

County and City Government Letter of Support FAQs for BEAD Proposals

What is BEAD?

- BEAD is the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program. It's a federal grant program that provides funds to states to close the digital divide by first expanding broadband access to all unserved and underserved locations in a state.
- Virginia's BEAD allocation is \$1.48B, which is projected to completely close gaps in broadband infrastructure across the Commonwealth and allow for opportunities to invest in broadband affordability and adoption.
- The Virginia Office of Broadband has been working through the required federal planning stages to access these funds. You can learn more about these planning stages at dhcd.virginia.gov/bead.

How is it different than VATI?

- BEAD has several key differences than the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI).
 - Grants under BEAD are made directly to broadband providers.
 - Application areas under BEAD are pre-determined and not drawn by a local government.
 - Eligible locations under BEAD are determined through a state-level challenge process, which was conducted in late 2023 and early 2024.
 - These eligible locations include homes, businesses, and community anchors that don't have broadband access and are not included in an existing expansion project area. This includes an estimated 115,000 locations statewide!¹
 - Eligible locations must be mapped on the Federal Communications Commission's Broadband Fabric. If a location isn't on this Fabric, it can't be addressed under BEAD.
 - While local governments have traditionally contributed matching funds to VATI applications, this is not required under the BEAD program. There is a 25% match requirement under the BEAD program for broadband providers.

What roles do county and city governments play?

- The Office of Broadband knows the important role local governments play in broadband expansion across the Commonwealth.
- Counties and Cities have the opportunity to provide letters of support to broadband providers submitting applications in their jurisdiction under the BEAD program.

Does this Letter of Support actually matter?

- Letters of Support from Counties and Cities have significant influence in determining the broadband providers that receive awards in their jurisdictions under the BEAD Program
- If a County or City provides a letter of support to a broadband provider, that provider receives 10 points in the BEAD application process.

¹ This figure does not factor in locations funded under the FY2024 round of the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative. These VATI funded locations will be ineligible for BEAD.

- If a Letter of Support isn't granted to a broadband provider, the provider receives no points under this scoring category.
- The letter of support is worth 10% of the total points available – so the letters of support will be significant in determining the awarded broadband provider in a county or city.

Is there any specific action a local government needs to take to grant a letter of support?

- The Office of Broadband recommends these letters of support be granted by official vote of the Board of Supervisors or City Councils in respective jurisdictions.
- It is the responsibility of broadband providers to request this letter of support from the county or city and upload this letter with their application into the application portal.
- These letters should be addressed to the specific broadband provider which receives the support. The 'letters' can be as simple as an email communication from county or city staff to the broadband provider reflecting the Board's or Council's decision to grant the letter. The only requirement is that this support must be conveyed in writing.

What should a county or city government consider when considering giving a letter of support?

- There are no pre-set criteria from the Office of Broadband for cities and counties in determining which broadband providers receive letters of support.
- Counties and cities may want to consider a multitude of factors, including projected construction timeframes, existing partnerships, partnerships with organizations to streamline construction, digital opportunity efforts of a broadband provider, or others.
- A county and city may elect to contribute matching funds to an application to help particular providers be more competitive, but this is not a requirement for localities under the BEAD program and is solely up to the decision of the county or city.

Can a county or city government provide a letter of support for more than one broadband provider?

- Yes, Letters of Support can be provided to as many broadband providers that request this support.
- Letters of Support cannot be provided for specific subareas of a county or city. Letters of Support, and the scoring credit are **ONLY** applied to the entire county or city.

What is the timeline for providing such letter of support?

- The total BEAD application window for broadband providers is 150 days and begins after the approval of BEAD Challenge Process results to finalize the number of eligible locations under BEAD.
- Letters of Support must be received and submitted, by this application deadline.

When can we expect construction getting underway for BEAD?

- Construction of BEAD-funded projects heavily depends on approval of awards at the federal level.
- New federal funding requirements may impact the timeliness and implementation of these awards. This includes advanced environmental and historical permitting, domestic material sourcing requirements, and additional labor provisions.

- Because of these factors, the earliest-possible construction start-dates will vary greatly from project to project.

Is there anything else that local governments should be focused on under BEAD?

- Yes! BEAD also has opportunities to invest in broadband adoption programs, like telehealth, smart farming, digital literacy, among others. Reach out to broadband@dhcd.virginia.gov to express your interest in these programs and learn more about BEAD “Non-Deployment”!
- The Office of Broadband has also established a planning grant program to help cities, counties, and tribal governments better understand gaps in broadband affordability and adoption in their jurisdictions. \$25,000 is available to each city, county, and tribal government in the Commonwealth that applies. Reach out to digitalopportunity@dhcd.virginia.gov to learn more! More information is also available at <https://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/digital-opportunity>