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Commerce finishes \$4 billion broadband Internet stimulus grants

The Commerce Department on Monday announced the last of its more than \$4 billion in stimulus grants for the expansion of broadband Internet lines. The program, as part of the Recovery Act, was meant to jump-start the economy and provide the underlying technology needed for new business and economic growth.

Commerce Secretary Gary Locke announced a final 14 grants totaling \$207 million. The department, along with Agriculture, were given more than \$7 billion to separately distribute to rural and other broadband projects.

--The Commerce Department awarded a total of 233 projects in every state. Many of those projects are so-called "middle mile" fiber optic loops that can connect several towns in a region to backbone networks.

--The NTIA granted awards to connect 24,000 community schools, libraries, government offices, health-care facilities and public safety entities to high-speed networks.

Critics of broadband stimulus funds and other Recovery Act projects have questioned the immediate benefits of those awards and whether companies will be able to continue operations of their projects after government subsidies are spent.

In a news release, the National Telecommunications & Information Administration, the White House's technology policy arm, said the benefits may not be immediate. But the federal government has created a timeline for the projects.

"These anticipated benefits will be realized over the life of each project, which must be substantially complete within two years and fully complete within three years," the NTIA said.

Craig Settles, a telecommunications consultant, said the expectations of immediate jobs growth from broadband deployment was "unrealistic" and "unfortunate."

"The real benefits come from the businesses that arise from these tech investments," Settles said.

Read more for the specific awards announced Monday:

Comprehensive Community Infrastructure awards:

California: Los Angeles Regional Interoperable Communications Systems Authority. This \$154.6 million grant will fund deployment of an interoperable wireless public safety broadband network across Los Angeles County to serve more than 80 public safety agencies and up to 34,000 first responders. The network will enable computer-aided dispatch, rapid law enforcement queries, real-time video streaming, medical telemetry and patient tracking, and other uses.

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Colorado: Adams County Communications Center Inc. This \$12.1 million grant will fund deployment of an interoperable wireless public safety broadband network in an area that includes Adams County and the Denver International Airport to serve more than 20 public safety agencies and up to 2,000 first responders. The project will enable uses such as HAZMAT database query and records access, criminal checks, airport perimeter security and emergency runway clearance.

Public Computer Center awards:

California: Monterey County Office of Education. This \$3.6 million grant will fund approximately three new and 26 upgraded public computer centers, and 500 new or upgraded workstations to serve up to an additional 5,000 users each week and provide training for as many as 10,000 residents.

Colorado: Colorado Board of Education. This \$2.3 million grant will fund approximately six new and 70 upgraded public computer centers, and 1,200 new or upgraded workstations, to serve up to an additional 21,000 users each week and provide training for as many as 90,000 residents.

Delaware: Delaware Department of State. This \$1.9 million grant will fund the upgrade of 32 public computer centers and approximately 50 new workstations to serve up to an additional 1,300 users each week and provide training for as many as 2,000 residents.

Florida: Florida A&M University. This \$1.5 million grant will fund a new public computer center with 65 workstations to serve an estimated 2,800 users each week and provide training for as many as 14,500 residents.

Nevada: Lyon County School District. This \$745,000 grant will fund six new public computer centers with approximately 120 workstations to serve up to an estimated 1,700 users each week and provide training for as many as 7,500 residents.

New York: Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe. This \$642,000 grant will fund five new public computer centers with approximately 60 workstations to serve up to an additional 500 users each week and provide training for as many as 2,700 residents.

Sustainable Broadband Adoption awards:

Arkansas: Connect Arkansas Inc. This \$3.7 million grant will fund training for approximately 2,600 residents, focusing on digital literacy, online entrepreneurship and access to telehealth services.

California: California Emerging Technology Fund. This \$7.1 million grant will fund a project designed to place unemployed residents in IT-industry jobs by training approximately 37,000 people and providing computers to qualified low-income residents who graduate from a broadband training curriculum.

California: City and County of San Francisco. This \$7.9 million grant will fund a project to provide broadband-related training to approximately 8,400 seniors, low-income individuals and others in economically and socially vulnerable groups.

California, Louisiana, Minnesota, New York, Oregon and Texas: Portland State University. This \$3.3 million grant will fund digital literacy and other training tailored to adult learners. The project intends to train approximately 23,000 people, focusing on economically vulnerable populations, to prepare them for careers in the digital economy.

Michigan: Michigan State University. This \$5.2 million grant will fund a project to provide broadband-related training to approximately 3,200 residents, focusing on high school students, displaced workers and small businesses in 11 cities across the state. One project aim is to prepare displaced former industrial workers for IT jobs.

Washington: Toledo Telephone Co. This \$2.1 million grant will fund a project with the Cowlitz Tribe to provide broadband-related training to approximately 750 residents. Qualified residents who complete a training curriculum may receive subsidized equipment and broadband access.

By Cecilia Kang | September 27, 2010; 5:40 PM ET
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