
Connect Illinois Round 4 Request for Input on Project Area Units (PAU)

Structure of Document

This Request for Input document poses several questions in the interest of refining the State’s preliminary Project Area Units (PAUs) for the Connect Illinois Round 4 Initiative. Accordingly, the document is structured into three sections:

- Section 1: Background
- Section 2: Key questions for respondent input and response template
- Section 3: Administrative considerations for filing comments

1. Background

➤ **1.1 Overview: Illinois Office of Broadband Request for Input**

To further the goal of connecting all Illinoisans, the Illinois Office of Broadband (IOB) has chosen to design “project area units” (PAUs) for broadband deployment. PAUs are collections of eligible broadband-serviceable locations (BSLs), which will serve as “building blocks” for potential subgrantees to create project areas. PAUs will be the smallest possible units for which potential subgrantees may apply for grants and will allow the State to streamline the subgrantee selection process. (See Section 1.2 below for further details.)

A critical next step in the process is to define PAUs in a way that synthesizes input from potential subgrantees. To that end, the State has drafted and published a preliminary set of PAUs based on the density of eligible locations and with the goal of avoiding geographical impediments to broadband deployment. Through this Request for Input, the State welcomes feedback from potential applicants and interested respondents, especially on impediments that could impact the feasibility of deploying broadband across the preliminary published PAUs.

The preliminary set of PAUs, published on the [Illinois Broadband Map](#), is based on the FCC Broadband Availability Data last updated on January 23, 2024, and excludes BSLs contractually obligated to be connected through other state or federal grant programs (known as Enforceable Commitments). The list of eligible locations and PAUs is **subject to change** based on any other federal and state grants yet to be incorporated, the BEAD Challenge Process results, and any changes that may result from additional NTIA feedback on Illinois’ BEAD Initial Proposal Volume II. These changes, and changes resulting from the Request for Input process, will be incorporated into the final set of PAUs that the State will release.

➤ **1.2 Project Area Units (PAUs) definition**

PAUs are defined as a collection of unserved locations, underserved locations, and eligible community anchor institutions (CAIs) to serve as “building blocks” in an application for broadband deployment funding. Each PAU contains a set of “hex-8s,” which are units within a hexagonal, H3 geospatial indexing system that group together BSLs in each hex-8 unit. The PAU:

- May not be broken into a smaller collection of unserved and underserved locations.
- Cannot overlap.
- Collectively contains all unserved locations, underserved locations, and eligible CAIs in the state. Note that CAIs are not included in the preliminary PAUs and will be added after the challenge process.

➤ **1.3 Purpose of the Request for Input process**

The Illinois Office of Broadband (IOB) intends to use the feedback received during the Request for Input process to refine the initial set of published PAUs. Specifically, the State is looking for potential challenges within a PAU that may complicate broadband deployment. This collaborative approach aims to facilitate agreement between the State and potential subgrantees on how to realize the goal of universal broadband coverage across Illinois.

➤ **1.4 Key dates of the Request for Input process**

Key Milestone	Timeline
Publication of preliminary PAUs	March 25, 2024
Request for Input published	May 13, 2024
Webinar: How to participate in the Request for Input process	May 14, 2024, 10:00 – 11:00 am CT <i>Email broadband@illinois.gov to register</i>
Technical assistance on the Request for Input process	To be published on IOB website
Request for Input response due	June 9, 2024

➤ **1.5 Eligible respondents of the Request for Input process**

All interested parties may participate in the Request for Input process. Participation is non-binding and is not required to partake in any future Connect Illinois grant round. Entities who anticipate participating in the BEAD subgrantee process are encouraged to participate in the Request for Input process.

2. Key questions for respondent input and response template

➤ **2.1 To ensure effective collaboration with the State of Illinois, please provide the input requested in the [RFI template](#).** Please also refer to the detailed instructions in the [RFI Guidebook](#).

- a. Summary
 - i. Name of respondent, job title, email address, phone number, and associated company or organization name
- b. PAUs of interest
 - i. List the PAUs of interest and describe the level of interest—either complete (i.e., interested in serving the entire PAU) or partial (i.e., interested in serving part of the PAU)
 - ii. For each PAU added, indicate the technology choice: fiber, fixed wireless, or other reliable broadband technology
 - iii. If partial interest in one or more of the PAU(s) is indicated, provide the reason for the partial interest
- c. PAUs of partial interest
 - i. For all PAUs that have been designated as partial interest, identify the hex-8(s) within the PAU that are of interest

3. Administrative considerations

➤ **3.1 Submission of Request for Input to DCEO**

The intent and goal of this Request for Input is to collect non-binding feedback on how broadband serviceable locations should be segmented to optimize the BEAD subgrantee process and ensure coverage across the state. This Request for Input is for coordination and planning purposes only.

➤ **3.2 Responses**

Respond to the Request for Input by June 9, 11:59 pm CT by uploading the completed template to [this form](#). Please send any questions regarding the Request for Input to broadband@illinois.gov with PAU RFI in the subject line.

➤ **3.3 Confidentiality**

All information received through this request is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 5 ILCS 140/1, *et seq.* However, if you include proprietary information, please mark it “confidential”. The Department will consider any Confidential Information, so designated, presumptively exempt from disclosure pursuant to Section 7(1)(g) of FOIA.

3.4 Information in Request for Input.
If noted as confidential, the information provided in the Request for Input will be treated as trade secret information. If any party seeks to require the Department, pursuant to any law, regulation, or legal process, to disclose any of the Confidential Information, the Department will provide the respondent prompt notice so the company may seek a protective order or take other appropriate action.