Another 10 points is available to you for providing other benefits such as redundancy and direct interconnect facilities. And then 10 points, working with your community, meeting their needs, and if you're able to complete this project into yours.

18:15: Going on to project sustainability. There is the organizational capability that we will look at, and that is worth five points. Your budget, and the reasonableness of your budget is worth 10 point. The fiscal sustainability of the project, beyond the award period, that is worth 10 points. And finally, the non-federal cost share. What you see here is, if you match with 30 to 40%, you will get five points, if you match with 41 to 50%, you will get 10 points, and if you match with greater than 50%, you will get 15 points.

18:58: I mentioned earlier, that those applications that come out of merit with an average score of at least 80 or greater and meet two of the five statutory criteria will be prioritized into programmatic review. What you see here on the right are the five statutory criteria. The first is adopting fiscally sustainable middle mile strategies. The second is committing to offering a non-discriminatory interconnect to last mile providers or anyone who's asking, with a bonafide request. The third statutory criteria is identifying those last mile providers who you could interconnect with, who you could offer, who would be able to offer sustainable plans.

19:48: The fourth criteria is offering or identifying some sort of investment or in-kind support which would accelerate the project completion. And the fifth statute criteria is benefiting national security interests of the United States and the Department of Defense.

20:07: So now we're in the third part of review which is called programmatic. Keep in mind the staff here at NTIA, we might request that the applicant provides additional information if we have questions, we will be reaching out to you. And then we're going to take the merit score that we that we just talked about, and we are going to use a multiplier between 1.0 and 1.8, based on the eight criteria that you see here.

20:35: These eight criteria which will be used to assess, to calculate your weighted score are one, reducing end user prices, two, reducing latency in remote or insular areas. Three, benefiting priority areas and groups, Four, benefiting unserved areas or tribal ends. Five, connecting unserved Community anchor institutions. Six, complying with select requirements such as fair Labor practices, workforce development objectives, civil rights, and non-discrimination law compliance. Seven, demonstrating climate resiliency. And eight, the proposed use of Community benefits agreements. That's also a lot to talk about and you can look forward to once the application window opens, we will have more webinars talking about these different criteria and some tools that might be available to you.

21:38: Let's go now quickly to a very high-level overview of what the application, what you can expect. There will be no surprises. We're looking for an executive summary and there is a limit on the number of words because we want this to be the, we're not looking for fancy words, we want to know what it is that you're building. And we want you to tell us that in 1000 words or less. It actually might work out to be a character count rather than words when we get the portal completed. We're looking for narratives on the project purpose, need, and beneficiaries. We're looking for information about your middle mile service offerings. We're looking for if you've got fiber, you must tell us which Community anchor institutions are within 1000 feet, where you will facilitate an interconnect.

22:32: If you're not doing fiber, we're looking for you to tell us that, if you would like. In the application, we will be asking for the project technical approach, where you want to build out, what that timeline looks like. This will include maps, diagrams, designs, technical details. We're looking for the financials and the

organizational financial capacity. We will have it's this, this is the budget, this is how much match and where that match is coming from. We're looking for financials, we're looking for audits we've got a pro forma for you. We're looking for information about your team.

23:08: None of this should be surprising because we've talked about it a lot today and it's in the NOFO. We're looking for org charts, resume of key personnel, we want to know what your plans are for Labor standards and workforce development. We're looking for your government and Community involvement. Have you coordinated with your state local tribal territory native government and Community organizations? We're looking for the budget narrative and detailed budget justification.

23:38: In the webinar last week, I mentioned that we were looking for quality applications. We're not looking for fancy words. What we're looking for here is that the amount of federal funding that you are requesting that's listed on your 424 will be the same number that you're putting in your 424c and the same number that you're putting in your budget narrative, and the same number that you're putting into your detailed budget justification.

24:02: And then there's the standard forms which you can expect with this application, such as the 424 the 424c, we mentioned the CD 511 and lobbying, if applicable.

24:16: We will only be accepting applications through the NTIA grants portal. It will be open to you in about a month. Applications will be accepted through the end of September of this year. If you have problems accessing the NTIA grants portal, you can email middlemile@NTIA.gov or NGhelpdesk@NTIA.gov. I think that's short for NTIA grant.

24:47: So it's NGhelpdesk@ntia.gov keep an eye on our website InternetforAll.gov. That is where you will find that's where you found the NOFO, that's where you find information about these webinars, that's where we're posting our FAQs. That is also where you will find the link to our portal once the application window is open.

25:11: And next steps here. Coordinate with your state and local broadband office. Send questions to us, we love answering questions and there have been some excellent questions I expect more of them today, some of you have been sending them into middlemile@ntia.gov.

25:30: Some of these are going to be posted as FAQ so they take a little bit longer, but the reason that we're doing that is because it's a great question that a lot of people might have and it would benefit all to know the answer. Attend future webinars and engage with us and get your application in by September 30 of 2022.

25:52: And here, you have some contact information, this is me Sarah Bleau the middle mile director. We've also, we will be working with NIST again they are grants

office Scott McNichol beyond with us for the Q&A. So you have his information here and media inquiries, you can go to Steven Yusko.

26:11: Thank you, and now we're going to hand off to back to Arica and we'll do some Q&A.

Arica Cox

26:23: Alright, thank you Sarah for your presentation and remarks.

26:56: And with that said we're going to move into our Q&A portion in addition to Sarah Bleau, I'd like to welcome Scott McNichol and Darren Olson to the virtual stage. Scott and Darren are grants officers with the National Institute of Standards and Technology and there'll be partnering today was Sarah to answer your questions.

27:15: For the webinar participants, we ask that you enter your questions into the Q&A function, not the separate chat function, but there is the designated Q&A function on your screen. Enter your questions there and we will do our best to get to them and answer. Due to sheer volume, we might not be able to get to them all today, but we ask that you please look at our future webinars and check out our website and we'll attempt to answer your questions through those vehicles as well.

27:46: Alright, so let's take a look at some of the questions we've gotten so far. From a, and I'm going to throw them out to you Darren, Scott, and Sarah but if there's a question that you're just anxious to answer you think you're better suited to answer it please, by all means jump in okay.

28:06: First questions are, regarding we've got a couple here actually regarding grant matching. In terms of I know Sarah you talked a bit about nonfederal cost share. So we do know that that is there, but are funds from other grant programs able to be used as matches? And second part of the question there, is when you're talking about nonfederal costs share, can they be in kind services? And I'm going to throw that one to Darren.

Darren Olson

28:38: Ah so, the last part of that question is yes, in-kind can be used as cost share or match. For the most part nonfederal funds cannot be used as cost share or match. There are in some programs exceptions for 638 funds that tribes have. I don't recall in the, in this program if I don't believe I saw anything in the NOFO that those were eligible to be used as non-federal cost share but typically no, you cannot use other federal funds as cost share.

Scott McNichol

29:10: Now, the only exception to that is, it has to be explicitly allowable per the statute of that other federal funding in order to be used as match know these words.

Arica Cox

29:22: Perfect, thank you Darren and Scott. Sarah, question to you – we've got a lot of questions although the information is in the NOFO and in your presentation, we want to make sure that folks have some clarity over eligible applicants right. And so there are a few questions regarding eligibility. So, for example, can small rural

counties apply for the funding? Can entities that may not be a large telecommunications company or entities that may not have a significant number of assets themselves but work with other telecommunications providers, but consider themselves telecommunications entities, participate and apply for these programs? So can you clarify just a little bit those that are eligible to apply?

Sarah Bleau

30:10: Yeah that's a great question, thank you Arica. There are many, many, many, many eligible entities that are described in the NOFO, the counties, political subdivisions of a state, local governments. We've got telecom companies, ISPs, utility companies, co-op. And partnerships of all of these, what, I've been in a few webinars and presentations over the last couple of weeks and we're encouraging partnerships as much as possible, that there is no one company, fiber, wireless, cable, satellite, anything, you know, Internet company, electrical company, nobody can do this, all by themselves So yes, we are encouraging.

30:59: But, but I would also keep an eye on the, we talked about today, the showing the financial and managerial and operational capabilities of the applicant. So I would be mindful of that as well.

Arica Cox

31:14: Thank you, Sarah. Along similar lines Sarah, we know that there are multiple grant programs out right now right, that were just released as a result of this funding. And so some applicants may be eligible for more than just the middle mile Program. If applicants are eligible for more than one program and they actually have a proposal under consideration, is it okay if they go ahead and apply for middle mile if they have not yet received funding for the for a program of the same scope? And I'll give that to both if NIST and Sarah want to jump in there either one.

Darren Olson

31:56: It certainly doesn't hurt to apply, I mean you don't know for sure that you're going to get an award in in a given funding opportunity, so I think, from a financial assistance side, it certainly doesn't hurt to apply to more than one.

Sarah Bleau

32:09: And Darren and I would add to that to that we will be talking quite a bit when it's, this is not just tossing an application over the NTIA grants portal and then poof, you're gone and we're gone. There's going to be a lot of iterative back and forth, where we will be clarifying how much you intended to ask for in the budget, and what the level costs are, and what your plan is, and what the timeline and who these people are that you know, the level of need, is the people who are running your company there's going to be a lot of back and forth. And so let's be completely transparent. If you've applied for several different programs, and you are notified that you're possibly going to win funds, let us know that's amazing and will celebrate together but just let's communicate that it's not I would it's not you, I would not it wouldn't be prohibited from applying to many programs, at the same time, but let's just keep communicating honestly and transparently about the status of your application within each Program.

Darren Olson

33:09: But one other thing I would throw in is, if you do get awards and multiple programs lot of time there are, you know, you cannot have an overlapping scope of

work. So if you have something going on with one program that you get an award for and then you're notified that you're receiving an award in another Program with similar activities, you cannot have an overlap in the scope of work for that.

Arica Cox

33:35: Thank you Darren and Sarah. And I also think it's important to note that we do have discussions and communications with other agencies that may have grant programs in place as well right. So we all work together to make sure that there are no overlaps and that those that are applying that are eligible, are getting what it is that that they've applied for. In terms of, I want to throw this back to you Darren, there's another question on grant matching and cost share. Can state funding actually be allowed to use be used for grant matching for the Federal grant?

Darren Olson

34:15: As long as it doesn't have a federal nexus, yes, it can be.

Arica Cox

34:21: Thank you. Sarah we've got a few questions here regarding the use of grant funds within the context of the actual program scope. And so one of the questions is regarding to workforce development. Can grant funds be used to fund the creation and operation of workforce development if the entity does not currently have a program like that in place?

Sarah Bleau

34:50: Well, what I would, what I would wonder about that question, I think if we go back to the original eligibility criteria where that fits into those criteria, developing the workforce. So, I would point you back there. As a standalone developing workforce is probably not the right use of funds for the middle mile project. But take a look at what the eligibility criteria are that are that we talked about earlier today. And this this deck and this webinar will all be available on our website so that you can study it and what else, whatever else you want to do with it is when you go to Internet for All, it will be there in about a week.

Arica Cox

35:32: Along with the NOFO right, that has a wealth of information in terms of eligibility. We've also got a question regarding emergency management services. So are there, broadband infrastructure funds that are, let's see me, are there, broadband infrastructure funds that can be used as part of this program for emergency management services for things such as cell towers to provide emergency services for radio systems that are not covered? And if not, where might an applicant find more information on grant programs better suited to this use? Anybody want to take a stab at those.

Sarah Bleau

36:24: I think that I know that, on the one hand, we have available on our BroadbandUSA website that's a little cheat sheet that takes anybody who's interested in looking at it, where different sources of federal funding are available. So I would definitely take a look at that. And then I would also, you know, keeping in mind the initial eligibility criteria that we talked about with the middle mile program, one of the statutory criteria is benefiting national security interests. So there's a lot to balance with this program, a lot that we're asking for, but if you meet that initial eligibility and then maybe the benefiting national security interests I

wanted the statutory criteria that you need later on in the programmatic, if that's helpful.

Arica Cox

37:22: Thanks Sarah so we know that supply chain issues are common these days and so we've got a couple questions about the timing of the purchase of equipment and supplies. And so, if an applicant is applying for this program and wants to be proactive, this is a question regarding the use of grant funds and allowability. If they're trying to get ahead of long lead times, does this preclude ordering the material in advance preclude them from being funded through this program? So, in other words, it sounds like if they have equipment and supplies that they place on order now in the hopes that they will be funded could those expenses then be eligible for reimbursement under this program? I'm going to throw that to Scott and Darren.

Darren Olson

38:22: Those would fall under the requirements of how to get reimbursed for pre award costs. So the pre award costs are at your own risk. So if you go out and you're buying a bunch of equipment in anticipation of getting an award, you're buying that at your own risk The pre award.

38:43: Costs are subject to review and approval by a grants officer. So they would you know they would need to meet all the requirements of being applicable, allowable, necessary, and reasonable, so basically the requirements in two CFR 200 and.

39:00: I mean yeah it can certainly be done. I believe in the NOFO it talks about the pre award costs, what the requirements are, and I don't recall what section that was in. But I would refer to that section in the NOFO also.

Scott McNichol

39:13: Yeah so and under this program, pre work costs are only eligible for costs to access the work done to submit an application. So, you know, and given where the NOFO is, generally speaking, you know cost of equipment and those kinds of things would not be an eligible cost pre award. And furthermore it's it that's just a really significant risk.

39:38: You know, to reiterate what Darren just said, we don't know what the competition, how many applicants are going to be applying, how many are ultimately going to be funded, so you know for all kinds of reasons that that's really not a good practice for.

Sarah Bleau

39:56: However, it is a possible in-kind match contribution, would you agree with that?

Scott McNichol

40:04: It could be. So it could be.

Sarah Bleau

40:07: I wouldn't rule. I don't think it's a bad idea. If you're looking for match then buying equipment or materials upfront, maybe that would be a way to meet the 30% threshold.

Scott McNichol

40:23: But it's still at their own risk.

Arica Cox

40:26: Certainly. Okay let's move to we've got a couple questions here about unserved and underserved in regards to the FCC fixed broadband map. Sarah, in terms of sources, if an applicant is unable to access the broadband map in time, is there other sources or definitions that they can use to explain or illustrate their unserved and underserved populations that they'll be serving?

Sarah Bleau

41:03: Um yes that's a that's a great question. The I think we've been talking for a long time about the FCC maps and the 477 data. And it was great for what it did, it wasn't as granular as we're able to go now. So that's what the FCC is doing is they're going to provide more granular data down two locations to show unserved and underserved. And that data is not going that map is not going to be available until after September 30. The application for middle mile is due September 30th. So I think it would be helpful, there are a lot of states who have developed their own tools, who've done speed tests, who've been looking at this for a long time, if you want to take a look at our BroadbandUSA website, you will see a link to the state broadband leaders network and you'll find contacts and links to each of those states who participate. I think that that would be a really helpful resource.

42:04: We've also got on our own BroadbandUSA website under data mapping there's a link to the indicators of broadband need map. I will point out that indicators of broadband need map does not go as granular as locations. Depending on the type of data, it might be aggregated at the track level, it might be.

42:26: It might not get down all the way to the block level, but those are a couple of areas that I would look at just to get a sense for where the unserved and the underserved households are located.

Arica Cox

42:38: Thank you, Sarah. In terms, we've got a few questions here were guarding kind of administrative type aspects to the application process in regards to templates. So if an applicant needs to submit, it looks like they're saying a plan, can NTIA provide a template? Okay, so in terms of the application, are there any required templates for them to share their project plans or schedule, or is it up to the applicant, to put it in the format that they'd be impressed?

Sarah Bleau

43:18: I'll take that question. Or how we did, so we are in the process of getting the application ready for you to apply on our NTIA grants portal. That will be available in about a month. We're also developing an application guidance document. So that and it very clearly describes those templates which are existing, such as the CD 511 that you would just download and where to download it from. And a few that are being built into our portal, such as the 424. But there are other templates that we are providing yes, and those will be clearly lined out in this application guidance. I don't want to give you a heads up as to what those templates are because we haven't released the, opened up the application just yet, but that will be very soon and, yes, we do encourage you to use the templates that are being provided.

44:18: It should be very helpful to make sure that we're looking at that we can review your application most efficiently, effectively, and completely understand what it is that you're trying to build.

Arica Cox

44:31: So stay tuned for that information when the application is released right. All right, you talked a little bit, Sarah, about working or contacting working with the state brand broadband office. So will projects that do not have direct support from a state broadband office still be eligible?

Sarah Bleau

44:53: Oh absolutely! As long as you're an eligible entity and you meet the eligibility criteria, absolutely, it is not a requirement if, and if you don't have a state broadband office, you can't. But yeah absolutely, if that is no nothing on you, if you're an eligible entity and you've got a plan, then get it in.

Arica Cox

45:15: All right, thanks, Sarah. Let's see what else we've got coming in here. A lot of questions here, Darren and Scott, regarding letters of credit and financial statements and things of that nature. If applicants have questions as to whether or not those documents are the right type or they contain the correct information, can they reach out, is there a way for them to get clarification and make sure that they're supplying the right information in those financial statements and or letters of credit?

Scott McNichol

45:57: Yeah, I mean, I would have them go to the main email chain or email address that NTIA is using. But those questions, actually a lot of those financial certifications etc. are not necessarily a grant regulation requirement, those are a requirement of the program by statute. So we would work with the program office to help get the right answer, but those answers will actually probably mostly come from NTIA.

Arica Cox

46:26: Perfect, thank you for that, so another plug here middlemile@ntia.gov correct Sarah.

Sarah Bleau

46:34: Yep that's right.

Arica Cox

46:35: that's where questions go if you need clarification. Please send an email again that's middlemile@ntia.gov. Here's a question in regards to priority or special consideration. So this is kind of along the lines of some of the questions we answered last week, is there any special consideration or set aside for socio economic entities such as service disabled, women owned, minority owned businesses? Sarah.

Sarah Bleau

47:12: I would take a look at the NOFO, we do talk about that a little bit so make sure you understand that's my greatest advice to everybody is is understanding the NOFO/ We're going to play a game of, shoot I can't remember the name of it, what is that that the kids all play in school? Of who knows the NOFO better than Nick Alexander? Know the NOFO, all of that is described in there, what we're going to be evaluating the criteria, how the review process works. And shoot if anybody thinks of what that game is, let me know.

Arica Cox

47:47: All right, thank you, Sarah let's see what else we've got here. Guys, got some great questions, some of them are kind of long so I'm trying to read through them here. What Sarah, when we talk about since you answer just a few questions ago about working with the state broadband office, for those that do have a State Office can you talk a little bit more about what really is the benefit of making sure that applicants are aligned with the state broadband office, if they have one, and perhaps aligned with an overall state strategy? Is there a benefit to that in terms of applying for this grant?

Sarah Bleau

48:41: Yeah I think absolutely. They're, back to my original point that there's no one company, no one technology, no one government who can bring affordable and high-speed internet to all Americans, you have to be working with your state. If your state's invested in broadband office, absolutely be working with them make them aware of what your plans are the States. When they applied, the governors and have signed off on the letters of intent, in order to for the states to go after planning money for the BEAD fund.

49:14: And there is middle mile that can be built out with that BEAD program. So by all means, if you have a state broadband office, I would make them aware of what your plans are. Maybe there's maybe there are some partners that you can pick up and maybe that helps the proposal I don't know, but I would definitely work with them. And if you don't have a state broadband office that's okay too. That's why we're having these conversations, so that we can begin making sure that everybody is aware of where help is needed.

Arica Cox

49:45: Thanks for that Sarah. Another question for you, in terms of multiple applications, is it better to apply for one large project that might be multi geographical? Or should individual projects be applied for separately? So it sounds like if it if an applicant has different projects, whether it's you know in different geographical areas, or they may be working with different partners is it preferred that they do separate applications, or does it really matter?

Sarah Bleau

50:21: I can't say what which is preferred if there's any preference at all. I will say that you will have the ability, definitely, to log into the portal and apply for the middle mile program and build as many project applications as you like. You can actually even I would get smart with your title to say "this is me in this place", and "this is me in that place" so that you can kind of differentiate between the different projects that you have applied for within middle mile. I'd also say that building one project that's very complex and complicated if that's easier for you, then, then I would recommend doing what makes the most sense for you the as you apply for these programs there's no preference, one way or the other.

Arica Cox

51:07: And along those along similar lines if a project includes elements of both middle mile builds and last mile builds, is the applicant eligible to still apply for the middle mile portion and do they need to break out any project that's any portion of the project that's out of that may be out of scope in regards to last mile?

Sarah Bleau 51:33: We're definitely unable to find any last mile connections with this middle mile program the Statute was very clear that the middle mile is defined as anything that does not touch the end user, including Community anchor institutions, the NOFO did the, Statute and the NOFO both also go on to say, if this is fiber optic regarding Community anchor institutions that you will agree to placing or enabling a direct interconnect to facilitate one gig up and down within 1000 feet of that community anchor institution. But the answer, I don't know if I've answered the question. Oh, and just a great big huge brain fart I'm sorry.

Arica Cox 52:17: No, I think you did answer it, right? I think the scope of this really is middle mile.

Sarah Bleau 52:22: Right, yes, yes it is middle mile.

Arica Cox 52:23: Absolutely yep you answered it so I've got a question for our grants officers at NIST, can grant preparation costs internal and contracted services be included in requests as reimburse people? And, if so, are those costs limited to a certain percentage of the total grant amount requested?

Darren Olson 52:47: A couple phases to that, I think, your proposal costs can be recovered you'd have to refer to two CFR 200460. So take a look at that, for your to see how a proposal costs are addressed as far as being reimbursed. And, can you repeat the other part of that something about?

Arica Cox 53:12: I knew you're gonna ask me that. It looks like it is limited where'd we go. Are those costs limited to a certain percentage of grant costs?

Darren Olson 53:24: I would say, as a general answer, no, but if it's a huge part of costs I think would be. Oh, go ahead Scott.

Scott McNichol 53:34: Yeah I can take this one, so in the specifically in this NOFO they're limited to \$50,000. So for this program now the pre award costs for application preparation are limited to \$50,000 from middle mile.

Arica Cox 53:52: Perfect, thank you for that. Alright, we are coming down to the wire we've got about six minutes left, and so what I'd like to do is to ask both Scott and Darren, and Sarah for final remarks right? Is there - if those that are participating were to take one major piece of information away something you'd want them to remember as a key takeaway, what would you like to emphasize for those on the webinar today? I want to start with Darren and Scott.

Darren Olson 54:25: I would, I would say, as you're drafting up your budget; your budget is your best guess at this point and we understand that. You know don't think that everything has to be exact, just your budget is your best guess at the time of application. There will be, that if you're selected for award there may be some negotiation and clarification down the road, but right now it's your best guess.

Scott McNichol 54:52: And my main takeaway for everybody would be really, and Sarah hinted at earlier too, but it's really important that you get to know that NOFO. Get

comfortable with it. It includes all of the you know requirements to a pretty specific level and actually a lot of the questions that we've seen today are answered at various points in that NOFO. So definitely spend some time reading and I know it's long, I know it's kind of it's complicated because the Statute is complicated. But that's the best and first place to really start as you're starting to think through planning these is really good to know that NOFO and then you can really start to dive into the application preparation process.

Arica Cox

55:42: Thank you for that and again to your point right, then NOFO we've also got information on our website for folks to take a look at and again, the middlemile@ntia.gov email address for those that have questions that we may have been unable to get through on this webinar. And so, Sarah, what about you, what are your, what are the key takeaways that you'd like folks to leave this webinar with as they get ready to prepare for the application process?

Sarah Bleau

56:12: I think I said it last week and Scott said it again, understanding the NOFO. It is, it is a lot to read through but plotting out, what, how you're going to thinking about how you're going to address the different criteria that will be evaluating. We will have the application available in about a month. And we will have many more webinars, the plan is to dive into each section of the application, because we want, we want people to feel comfortable providing good, solid applications. But understanding between now and over the next couple of weeks just get to know it understand what it is that we're looking for and how you might do it. And try to think about we've talked about supply chain, workforce development. We've talked about partnerships, who can help you. If you're short on supplies, who can you partner up with who's got supplies. So that would be my recommendation.

Arica Cox

57:20: Thank you for that Sarah and thank you, Sarah, Darren, and Scott for taking time out of your day to give folks the information that they need to move forward in this process. To all of our potential applicants out there, make sure that you be on the lookout for additional webinars. We'll have additional webinars coming up in the near future.

Scott McNichol

57:42: And again information can be found on Internetforall.gov; or I cannot stress this enough, middlemile@ntia.gov. And as our panelists stress, make sure that you take a look at your NOFO. So again, if we were unable to get to your question today, I know, we had literally almost hundred questions and we couldn't get to all of them. But please feel free to reach out and what we're able to answer. We will take a look at those resources, and we are here to help you. We look forward to working with many of you in bringing affordable reliable high-speed internet to everyone in America. And with that we thank you for joining and hope you have a great day.

58:27: Thank you everyone.

Sarah Bleau

58:29: Thank you.