

Illinois Local Coordination Guidance Document

Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program – Connect Illinois Round 4

Guidance on preparing evidence of (1) Community Support and (2) Financial Commitment from Community for the BEAD-funded Connect Illinois Round 4

The BEAD-funded Connect Illinois Round 4 allocates \$1.04 billion to connect up to 175,000+ households, businesses, and community anchor institutions to high quality, affordable broadband service. Through a three-wave competitive process, the Illinois Office of Broadband (IOB) will accept applications from entities who can deploy internet service and evaluate them based on a set of scoring criteria.

Through two *Local Coordination* criteria on the scoring rubric, the BEAD Program provides counties, local governments, residents, and other community institutions a significant opportunity to influence how applications are evaluated for BEAD funding. This guidance document is intended to provide clarity and best practices around compiling and crafting evidence of community support and financial commitment.

The audience for this document is both:

- **Prospective BEAD applicants** looking to better understand local coordination processes and documentation; and
- **Local governments and community institutions** preparing to evaluate internet service provider (ISP) proposals in order to make decisions about offering support.

Part 1: Local Coordination Overview

Local coordination for broadband means the process of ISPs engaging with local governments and communities to understand their priorities and needs, and align broadband offerings accordingly.

In the BEAD-funded Connect Illinois Round 4, *Local Coordination* represents 10% of the total points an applicant can earn. Points will be awarded based on the breadth and depth of community support for the project (5%) and financial investment by the community (5%).

(1) Evidence of Community Support

The evaluation of the evidence of community support will be similar to evaluation during Connect Illinois Round 3.

Factors for consideration include (a) degree of personalized and specific letters that reflect a broad spectrum of community members, (b) degree to which the project fits into an existing community strategic plan or commitments from community, (c) recent survey that covers a broad spectrum of the community, with statistically meaningful results regarding level of need,

gaps, and project support, (d) evidence of community outreach efforts to gauge interest in the project, or (e) other community feedback or evidence of community engagement / collaboration that shows compelling need and support for project.

Below is a detailed list of acceptable **evidence of community support**, with factors for consideration:

A) Support Letters

- Customized, specific letters of support demonstrating genuine, localized endorsement for the *specific* project from stakeholders such as:
 - Local and regional government officials (e.g., county, municipality, economic development organizations, agency elected officials)
 - Community institutions benefitting from broadband (e.g., schools, libraries)
 - Community organizations (e.g., non-profits, employers, etc.)
 - Individual end-users (e.g., residents and businesses) with a personal stake in the project.

B) Strategic Plan or Community Commitment

- Demonstration of how the project aligns with an existing community strategic plan, such as how the proposed project addresses documented broadband gaps, connectivity barriers, and community priorities.

C) Recent Survey

- Survey within last 12-24 months to gauge a community's broadband needs, service gaps, technology preferences, etc. Survey touches upon level of need, gaps, and support for a broadband project.
 - Example: Survey conducted by a county that participated in the [Broadband Breakthrough](#) program.

D) Community Outreach

- Evidence of active community engagement that documents meaningful outreach and input from a broad spectrum of the community (e.g., evidence of townhall meetings, local meeting attendance, social media outreach to targeted constituents).

E) Other Community Feedback and Engagement

- Examples of other evidence of community engagement and interest include (but are not limited to):
 - Local commitment to support the project with infrastructure planning and deployment (e.g., permitting, pole attachment, right-of-way access, shared assets, etc.)
 - Proof of previous and/or ongoing collaborative efforts with the community (e.g., history of partnership)
 - Other community feedback that shows compelling need and project support

High-scoring applications will:

- Include support letters (A) that are personalized and reflect both a broad spectrum of stakeholders and geographic areas covered by the proposed project;

- Touch upon several of the other opportunities listed above (B-E) indicating community support; and
- Include both depth and breadth of support from the populations impacted by and geographic areas included in the proposed project.

Earning full points does not require providing evidence for every category listed above. The scoring rubric rewards genuine, authentic evidence of community support.

Reminder: Anyone can provide evidence of community support! Support may come from a wide variety of community representatives, which can include community-based organizations, schools, libraries, small businesses, municipal governments, residents, chambers of commerce, and more. Any party who may benefit from or have a stake in improved internet service is welcome to contribute their perspective.

(2) Verified Financial Commitment from the Community

Evidence of financial commitment from a community may look like:

Financial contribution from the local government or other community institutions, including evidence to verify commitment, such as signed letter of intent or commitment.

Note: If a community partner commits American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) resources or another time-bound funding source, it is important that the community partner and applicant coordinate to ensure matching funds align with the appropriate spending deadlines.

In-kind resource commitments from the local government or other community institutions (i.e., waived permit fees, access to existing conduit or dark fiber, etc.).

High-scoring applications will provide a financial contribution to the proposed project. In-kind resource commitments may earn points but will be considered most strongly along with a financial match.

Part 2: Helpful Information Gathering: Considerations & Questions

The table below offers considerations local governments and communities can use to evaluate an internet service provider’s proposal or gather useful information to incorporate into a letter of support.

Topic	Considerations	Helpful Questions
Universal Coverage	Once the final BEAD map is available, communities can search by address, county, etc. to view	<i>Will the ISP cover all eligible locations in the geographic region, including specific rural, low-income, or otherwise hard-to-serve pockets?</i>

	which locations are eligible to be connected through BEAD.	
Type of Technology	Consider whether the community has any preference for the type of technology (e.g., fiber, fixed wireless, hybrid, etc.) or preferences around deployment plans (e.g., aerial vs. underground).	<i>How does the ISP propose to use different technologies in its proposed project? What is its planned approach for deployment?</i>
Affordability Commitments	Consider community priorities around low-cost options, speed and pricing packages, and commitments to price consistency over time.	<i>Describe your vision of a broadband product(s) and the associated pricing to serve low-income households.</i>
Digital Equity	Understand whether the provider has committed to serving community anchor institutions or plans to support digital skill building initiatives in the community. Consider their plans for outreach or advertisement of low-cost options – does this meet your community’s needs?	<i>How do you currently support digital equity efforts in communities you serve? How might you support local organizations who help residents improve their digital skills and access computers?</i>
Business Practices	Consider community priorities around location of technicians, customer service/call centers, and local hiring preferences.	<i>Will there be jobs created in the area? How will customers receive service support?</i>
Accountability	Understand how the provider’s business is structured and any planned changes. Understand the provider’s planned deployment timeline, whether they can offer a point of contact for the project, and provide a schedule, updates, and notifications.	<i>Has this provider been involved in any bankruptcies, lawsuits, fines, sanctions, or arbitrations? Is the ISP contemplating selling to or merging the company with another ISP in the next 7 years? Will the provider be selling customer data? How will the ISP communicate with and update local governments and residents while a project is underway?</i>
Relationship with ISP	Meet with the provider to learn about their plans and approach. Seek references from previous communities the provider has served. Consider what type of on-going relationship your community prefers.	<i>Have you met with the ISP? Has the ISP solicited input from the community to understand its needs?</i>
Financial Commitments	Consider the provider’s financial contribution to the project, and where they will source materials and equipment.	<i>How much financial “skin in the game” will the provider have in the project? Will the provider purchase supplies locally?</i>

Infrastructure	Identify local right-of-way access and easement requirements. Assess poles for 'make ready status.'	<i>Does the ISP have experience building networks in similar communities across Illinois?</i>
-----------------------	---	---

Note: While *Local Coordination* is an important component of the BEAD application, it is not the only consideration in the scoring rubric. Thus, local governments should both recognize and tap into the influence this opportunity offers, while also maintaining a positive and productive relationship with ISPs and understanding that not all local preferences may be feasible. Overall, the goal is to keep the needs of communities front and center, helping to facilitate the project’s ultimate success and positive impact.

Part 3: Letter of Support Best Practices

Local governments may be approached by internet service providers (ISPs) seeking letters of support endorsing their BEAD applications. Communities can tap into the influence they have in offering community support for broadband applicants who meet their needs. **Strong letters of support are specific and demonstrate genuine, localized endorsement.**

Using the above table, local governments are encouraged to determine their priorities, and then engage with interested providers, asking questions to understand how a project may meet local needs. The outcome of these discussions can be captured through a letter of support.

Sample Framework for a Letter of Support

Subject: Support for [Applying Entity]'s Application for BEAD Funding

Introduction: Briefly introduce the purpose of the letter and discuss commitment to broadband expansion.

Acknowledgement of BEAD Funding: Mention the availability and purpose of BEAD funding.

Support for Broadband Expansion: Highlight the local efforts around and commitment to broadband expansion; Mention any relevant committees, surveys, or initiatives.

Eligible Entity’s BEAD Funding Application: Discuss the applicant’s proposal and how it will address the needs of the community. Mention specific experiences or anecdotes.

Experience with Applicant: Detail the organization, local government, or individual’s experience and engagement with the applicant; Mention any partnerships, engagement, or collaborative efforts.

Resolution/Endorsement Statement: Clearly state the endorsement of the application.

Conclusion: Reiterate the support and commitment to the project. Offer any additional support or information if needed.

For further questions, please email broadband@illinois.gov and visit the IOB's BEAD [website](#).

To receive up-to-date information, key deadlines, and on-going resources, register for the Illinois Broadband Connections [bi-weekly newsletter](#) and complete the [IOB intake form](#).