Tribal Broadband Funding Opportunities Update March 2022

Key federal legislation over the last two years created many funding opportunities for Tribes to expand broadband access in their communities. This list of funding programs has an estimated $15.2 billion[1] available to Tribes for broadband projects, however much of the same funding is meant for other significant needs like COVID-19 mitigation. Some programs also consider Tribes as one eligible entity among many with no guarantee that Tribes will be awarded. Therefore it is difficult to say how much of the funding available for broadband will ultimately be used for that purpose.

Tribes are working to use these new resources to find new and innovative solutions to close the digital divide. The American Indian Policy Institute (AIPI) has identified funding and resources as a key factor for broadband development. AIPI's Tribal Broadband Priorities 2022 states that additional funding is needed for Tribes to expand broadband access. Also, that funding be provided in a way that gives Tribes as much discretion and flexibility to allow for Tribes to properly address their unique situation and needs. The programs listed in this document all have the potential to fund broadband internet projects, and do so with different degrees of discretion and flexibility for Tribes.

This document is meant to list important funding programs available to Tribes for broadband connectivity. AIPI has been working to track these broadband programs, however this list is not exhaustive. These programs are ones that have open application windows or important new rule updates. Please continue to follow AIPI for any new information on new Tribal broadband developments.

Tribal Broadband Programs - Includes modules specifically for Tribes, programs with Tribal funding set-aside, and programs with Tribal eligibility.

1. The Indigenous Communities Program

The Indigenous Communities Program allocates $100 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding specifically for Indigenous communities, which were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. This program is designed to support the needs of Tribal Governments and Indigenous communities. The Economic Development Administration (EDA) will support these important partners to develop and execute economic development projects to recover from the pandemic and build economies for the future, this also includes broadband projects.

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[1] Estimated sum of funding designated for Tribes within the programs listed, does not include state, USDA, HUD programs, and does not include the ACP.

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The EDA strongly recommends submitting completed applications by **March 31, 2022**. All awards will be made at a 100% grant rate. The EDA will reimburse certain pre-award project costs To apply, read the [Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)](#) and eligibility requirements at https://eda.gov/funding-opportunities/. Please direct any questions about the American Rescue Plan Indigenous Communities program to indigenous@eda.gov.

2. [State Small Business Credit Initiative](#) (SSBCI)

The SSBCI is an already existing program under the U.S. Treasury that was reauthorized by the ARPA that includes a $500 million set-aside for Tribes. The SSBCI would support Tribal small business financing programs that could be used to support qualifying Tribal businesses in the broadband/telecommunications field.

The application period for the SSBCI is still open for Tribes. The deadline to apply is **May 11, 2022**. For more information please review the [SSBCI Tribal Government Fact Sheet](#) or contact Tribal.Consult@treasury.gov.

3. [Capital Projects Fund](#)

The Capital Projects Fund was created by the ARPA and includes a $100 million Tribal set-aside to fund critical capital projects that directly enable work, education, and health monitoring, including remote options, in response to the public health emergency. This program is administered by the U.S. Treasury.

The application period for this program is still open. The deadline for applications is **June 1, 2022**, and more information is available in the [Capital Projects Fund Guidance](#). Please contact Tribal.Consult@treasury.gov for any questions and additional information.

4. [Tribal Broadband Connectivity Connectivity Program](#) (TBCP)

The TBCP was created by the [Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021](#), and made $980 million in grants available to Tribes for broadband deployment on Tribal lands, as well as for telehealth, distance learning, broadband affordability, and digital inclusion. [The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) (IIJA) made changes to the TBCP by extending timelines and appropriating an additional $2 billion for grants.

The deadline to apply to the TBCP was on September 1, 2021. However, The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) may announce an additional application period for additional funding provided by the IIJA. Please contact BroadbandForAll@ntia.gov or visit the [NTIA Tribal Nations page](#) for additional information.

5. [Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program](#)

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Tribes are eligible to apply for grants out of this $1 billion program for the construction, improvement, or acquisition of middle mile infrastructure. This program does not provide broadband access all the way to end-users, it assists with the necessary infrastructure that brings broadband access to a community or area. The funding for this grant program comes from the IIJA. This program is administered by the NTIA.

Important dates and final details on this grant program have not yet been released. Please contact BroadbandForAll@ntia.gov or visit the [NTIA Tribal Nations page](#) for additional information and resources.

6. [Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program](#)

Tribes are eligible to apply for this $1.25 billion discretionary grant program created by the IIJA. Funding will be distributed via annual grant programs over 5 years to implement digital equity projects. Digital equity projects include developing digital inclusion activities, facilitating broadband adoption education, and increasing public broadband access through hardware and software investments. This program is administered by the NTIA.

Important dates and final details have not yet been released, but this program will begin once NTIA starts awarding grants from the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program (see the State Programs section below). Please contact BroadbandForAll@ntia.gov or visit the [NTIA Tribal Nations page](#) for additional information and resources.

7. [Local Assistance & Tribal Consistency Fund](#)

This fund is established within the ARPA and includes a $500 million Tribal set-aside over 2 years that can be used for any governmental purpose other than lobbying. This program is administered by the U.S. Treasury.

This program's use of funds and methodology are still being finalized. Treasury held a series of consultations and received written comments during February 2022.

8. [ReConnect Program](#)

The ReConnect Program offers loans, grants, and loan-grant combinations to facilitate broadband deployment in areas of rural America that currently do not have sufficient access to broadband. There are 100% grant awards for Tribal governments and socially vulnerable communities that allocate up to $350 million for grants. The maximum amount of grant funds that can be requested in an application is $25 million. However, in some cases, the applicant may request up to $35 million. This program is administered through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The application period for this program is now closed and will open again in the next fiscal year. For questions or comments, please visit https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/contact-us.

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9. [Community Connect Grant Program](#)

The Community Connect Grant Program provides financial assistance to eligible applicants that will provide broadband service in rural, economically-challenged communities where service does not exist. Eligible entities include Federally-recognized Tribes in rural areas that lack any existing broadband speed of at least 10 Mbps downstream and 1 Mbps upstream. The application guide provides guidance on rural areas currently eligible for Community Connect grants. This program is administered through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

There is a 15% matching requirement. Applicants must focus on a single community, must have a community center, and must cover the cost of providing broadband service free of charge in critical community facilities for 2 years. Less than 10% of the grant amount or up to $150,000 may be used for the improvement, expansion, construction, or acquisition of the community center. The application period for this program is now closed. The next application window is expected to open in late Fall 2022. For questions about the Community Connect Grant Program, please email community.connect@wdc.usda.gov or call the Loan Origination and Approval Division at (202) 720-0800.

10. [Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grant Program](#)

The Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grant Program helps rural communities use the unique capabilities of telecommunications to connect to each other and to the world, overcoming the effects of remoteness and low population density by providing funding for equipment to deliver telemedicine service and distance learning curriculums in rural communities with a population of 20,000 or less. Eligible entities include Federally-recognized Tribes. This program is administered through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

There is a 15% matching requirement. Up to 20% of a grant can be used for broadband facilities that support distance learning or telemedicine. The application period for this program is now closed. The next application window is expected to open in late Fall 2022. For more information visit dltinfo@usda.gov or call (202) 720-0800.

11. [Indian Housing Block Grant](#) (IHBG)

The Indian Housing Block Grant Program (IHBG) is a formula grant that provides affordable housing, makes homes broadband ready, pays for broadband connectivity as utility assistance, and purchases devices to facilitate education or self-sufficiency training. Each year, recipients of the Indian Housing Block Grant use [EPIC](#) to electronically submit an Indian Housing Plan to receive funding and complete Annual Performance Reports. A fillable PDF version of the forms are also available through HUD's Office of Native American Programs (ONAP) for recipients with unreliable internet service. This program is administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

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Please contact your local [Area ONAP](#) office with any questions.

12. [Indian Community Development Block Grant](#) (ICDBG)

The ICBDG provides eligible grantees with direct grants for use in infrastructure development (installation of Fiber, dish systems, mesh networks, etc.), construction and rehabilitation of housing fiber or cable installation, and improvements in community connectivity through dish or mesh networks. These single-purpose grants are awarded on a competition basis pursuant to the terms published in an annual NOFA. The program is administered by the six area ONAPs with policy development and oversight provided by ONAP headquarters. Each Area ONAP is responsible for a geographic jurisdiction that includes from 26 to over 200 eligible applicants.

Please contact your local [Area ONAP](#) office with any questions.

13. [Coronavirus Relief Fund](#)

The Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) is a fund created by the [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act](#) (CARES). The CRF included an $8 billion Tribal set-aside to assist Tribes with mitigating the impact of COVID-19. The CRF can be used for the facilitation of distance learning, including technological improvements, expansion of telework capabilities, and establishing and operating telemedicine capabilities for COVID-19 related treatment. The CRF is administered by the U.S. Treasury.

CRF payments to Tribes have been completed. However, [recent rule guidance revisions](#) state costs must only be obligated during the covered period. Previously, rule guidance indicated performance and/or delivery had to take place during the covered period. Expenditures can be recorded through September 30, 2022. Please contact Tribal.Consult@treasury.gov for further information.

14. [Emergency Rental Assistance Program](#) (ERA)

This program allows Tribes to develop new programs or use existing programs to assist individuals who are unable to pay rent or utilities. This program also allows for assistance with internet expenses if it allows renters to engage in distance learning, telework, telemedicine, or to obtain government services. $797.6 million is set aside for Tribes for this program. The ERA program is administered by the U.S. Treasury.

Funding under this program was [originally](#) available through December 31, 2021, but this date has been [extended](#) through September 30, 2022. Funding in this program may also be subject to reallocation, and any [updates](#) regarding funding reallocation can be found on the [ERA website](#). Please contact Tribal.Consult@treasury.gov for more information.

15. [Homeowner Assistance Fund](#) (HAF)

The HAF was created by the ARPA and includes a $498 million Tribal set aside that may be used for assistance with mortgage payments, homeowner's insurance, utility payments, and other specified purposes. Fund guidance states that a homeowner's internet service may serve as a qualifying expense.

The deadline for Tribes to request funding from the HAF was on December 15, 2021. However, on February 24, 2022, Treasury issued new guidance on income, eligible housing counseling services, administrative expenses, eligible uses of funds, and approaches for household income verification.

16. States, Local & Tribal Fiscal Recovery Funds Program (SLFRF)

This program was included in the ARPA and allocated $20 billion to Tribes to address many areas of need directly related to the impact of COVID-19. One of these areas of need includes broadband infrastructure. This program is administered by the U.S. Treasury.

Deadlines to submit applications for the SLFRF were in June and July of 2021. However, Treasury adopted the final rule for the program on January 6, 2022, and the final rule goes into effect on April 1, 2022. The final rule makes changes based on stakeholder feedback on the SLFRF's implementation over the past year.

State Broadband Programs - These programs are intended to be used by states but may have the potential to benefit Tribal communities through collaboration.

1. Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program (BEAD)

Established through the IIJA, the BEAD Program has a budget of $42.45 billion and will grant funds to states and territories to invest in broadband projects that will help close the availability gap. Eligible Entities include unserved locations with no access to 25/3 Mbps, underserved locations with no access to 100/20 Mbps, and community anchor institutions without gigabit connections. States will receive an initial grant to support planning efforts like building capacity in state broadband offices to outreach and coordinate with local communities. States will then submit a 5-year action plan, which shall be informed by collaboration with local and regional entities. This program is administered through NTIA.

NTIA is working to finalize the program and is currently holding consultations to gather Tribal input on the BEAD program. Please check NTIA's Tribal Nations resource page for more information about past and upcoming consultations. To ask questions about IIJA broadband programs or provide additional feedback please email BroadbandForAll@ntia.gov.

2. State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program

Established under the Digital Equity Act within the IIJA, the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program allocates $60 million for states and territories to develop "Digital Equity Plans." The

purpose of the program is to ensure states have the planning capacity to design and support digital equity and inclusion programs for all communities and individuals. Planning grants will be made available directly to states. This program is administered through NTIA.

To be eligible for a grant, a state must submit an application in response to the NTIA's publication of a NOFO and designate a plan administrator. The application must include a commitment to develop the state digital equity plan within one year after being awarded the grant. To ask questions about IIJA broadband programs or provide additional feedback, please contact BroadbandForAll@ntia.gov.

3. [State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program](#)

Established under the Digital Equity Act within the IIJA, the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program allocates an additional $1.44 billion over five years for states to implement and oversee their respective State Digital Equity Plans and digital inclusion activities. This program is administered through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).

In order to apply for Capacity Grants, States must have participated in and completed the planning program. To ask questions about IIJA broadband programs or provide additional feedback: BroadbandForAll@ntia.gov.

Individual Broadband Programs - These programs are intended to benefit individuals or specific entities but are also able to assist individual Tribal members and organizations.

1. [Lifeline Program](#)

Lifeline is a federal program that helps to lower the monthly cost of phone and internet by offering a monthly benefit of up to $34.25 towards phone or internet services for eligible subscribers living on Tribal lands. A consumer can qualify for the Lifeline benefit if their income is 135% or less than the federal poverty guidelines, or if they participate in SNAP, Medicaid, or other federal programs. Consumers can apply [online](#), via mail by printing or requesting an application by phone or with a service provider identified through the "Companies Near Me" tool available on www.lifelinesupport.org/companies-near-me/.

To help keep Americans connected during the coronavirus pandemic, the FCC has temporarily waived recertification, reverification, general de-enrollment, income documentation, and documentation requirements for subscribers residing in rural areas on Tribal lands, and has extended those waivers until March 31, 2022. For consumer support, please email LifelineSupport@usac.org or call (800) 234-9473.

2. [High-Cost Program](#)

The High-Cost program ensures that consumers in rural, insular, and high-cost areas

have access to reasonably comparable services at rates that are reasonably comparable to those in urban areas. Funding goes to Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETC) for deployment and ongoing operations. The FCC factors in the unique challenges of serving rural Tribal communities to ensure that ETCs have sufficient support to serve them. The FCC requires engagement with Tribal governments in recognition of its vital importance to the successful deployment and provision of service.

More information is available by visiting: www.usac.org/high-cost/program-overview/.

3. E-Rate Program

The E-Rate Program provides funding for eligible equipment services to public or private schools (K-12), libraries (including Tribal libraries), and groups of schools and libraries (e.g., consortia, districts, systems) and has an annual funding cap of $4.276B, adjusted annually for inflation. Discounts range from 20% to 90% based on level of poverty (based on the percentage of students eligible for National School Lunch Program or an Alternative Discount Mechanism), urban/rural status, and type of service.

For further questions, contact the E-Rate Customer Service Center at (888) 203- 8100.

4. Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)

The Affordable Connectivity Program is an FCC benefit program that helps ensure households can afford the broadband they need for work, school, healthcare, and more. The benefit provides a discount of up to $30 per month toward internet service for eligible households and up to $75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to $100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute more than $10 and less than $50 toward the purchase price. Eligible households include those who participate in Tribal specific programs, such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal TANF, or Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations.

To apply, go to ACPBenefit.org, or print out a mail-in application. Contact your preferred participating provider to select a plan and apply the discount to your bill. Eligible households must both apply for the program and contact a participating provider to select a service plan. The Affordable Connectivity Program is limited to one monthly service discount and one device discount per household. For more information, please visit www.fcc.gov/ACP or call the ACP Support Center at (877) 384-2575.

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