Interview Guide—Meetings with Community Organizations

Coordination with various groups, such as Community Organizations, is necessary to meet the requirements outlined in the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Five-Year Action Plan and the planning documentation requirement set by the State Digital Equity Planning Grant program.

> **This interview guide is a tool to assist State/Territory (S/T) Broadband Offices in preparing for and engaging with interested parties to further an understanding of high-speed Internet availability in their respective areas. It provides direction for initial discussions and is not comprehensive of all topics that an S/T may need to discuss.**

Community Organization collaboration is an essential component to these grant programs and their success. The guide will 1) outline why meeting with Community Organizations is important, 2) frame a meeting agenda and targeted outcomes, as well as 3) provide meeting best practices.

Why Engagement Matters

Successful S/T Broadband Office engagement with community organizations relies on open and transparent communication focused on gaining an understanding of how the BEAD and Digital Equity programs impact these organizations and learning about current and planned activities related to digital equity. Engaging with community organizations is important because it:

- Opens dialogue to better identify and understand community priorities and needs;
- Develops early buy-in for high-speed Internet plans;
- Includes diverse expertise and experiences of those most impacted by the digital divide;
- Encourages transparency, which builds trust by demonstrating responsible stewardship of state and local resources; and
- Establishes a feedback mechanism to capture additional input from Community Organizations.

Understanding Community Organizations

As infrastructure advancement primarily impacts local communities, community organizations have a unique understanding of local needs. S/T Broadband Offices should coordinate closely with community organizations, during the development of the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan and the State Digital Equity Plan, to better understand the current and future needs of their localities. By encouraging ongoing engagement, S/Ts can anticipate challenges related to infrastructure deployment and digital inclusion programming before they arise.

> **Community Organizations***
> - Nonprofit Organizations
> - Community-based Organizations
> - Faith-Based Organizations
> - Coalitions or Associations
> - Community activists, residents, and other community leaders
>
> ** Some community organizations, but not all, will serve in a CAI capacity*

When engaging at the community level, S/T Broadband Offices should remain mindful that each organization serves a certain community with specific needs. Some organizations will play critical roles in training, education, workforce development, and digital inclusion while others will have more technical interests, such as if they are also serving as a Community Anchor Institution (CAI). Understanding community organization interests, priorities, and concerns

will enable the S/T to better address these needs in the Five-Year Action Plan, Digital Equity Plan, and associated implementation efforts—particularly as community organizations are eligible and encouraged to apply as subgrantees.

High-Level Meeting Agenda and Targeted Outcomes

Pre-Meeting Preparation

Basic logistics should be considered and discussed prior to meeting. **Figure Figure** 1 captures key elements to consider when conducting an in-person, virtual, or hybrid meeting.

IN-PERSON		VIRTUAL		HYBRID
LOCATION	**EQUIPMENT**	**SOFTWARE & LOGISTICS**	**EQUIPMENT**	*Combine in-person and virtual elements to meet physical and technological constraints of attendees*
• Consider location access details (ADA accessibility, parking, ability to physically distance) • Provide directions for finding the meeting room once on site • Include enough seating for all participants • Communicate current health protocol guidance (masking, testing) • Set up closed captions or make other considerations for multiple languages	• Evaluate what AV needs the meeting has (projector, screen, conference speakers) • Determine if participants can access location Wi-Fi and prepare guidance for how to access it	• Understand web applications participants are familiar with using (Zoom, WebEx, Teams, etc.) • Note if any constraints exist for using the selected application (free versions available, time limits on use) • Offer to start the meeting earlier for those wishing to check their connection	• Share information on what video/camera technology, software, or connectivity is needed (or preferred) for participation • Plan for an alternate method to participate if technology or access issues arise (call-in number or different video application) • Set up the virtual meeting to include a transcript that is made available to all participants after the meeting	

Figure 1 - Meeting Formats and Considerations

<u>Note:</u> Meeting planning should not be one-sided. While the S/T Broadband Office might suggest one venue or software for the meeting, remaining open to alternatives proposed by the Community Organizations may assist scheduling.

Evaluate Meeting Logistics

Once the S/T Broadband Office has established whether the meeting is in-person, virtual, or hybrid of the two, evaluate the meeting logistics.

- **Number of Voices:** Meetings with an individual participant group are preferable as the focused format invites more open, detailed, and transparent dialogue. If a meeting has numerous groups participating, consider the potential impact on the level of details gathered for the selected topics.
- **Availability:** Consider using a polling application (FindTime poll in Outlook, Doodle, Survey Monkey, etc.) to determine attendee availability. If the meeting topic allows, consider offering multiple sessions or formats for attendees to participate.
- **Meeting Size:** Plan for meeting space in accordance with the size of the planned engagement. Understand who the Community Organizations wants to bring into the meeting and the size of the group.

- **Duration:** Assess questions in the Discussion Guide from the context of the meeting timeframe, realizing that one question posted to several groups may take as long as several questions posed to a smaller group.

Prepare Agenda in Advance

Developing and sharing an agenda in advance of meeting will inform attendee perspective, set expectations about discussion areas, and help bring the right participants to the table. Below is a sample agenda S/Ts can use to provide a meeting framework for community organization discussions. <u>*Note:*</u> S/Ts can modify the agenda, as needed.

Establish Targeted Outcomes

Community Organization engagement should seek to advance one or several of the following objectives:

- Establish relationship and rapport between Community Organizations and S/T Broadband Office
- Provide a uniform, base understanding of the BEAD and Digital Equity Act programs
- Share the S/T's planning and implementation timelines and ongoing engagement plans
- Gain high-level understanding and clarity on the organization's understanding of the current state of broadband deployment and priority concerns
- Establish feedback mechanisms to capture additional input from community organizations

Agenda Topic	High-level Objective
Welcome & Introductions	➢ *Review meeting purpose and facilitate participant introductions, to include position and role in planning and implementation processes.*
Review Meeting Goals	➢ *Set expectations/desires outcomes as it relates to the meeting purpose and agenda*
BEAD & Digital Equity Overview	➢ *Brief overview of the S/T's planning and implementation phases, to include a high-level review of program timelines.*
Understanding the Community Organization's Perspective	➢ *Understand the attendees' experience in broadband infrastructure planning through the lens of selected topics; discuss priority concerns.*
Feedback & Next Steps	➢ *Provide a feedback mechanism to capture additional input following the meeting and establish future engagement.*

Discussion Guide

Below are sample questions to help guide conversations based on the sample agenda above. Questions aim to elicit understanding of the Community Organization's perspective regarding certain topics. <u>*Note:*</u> These questions are not considered a comprehensive guide to all topics for discussion, and they may be tailored by the S/T, as needed. S/Ts should remember to take the overall meeting timeframe into account when choosing the number of topics to cover as well as volume of questions to ask.

Welcome and Introductions	
Guidance:	**Discussion Questions:**
Discuss the meeting's purpose and ask all attendees to provide a	• *How familiar is your community organization with the S/T Broadband Office and its purpose?*

personal introduction, including position/role.	• *What is each individual/office's anticipated role in the planning and implementation process?*
Review Meeting Goals	
Guidance:	**Discussion Questions:**
Set meeting expectations and desired outcomes as it relates to the meeting purpose and agenda.	• *Gather from the participants their expectations going into this meeting.* • *Address their expectations head on and lead with the S/T's own purpose and desired outcome for the meeting, being specific and transparent.*
BEAD & Digital Equity Overview	
Guidance:	**Discussion Questions:**
Provide overview of the S/T's planning and implementation phases for each program, to include a high-level review of program timelines. Can discuss Broadband Maps and the challenge process at a high-level.	• *How is your organization accomplishing its purpose? Who do you serve? What programs do you offer to the community?* • *Is the community organization aware of the BEAD and Digital Equity objectives and associated timelines?* • *Does the community organization believe the implementation of the BEAD and Digital Equity programs will assist in alleviating or resolving broadband barriers within their respective communities?* • *What concerns does the community organization have surrounding the BEAD/Digital Equity efforts across their communities?* • *Has the local community been surveyed to determine interest in the BEAD and Digital Equity programs?* *Information: BEAD Program, Digital Equity Program, Digital Inclusion Startup Guide, FCC Broadband Data Maps*
Understanding Community Organizations Perspective on…	*NOTE: Questions may be tailored, and meeting timeframe should be taken into account when choosing number of topics to cover and volume of questions to ask.*
Guidance:	**Discussion Questions:**
Digital Equity	
Inquire if attendees have developed plans for the provision of equitable broadband services to middle and low-income communities.	• *What is the community organization perspective on their current broadband environment? What is the primary driver of the digital divide within the communities they work in? Have they performed any prior needs assessments to evaluate broadband need in local communities?* • *How can your organization's existing programs advance the goals of digital equity?* • *What programming does the organization plan to promote to increase digital literacy and skills?* • *What resources are needed to support digital inclusion programs digital inclusion programs among underrepresented populations, including ethnic communities and lower-income areas (e.g., staffing, meeting space, curriculum, devices, funding, etc.)?*
High-Speed Internet Improvement Programs	
Gather information regarding participation of existing or prior broadband improvement programs.	• *Has the community organization previously participated in an Internet infrastructure program? Were these efforts successful?* • *Is the organization planning to or currently participating in any other infrastructure improvement programs? If so, which programs, and how are they funded? Are there any associated restrictions?*

Workforce	
Encourage conversations regarding workforce issues.	• *What are some examples of existing workforce development programs and initiatives?* • *With current workforce shortages, does the community organization currently have sufficient staff with capacity and technical skills to implement each program's strategic requirements?* • *How does this organization plan to engage local community members to join the workforce? Have training programs been established?*
Feedback & Next Steps	
Capture technical assistance concerns, ask for feedback, and plan next meeting	• *What resources or guidance is needed for the future?* • *What is the organization's preferred communication method?* • *What topics should be discussed in future meetings that were not addressed in this meeting?*

Best Practices for Successful Engagement

PREPARING FOR ENGAGEMENT

- Research the history of the community organization's broadband involvement before the meeting.
- Review available BEAD/Digital Equity Technical Assistance materials prior to engaging.
- Research and understand the political structure of the Community Organization politics across the S/T landscape.
- Review area's FCC Broadband Data Maps and BEAD/Digital Equity Technical Assistance materials
- Compile and tailor questions to broaden the S/T's understanding of the community organization's current circumstances and address specific needs.
- Finalize and distribute agenda to participants with meeting invitation.

MEETING AND FOLLOW-UP

- Practice active listening during each meeting, accurately record the discussion and information that is being provided.
- Ensure fairness and equal time for discussions and information distribution during the meeting. Consider meeting with small groups.
- Remain conscious of time spent on each topic, allow for a question-and-answer period toward the end of each meeting.
- Conclude the meeting by summarizing key take-aways and potential action items discussed.
- Share meeting minutes to all attendees outlining all action items and their respective due dates as well as a feedback mechanism for additional input.