

STATE OF COLORADO

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Bill Ritter, Jr.
Governor

Michael Locatis
State Chief Information Officer

April 13, 2009

The Honorable Gary Locke
Secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce
Office of the Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Anna Gomez
Acting Assistant Secretary, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information
Office of the Assistant Secretary, National Telecommunications Information Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

RE: State of Colorado Submission in Response to the Joint Request for Information

Dear Secretary Locke, Secretary Vilsack, and Assistant Secretary Gomez:

The State of Colorado ("Colorado") supports the comments previously filed by NASCIO, NGA, and NARUC. These comments compellingly argue that substantial state involvement in the NTIA's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program ("BTOP") and RUS's Distance Learning, Telemedicine, and Broadband Program will help these agencies effectively accomplish their goals under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act ("ARRA") in every state. In particular, Colorado strongly urges NTIA and RUS to allow states to have a significant role in determining where grants are directed within their regions. Relative to the respective federal agencies, most states are better positioned to understand the needs of their citizens, factors affecting broadband deployment, and the partnerships and projects that will produce the greatest results as well as evaluate whether those projects are implemented successfully. In short, the states can share the workload with NTIA and RUS by assisting in the selection—and oversight—of the grants awarded to the most deserving recipients.

Colorado believes that NTIA and RUS should allow the states to score grant applications that are generated from within their regions. The scoring criteria should be objective, publically available, and developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders. Colorado believes that this process will best enable states to communicate their priorities to NTIA and RUS. If NTIA and RUS are guided by Colorado's scoring in selecting projects within Colorado for funding, the goals of the ARRA are most likely to be accomplished. Ideally, the NTIA and RUS would not only encourage the use of such a scoring system, but would empower states engaging in this process (as Colorado intends to do) by refusing to consider applications that did not go through this process.

Further, under the BTOP, states can apply directly for grants for activities that will increase broadband access in underserved and unserved areas and for community resource centers and adoption programs. One such way the State of Colorado intends to participate in the BTOP is to apply for a block grant, which will be sub-granted to private entities for broadband projects in Colorado. Colorado believes NTIA should recognize that such a block grant program will be an effective way to ensure value-laden projects and successful outcomes. Additionally, this type of funding structure would enable Colorado to assist NTIA in the necessary follow-up to make sure that the grant recipients are held to high standards of accountability. Finally, to facilitate such applications, the NTIA should make clear that the 20 percent funding match required under the BTOP would be waived for the State under this type of "block grant" arrangement on the understanding that it would apply to the subsequent sub-grantees awarded the funding.

Finally, in formulating a national mapping and data collection strategy, NTIA should take into consideration that some states, such as Colorado, have already begun mapping projects using non-ARRA and/or Broadband Data Improvement Act funds. In addition to being guided by the experiences of Colorado and other states, NTIA should clarify that matching fund requirements can be satisfied by money that has recently been spent on such projects. The NTIA should also be cautioned not to condition any grants on data collection or reporting requirements that would require a change in state law. Such requirements would be likely to limit the chances that a national mapping initiative would be successful and could hamper existing state projects. Further, NTIA and RUS should encourage the FCC to make the Form 477 census tract broadband data available to the states to enhance and expedite their individual mapping activities and to ensure a minimum level of broadband mapping granularity.

The State of Colorado looks forward to partnering with NTIA, RUS, and the FCC in ensuring that our nation has a successful broadband strategy. Please contact John Conley (303-764-7707; john.conley@state.co.us) or Dara Hessee (303-764-7709; dara.hessee@state.co.us) with any comments or questions.

Sincerely,


Michael Locatis
State CIO


John D. Conley
Deputy Director