

VPS Consulting Memo

Upcoming & Emerging Funding Opportunities

REVIEW & REPORT OF OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

Overview

The need to bring broadband to unserved and underserved areas is more important now than ever. The Federal Government along with several states have made a significant commitment, from a funding perspective, to assist with bringing broadband to those areas in need.

Vantage Point Solutions is dedicated to keeping our clients informed of the various funding opportunities on the horizon.

The enclosed report is designed to provide basic information regarding opportunities our clients and/or the communities they serve may be interested in pursuing, as well as provide a summary of what providers can do today to be prepared once the funding windows open.

Federal & State Funding At-a-Glance

PROGRAM & ADMINISTRATING AGENCY	FUND AMOUNT	ELIGIBLE RECIPIENT
Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (USAC)	\$3.21 Billion	Consumers
Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (NTIA)	\$1 Billion	Tribal Entities
COVID-19 CARES Act (USAC)	\$200 Million	Health Facilities
E-Rate (USAC)	TBD	Schools & Libraries
Secure Networks Act (FCC)	\$1.9 Million	Providers
Education Stabilization Fund (US Dept. of Education)	\$81.9 Billion	State Education Agencies; then TBD
Minority Broadband Initiatives (NTIA)	\$285 Million	Historically Black Colleges and Tribal
Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program (USDA)	\$65 Million	Rural Communities
Broadband Infrastructure Deployment (NTIA)	\$300 Million	States, Communities & Providers
ReConnect Loan and Grant Program (USDA)	\$685 Million	Providers
Broadband Data Task Force (FCC)	No Funding to be Distributed	
Broadband Interagency Coordination Act (NTIA)	No Funding to be Distributed	

Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBBP)

\$3.21 Billion – Administered by USAC – Look for Final Order and Rules Soon.

Consumer Benefit and Additional Eligibility Criteria

- Receive \$50 or \$75 (enhanced tribal lands benefit)
- \$100 towards connected device with a co-pay of \$10 to \$50
- Expires when funding exhausted or 6 months after COVID-19 pandemic has been declared ended.
- Additional eligibility criteria, beyond the Lifeline program, to include free and reduced school lunch program, Federal Pell Grant, substantial loss of income since February 29, 2020, or meets participating providers' existing low-income or COVID-19 program.

Consumer Advocacy Agencies can sign-up to promote program or get more information at:

<https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit>

Note: It is anticipated the program will be administered through the Lifeline Program.

Provider Information

Broadband Service Providers must "Elect" to participate.

ETC's will automatically qualify (process is unclear).

- May need to complete USAC election notice and/or register on Sam.gov.

Existing Broadband Service Providers (Non-ETC's)

- Register with Sam.gov - This may be new for your company.
- Items your company may have already:
 - FCC Registration Number FRN (CORES ID)
 - 498 ID (SPIN)

If your company had an existing Low-Income Program as of 4/1/2020 there will be a faster approval.

Sign-up for email list: <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/6194379/Emergency-Broadband-Benefit-Program>

Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (TBCP)

\$1 Billion – Administered by NTIA – Look for Notice of Funding Opportunity Soon.

What is It?

Grant to expand access to adoption of broadband service on tribal land or remote learning, telework or telehealth resources during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Get more information at: <https://www.ntia.gov/blog/2021/ntia-announces-tribal-consultations-new-program-increase-broadband-access-across-indian>

Who is Eligible?

- Tribal governments
- Tribal colleges and universities
- The Department of Hawaiian Homelands on behalf of the Native Hawaiian Community; including Native Hawaiian education programs.
- Tribal organizations
- Native corporations as defined under Section 3 of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

COVID-19 CARES Act – Round II

\$200 Million – Administered by USAC – Look for Final Order and Rules Soon.

Updates

Program administration has moved to USAC from the FCC.

Who is Eligible? How Will Providers be Impacted?

There will be another round of comment and rulemaking with another Report and Order to be released for comment during March 2021.

<https://prodnet.www.neca.org/publicationsdocs/wwwpdf/21721covid.pdf>

E-Rate – Emergency Relief

Administered by USAC – Currently in Comment and Rule Making Period.

What is It?

Emergency Relief to allow the use of E-Rate Funds to support Remote Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

<https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-21-98A1.pdf>

Comment and Rule Making Period Discussion

- Eligible Equipment, Services, and Costs – Should services extended beyond the schools/libraries be excluded?
- Cost Effective Purchase – How can the FCC ensure cost effectiveness?
- Funding and Prioritization – Is more funding needed?

Secure Networks Act

\$1.9 Million – Administered by FCC – Currently in Comment Period.

What is It?

Funding to be used to remove and replace communications equipment and services that pose a national security risk.

<https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-369559A1.pdf>

Comment Period Discussion

- Raise the cap on eligibility for providers with 10 million or fewer customers.
- Equipment used or obtained prior to June 30, 2020.
- Equipment to be replaced must meet eligibility criteria.

Education Stabilization Fund

\$81.9 Billion – Administered by US Department of Education

Update

The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA Act) provides an additional \$81.9 billion to the Education Stabilization Fund.

<https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/>

Does this Apply to Broadband?

Allowable uses include addressing student broadband assistance to Non-Public Connectivity gaps.

Minority Broadband Initiatives

\$285 Million – Administered by NTIA

What is It?

Targeted to focus on broadband access and adoption at historically black colleges or universities, tribal colleges, and universities.

<https://www.ntia.doc.gov/category/minority-broadband-initiative>

What's Next?

Currently in implementation stages – working with the Tribal Colleges and Universities on new Department of Education distance learning regulations.

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/09/02/2020-18636/distance-education-and-innovation>

Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program

\$65 Million – Administered by USDA

What is It?

A program for remote learning and tele-med. Awards will range from \$50,000 to \$1 Million – will require a 15% match.

Who is Eligible?

Assists rural communities to acquire technology and training to connect education and medical professionals with teachers.

Broadband Infrastructure Deployment Grants

\$300 Million – Administered by NTIA

What is It?

State and Provider partnerships for broadband infrastructure deployment in rural areas

Who is eligible?

Partnerships between a state, one or more political subdivisions of a state and providers of fixed broadband service to support infrastructure deployment.

Details on this funding program are to be determined – VPS is monitoring the NTIA site for updates.

ReConnect Loan and Grant Program – Round III

\$685 Million – Administered by USDA

What is It?

The Broadband ReConnect Program furnishes loans and grants to provide funds for the costs of construction, improvement, or acquisition of facilities and equipment needed to provide broadband service in eligible rural areas.

Details on this funding program are to be determined – more information is anticipated in Summer/Fall 2021.

Broadband Data Task Force

Administered by the FCC in conjunction with the Broadband DATA Act.

What is It?

A new task force focused on gathering accurate broadband data and implementing upgrades to the data collection process.

<https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-370061A2.pdf>

What's Next?

- Implementation of new data collection and mapping platforms.
- Continue to seek comment and publish orders on technical requirements.
- Purchase of necessary equipment.
- Public announcement will be at least 5 months prior to the start of filing.
- Outreach to Tribes and small filers.

Broadband Interagency Coordination Act

Administered by NTIA

What is It?

Requires the NTIA, FCC and the USAC to enter an interagency agreement to coordinate the distribution of federal funds for broadband programs, to prevent duplication of support and ensure stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

State Grants

State Funding Programs

Proposed Broadband Funding

In addition to the above federal programs, several states have proposed broadband funding to support infrastructure, training, and education during the 2021 fiscal budget process. Proposed funding being seen across the states ranges from the high side with the State of Iowa at \$450M to be allocated over the next three years, State of Tennessee at \$200M and goes down to the State of New Mexico at \$10M and State of Missouri at \$5M. State Governors and state leaders know broadband is important and the speeds at which people have access need to be adequate. In most states, the budget requests are in the Legislative cycle and as a result, final approved funding may vary from what was requested. VPS's connection with the state advocacy organizations and state leaders helps us keep up to date on the various programs and VPS will share information as it becomes available.

What Can Providers Do Now?

Whether you are looking at federal or state grant or support funding, or other broadband funding programs, many of the funding options have common application elements. The key to being successful is being prepared with a plan so when the funding windows open you are ready to be able to submit a strong application. The following is a listing of items to start with:

- Do you have a strategic plan for where you want to grow your network?
- Do you have estimated costs, both capital expenditures and operating estimates to meet your growth?
- Have you engaged with a Professional Engineer to be engaged with your plans to grow your network (most programs require a PE Certification)?
- Have you updated your company and management team operating experience summaries?

In addition to being prepared internally with a plan for your company, it is also important to start engaging in conversations with your local educational facilities, healthcare facilities, businesses, public safety and community leaders on the impact broadband and the lack of broadband has had on them.

Funding application windows are typically short and the more prepared a company can be before the window opens, the more successful it will be in securing funding.

Additional Information

For information on any of these funding programs and opportunities or if you would like Vantage Point Solutions' guidance, please contact any these members of the Vantage Point Solutions Consulting Team:

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