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# Reliable Broadband Service & Alternative Technologies Guidance

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*Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment  
(BEAD) Program*

January 2024



*This document is intended solely to assist recipients in better understanding the BEAD program and the requirements set forth in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for this program. This document does not and is not intended to supersede, modify, or otherwise alter applicable statutory or regulatory requirements, or the specific application requirements set forth in the NOFO. In all cases, statutory and regulatory mandates, and the requirements set forth in the NOFO, shall prevail over any inconsistencies contained in this document.*

## OVERVIEW

The **Infrastructure Act** defines “**reliable broadband service**” as “broadband service that meets **performance criteria** for **service availability, adaptability** to changing **end-user requirements, length of serviceable life**, or other criteria, other than upload and download speeds, as determined by the Assistant Secretary in coordination with the Commission.” 47 U.S.C. § 1702(a)(2)(L). For the purposes of this definition, the Assistant Secretary adopted the criteria that Reliable Broadband Service **must be (1) a fixed broadband service that (2) is available with a high degree of certainty, (3) both at present and for the foreseeable future**, and found, after coordination with the Commission, that the definition of Reliable Broadband Service set forth in the NOFO best meets those criteria.

## KEY DEFINITIONS:

- 1 Reliable broadband service (RBS):** The term “Reliable Broadband Service” means broadband service that is accessible to a location via:
  - fiber-optic technology (*BDC technology code 50*)
  - cable modem/hybrid fiber-coaxial (HFC) technology (*technology code 40*)
  - digital subscriber line (DSL) technology (*technology code 10*)
  - terrestrial fixed wireless technology utilizing entirely licensed spectrum (*includes spectrum licensed by rule*) or using a hybrid of licensed and unlicensed spectrum (*technology codes 71 and 72*).
- 2 Priority broadband project:** The term “Priority Broadband Project” means a project that will provision service via end-to-end fiber-optic facilities to each end-user premises.
- 3 Qualifying broadband:** To a location that is not a CAI, qualifying broadband is Reliable Broadband Service with (i) a speed of not less than 100 Mbps for downloads; and (ii) a speed of not less than 20 Mbps for uploads; and (iii) latency less than or equal to 100 milliseconds; “qualifying broadband” to a CAI is Reliable Broadband Service with a speed of not less than 1 Gbps for downloads and uploads alike and latency less than or equal to 100 milliseconds.
- 4 Alternative technology:** Alternative technology is any technology that does not qualify as reliable broadband service; includes unlicensed fixed wireless (ULFW) and low-earth orbit satellites (LEOs). Alternative technologies must still meet the BEAD technical requirements.
- 5 BEAD technical requirements:** For the purposes of BEAD, speed must be not less than 100 Mbps for downloads and 20 Mbps for uploads. 95% of latency measurements during testing windows must fall at or below 100 milliseconds round-trip time.

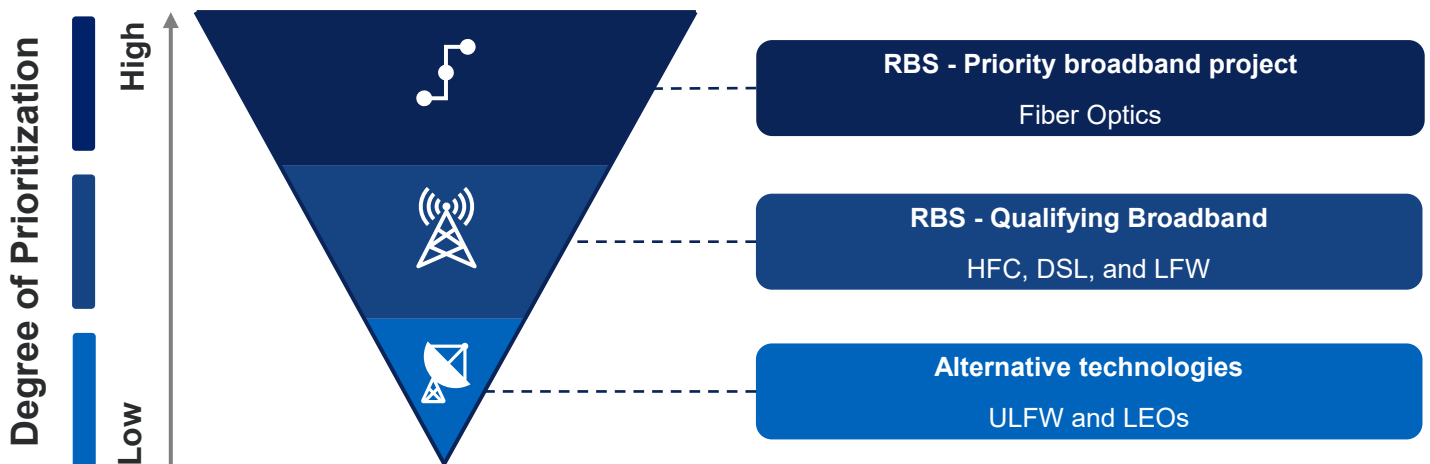


Figure 1 - Broadband Technology Prioritization

## WHEN CAN ALTERNATIVE TECHNOLOGIES BE USED?



### Default Selection Process:

**Single Proposal:** If there is only one proposed Priority Broadband Project in a given location that is below the Extremely High Cost Per Location Threshold (EHCPLT), it automatically becomes the default winner.

**Exception:** A different project may be chosen if the Eligible Entity requests, and the Assistant Secretary approves, a waiver for an alternative project.<sup>1</sup>



### Competitive Selection Process:

**Multiple Proposals:** In cases where multiple proposals exist and are deemed Priority Broadband Projects, and meet all other subgrantee qualifications (gating criteria), the Eligible Entity must use its approved competitive process to select the best project based on established selection criteria.



### High-Cost Fiber Proposals:

**Exceeding EHCPLT:** If all fiber project proposals in a project area exceed the cost threshold, the Eligible Entity has the discretion to consider other reliable broadband services or alternative technologies<sup>2</sup>.

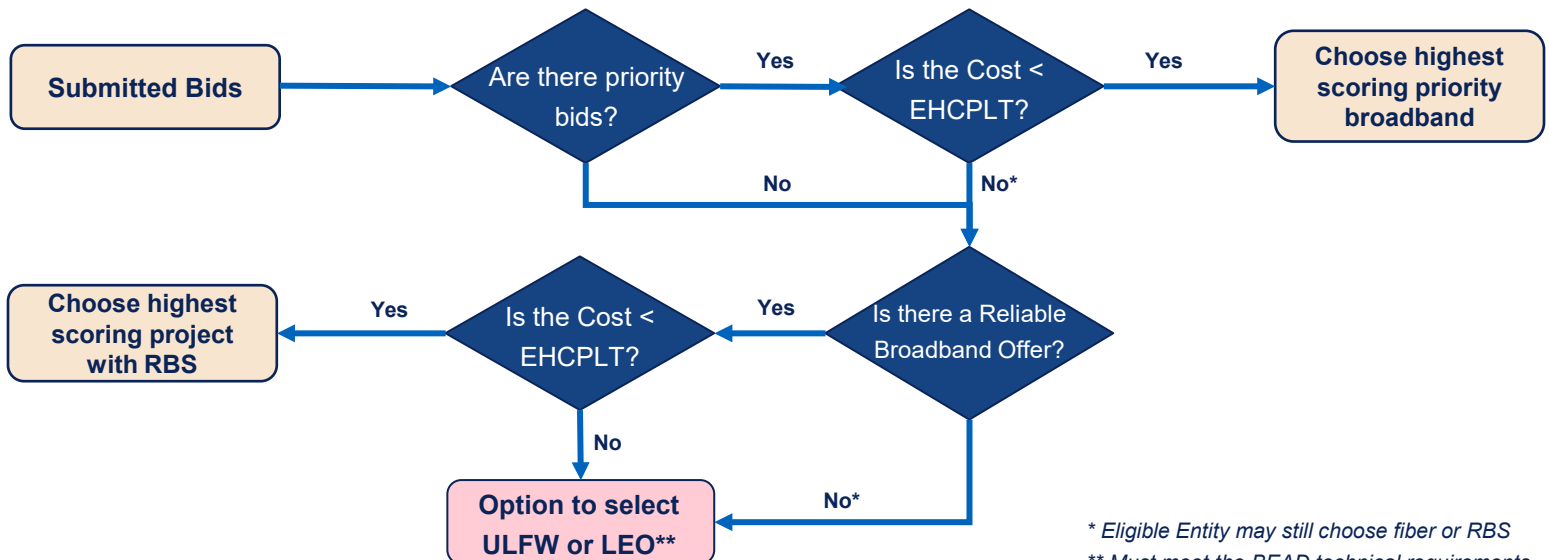


### Offer Solicitation and Scoring:

**Solicitation:** The Eligible Entity is permitted to request proposals for all technology types at once, including alternative technologies.

**Scoring Criteria:** Non-fiber (other last-mile broadband deployment projects) must have their own criteria, which can differ from the criteria for fiber projects (priority broadband projects). Examples: evaluation of long-term technical sustainability and the speed tiers for assessing affordability.

## SELECTION CRITERIA FOR PRIORITY BROADBAND PROJECTS



<sup>1</sup> See BEAD NOFO, Page 42- Footnote 63 - *The Eligible Entity need not seek a waiver before rejecting a project whose costs, on average or for a given location, exceed the Eligible Entity's Extremely High Cost Per Location Threshold.*

<sup>2</sup> Eligible options that comply with BEAD technical requirements including unlicensed fixed wireless and low-earth orbiting satellites.