

# 1. Introduction: Overview of the BEAD Grant Objectives and the Virgin Islands' Broadband Needs

The **Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Grant** is a historic initiative funded by the U.S. government through the **Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)** to address the longstanding digital divide in underserved and unserved communities across the United States, including the U.S. Virgin Islands. The primary goal of the BEAD Grant is to expand broadband infrastructure, improve connectivity, and enhance digital literacy, ensuring that all Americans—especially those in rural or economically disadvantaged areas—have reliable and affordable internet access.

In the **Virgin Islands**, broadband connectivity remains a critical issue. While broadband access has improved in urban areas, many rural and remote communities still suffer from limited or no access to high-speed internet. This lack of broadband access has a direct impact on the residents' ability to participate in essential activities, such as remote work, online education, telehealth, and access to government services. By addressing these disparities, the BEAD Grant aims to:

- **Improve broadband availability** by expanding network infrastructure in underserved and unserved areas.
- **Enhance internet adoption** by providing resources for digital literacy and skills training.
- **Increase digital equity** to ensure that every resident can access the internet regardless of socio-economic status.

The Virgin Islands Broadband Office (VIBO) will lead the implementation of the BEAD Grant in the region, working to meet the unique broadband needs of its diverse communities.

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## 2. Eligibility Criteria: Who Can Apply

To ensure that the BEAD Grant funds are used effectively, **eligible applicants** must meet specific criteria. These applicants may include various types of organizations that have the capacity to carry out broadband expansion and digital equity projects. The eligibility criteria are as follows:

### 2.1 Eligible Applicants

1. **Local Governments:** Local municipalities, counties, and territorial governments with the authority to implement broadband projects and promote digital inclusion.
2. **Nonprofit Organizations:** Community-based organizations, including those focused on digital literacy, broadband adoption, and other initiatives that aim to reduce the digital divide.
3. **Educational Institutions:** Public and private universities, colleges, and K-12 schools that wish to promote broadband access or undertake digital inclusion programs for students and families.

4. **Tribal Governments:** Federally recognized tribes and tribal organizations that are aiming to expand broadband access and close the digital divide in their communities.
5. **Private Sector Entities:** In some cases, private internet service providers (ISPs) or broadband infrastructure developers may apply if they meet the eligibility requirements and have a proven track record in broadband deployment.
6. **Consortia:** Collaborations between multiple eligible entities (e.g., local governments and nonprofits) that can leverage collective expertise and resources for a project.

## 2.2 Ineligible Applicants

- Individuals or private entities without the necessary organizational capacity to execute broadband projects.
- Projects that primarily focus on commercial or profit-driven goals without clear public benefit.

Each application will undergo a thorough eligibility review to confirm that applicants meet these criteria.

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## 3. Project Types: Specific Focus Areas for Non-Deployment Projects

In addition to traditional broadband infrastructure deployment projects, the BEAD Grant supports a range of **non-deployment projects** that contribute to the overarching goal of closing the digital divide. These types of projects focus on improving broadband access, adoption, and use in ways that do not directly involve physical infrastructure buildout. The following are examples of non-deployment project types eligible for BEAD funding:

### 3.1 Digital Literacy and Skills Training

- Programs aimed at improving digital skills for individuals in underserved communities, particularly targeting seniors, low-income families, and underrepresented groups.
- Initiatives that provide training on using digital tools for employment, education, healthcare, and civic participation.

### 3.2 Community Broadband Adoption Programs

- Outreach efforts to promote broadband adoption in underserved communities, including providing information about low-cost broadband options, digital literacy training, and resources to help individuals get online.
- Programs that offer subsidies or discounts for low-income households to purchase broadband services or necessary devices (e.g., computers, smartphones).

### 3.3 Telehealth and Telemedicine Expansion

- Projects aimed at enhancing telehealth services through better broadband access, including providing rural health clinics with the infrastructure and resources needed to offer remote consultations.
- Educational programs that teach residents how to access and use telehealth services effectively.

### 3.4 Infrastructure Planning and Research

- Feasibility studies and planning efforts that assess broadband needs in specific regions of the Virgin Islands, identify barriers to access, and create long-term strategies for broadband expansion.
- Community assessments, including data collection on broadband availability and usage.

### 3.5 Capacity Building for Local Governments and Stakeholders

- Programs that build the capacity of local governments to manage broadband infrastructure projects, including training on broadband policy, regulatory frameworks, and procurement processes.
- Activities to strengthen the technical expertise of local organizations and communities involved in broadband development.

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## 4. Application Instructions: Detailed Guidance on How to Apply

The application process for BEAD Grant funding will be clearly outlined in the **Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)**. Applicants must follow these instructions carefully to ensure their submissions meet the required standards. The application process includes:

### 4.1 Submission Process

1. **Online Application Portal:** Applicants will be required to submit their proposals via an online portal managed by the Virgin Islands Broadband Office (VIBO). The portal will allow applicants to submit all required documents and track the status of their application.
2. **Required Documents:** Each application must include the following:
  - A **Project Proposal** detailing the project scope, objectives, target population, and timeline.
  - A **Detailed Budget** outlining the expected costs, funding request, and cost-sharing contributions (if applicable).
  - A **Project Timeline** with clearly defined milestones, deliverables, and completion dates.
  - **Organizational Qualifications** including the applicant's experience, capacity, and previous work related to broadband projects.
  - **Community Impact Plan** describing how the project will serve the community and address broadband gaps.

3. **Submission Deadlines:** Specific deadlines will be announced in the NOFO. Applications must be submitted by the given deadline, with no exceptions. Late or incomplete applications will be disqualified.

## 4.2 Technical Assistance

To assist applicants in preparing their submissions, VIBO will host **webinars** and provide **guidance materials** (e.g., templates, FAQs) to clarify application requirements. One-on-one technical assistance may also be available for applicants needing additional support.

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## 5. Evaluation Criteria: How Applications Will Be Evaluated

Applications will be reviewed and evaluated based on a set of established criteria to ensure that only high-quality projects receive BEAD funding. The evaluation will consider the following factors:

Total Points: 100

### 5.1 Technical Merit (45 points possible)

- **Project purpose (15 points):** Reviewers will consider the extent to which potential subgrantees propose a project that aligns with one or more of the program's objectives. Reviewers will consider how proposed projects will prioritize the needs of the community and the project outcomes of the proposed program, especially those projects that align with the goals of the Vision 2040 plan.
- **Level of need/impact in proposed service areas (15 points):** Applications will receive full points for this section if a proposed project can demonstrate specific needs in a service area that VIBO has identified as low-income and/or unserved. The locations will be identified on a service area map that will be published on the BEAD website. Prospective subgrantees will need to provide comprehensive community statistics that reflect the potential need in the community for the proposed program, including but not limited to the estimated number of households or residents that may benefit from the program, the demographics of the impacted community (social, education, age, financial, and any covered populations as identified in the Digital Equity Act. Subgrantees will need to provide context as to how and why they selected their proposed project area.
- **Project feasibility (15 points):** Potential subgrantees will be scored on the comprehensiveness and appropriateness of the project, including the clarity and level of detail of the proposed project plan. Reviewers will assess the extent to which proposed programs stimulate the adoption of broadband for telehealth, distance learning, telework and entrepreneurship, economic growth, and job creation. Reviewers will also consider the reasonableness of the program timeline and the likeliness of program success.

### 5.2 Qualifications and Expertise (20 points possible)

- **Technical and operational capability (10 points):** Potential subgrantees will need to,

at minimum, demonstrate capability of operating the proposed program with appropriately skilled staffing with high technical understanding of proposed digital literacy activities.

- **Financial and managerial capacity (10 points):** Potential subgrantees will need to show proof of financial good standing and must demonstrate a substantial workforce able to fulfill the needs of the proposed program in a timely manner.

### 5.3 Local Coordination (10 points possible)

- **Proof of community engagement in proposed service area (5 points):** Potential subgrantees will need to provide record that they engaged the community for which they are submitting a proposal to serve, documenting that they considered the needs of the community when developing their proposal. Potential subgrantees who do not provide proof of engagement will receive no points in the category.
- **Letter(s) of support (5 points):** Potential subgrantees are requested to submit at least one letter of support from collaborating organizations (e.g., CAI where proposed services will be implemented). All collaborating organizations are encouraged to submit a letter of support in the application package submitted by the potential subgrantee for full points. Potential subgrantees who do not submit any letter(s) of support will receive no points in this category.

### 5.4 Project Budget (15 points possible)

- **Reasonableness of the budget (10 points):** When assessing points for reasonableness of the budget, there shall be a maximum number of points awarded to the lowest priced bidder. The points allocated to higher-priced bidders should be equal to the lowest bidder's price multiplied by the maximum points available for price, divided by the higher proposal price. In instances where projects are vastly different in scope, points will be awarded to potential subgrantees that address the needs of impacted community and/or service areas.

**5.5 Community Impact (5 points):** How well the proposed project addresses the broadband needs of the target community.

**5.6 Other (10 points possible)** – The VIBO will assess an additional ten points to projects that are similar in scope to determine which will be funded to avoid duplicative initiatives.

- **Minority Business Enterprise, Woman Business Enterprise, or Labor Surplus Area Firm (5 points):** Full points will be awarded to any potential subgrantee meeting one of these designations.
  - **Sustainability of the project after the end of funding term (5 points):** Potential subgrantees will need to provide a project sustainability plan after the end of the BEAD funding term (June 2028). Points will be awarded based on a succinct plan for project continuity passed 2028, and how the funded program will be maintained financially and operationally.
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## 6. Funding Amounts and Budget Guidance: Available Funding for Each Project

Funding for BEAD projects will vary based on the scope and nature of the proposed activities. The following budget guidelines will help applicants determine the appropriate funding request:

### 6.1 Available Funding Amounts

- **Non-Deployment Projects:** All funding is available for non-deployment projects.

### 6.2 Budget Guidance

- **Personnel Costs:** Only salaries for individuals directly working on the project should be included.
- **Equipment and Infrastructure Costs:** For non-deployment projects, costs related to hardware (computers, networking devices, etc.) or software should be detailed.
- **Administrative and Operational Costs:** These include project management, reporting, and overhead. Costs should be reasonable and justified.

Applicants must ensure that budgets are detailed, accurate, and consistent with the proposed project's scope.

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## 7. Reporting and Accountability: Reporting Requirements and Monitoring for Awarded Projects

Once awarded, projects will be subject to rigorous monitoring and reporting requirements to ensure accountability and transparency. Awardees will be required to:

### 7.1 Progress Reporting

- **Quarterly Reports:** Awardees must submit quarterly reports detailing project progress, expenditures, milestone achievements, and any challenges encountered.
- **Final Report:** Upon project completion

### 7.2 Financial Monitoring

- **Audit Requirements:** All expenditures will be subject to audit, and awardees must maintain accurate financial records.
- **Single Audit Requirements:** All entities that expend more than \$750,000 in a fiscal year are required to be audited.
- **Cost Tracking:** Awardees must track costs and ensure that all funds are used in accordance with the approved budget.

### 7.3 Site Visits and Evaluations

- **Site Visits:** VIBO may conduct site visits to ensure that projects are progressing as planned and to assess the impact on the community.
- **Impact Evaluations:** Post-implementation evaluations will assess the long-term effectiveness of the project in addressing broadband needs.

By adhering to these guidelines, VIBO ensures that BEAD Grant projects are managed responsibly and transparently, delivering tangible benefits to the Virgin Islands communities.