



Throw Out The Maps For BEAD

Focus On The “Hardest-to-Reach” Areas Through Open Competition To Achieve Equity NOW

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Los Angeles and Bay Area – February 1, 2023 – California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) applauds Congressman Clyburn and Senators King and Klobuchar for underscoring urgency to achieve Digital Equity NOW and calling for BEAD funds to be distributed on schedule.

Statement From Sunne Wright McPeak, President and CEO, CETF

Digital Access is a 21st Century Civil Right—thus, access delayed is access denied.

However, more fundamental action is needed to ensure that the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) serves the most digitally-disadvantaged as Congress envisioned and intended. The proposed map for the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) program should be “thrown out” for determining allocation of funds both because (a) it is seriously flawed and (b) no map should govern investments.

Maps should be used only for information. Investment of public funds should be performance-driven through an open, competitive application process that prioritizes the “hardest-to-reach” areas—rural, remote communities, including Tribal Lands, and high-poverty urban neighborhoods. This alternative approach would be a call to action for all Internet Service Providers—private and public—to “Step Up or Step Aside” if they want to serve the best interests of the nation.

Further, BEAD should focus on “at scale” projects, and then connect and upgrade all other locations along the path of deployment, including anchor institutions. The “hardest-to-reach” areas are those where the marketplace hasn’t operated and needs public investment. BEAD also should embrace common sense to recognize that an “unserved” location is “unserved” regardless of what a flawed map says.

The term “at scale” refers to a network designed and built to reach all unserved last-mile locations that can be supported by a specific middle-mile segment—by definition achieving any potential economies of scale to ensure the most cost-effective use of public funds. This approach is in contrast to incremental construction dictated by an imperfect map—exactly what will happen if a map is the primary tool for allocating funds.

It also is the best strategy to avoid “cherry picking” by applicants (the historical practice by ISPs) while also accelerating deployment to those most in need. Every state already is required to do a BEAD plan for IIJA. It is relatively easy for NTIA and the FCC to incorporate performance-based funding into BEAD planning. This is the most expeditious path forward to achieve Digital Equity. Time is of the essence.

About California Emerging Technology Fund

CETF is a statewide non-profit foundation with the mission to close the Digital Divide in California. CETF provides grants to non-profit community-based organizations (CBOs) to assist low-income households adopt broadband and become digitally proficient, leads and manages School2Home to successfully integrate technology into teaching and learning with deep parent engagement to close the Achievement Gap in middle schools in low-income neighborhoods, and promotes Digital Inclusion in public policy to achieve Digital Equity. For more information, please visit www.cetfund.org.