

Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Project Applications: Scoring and Prioritization

BEAD project types

Within the BEAD guidelines, there are two project types:

- **Priority Broadband Projects** – These projects provide 100% end-to-end fiber connection to all broadband serviceable locations (BSLs) in a project area.
- **Other Last-Mile Broadband Deployment Projects** – These projects connect all BSLs in a project area, but utilize qualifying non-fiber aspects in the project build.

Extreme high cost threshold (EHCT)

In order for a BEAD project application to incorporate non-fiber technology options, the project must exceed the EHCT. In Washington State's Initial Proposal Volume 2, the Washington State Broadband Office (WSBO) did not have enough information to determine what a reasonable EHCT would be. Since publication of that document, WSBO has used the following data sources to develop an EHCT:

- Estimates by CostQuest and retained vendors.
- Estimates from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Eligible Entity Toolkit.
- Analysis of project costs for previously awarded projects administered by WSBO, the Public Works Board and the Community Economic Revitalization Board.

To determine if a project exceeds the EHCT, first divide the total project cost by the number of BSLs in the project area to get a per location cost. For end to end fiber projects that reach a per location cost of \$6,000, the applicant may opt to utilize alternative reliable broadband technology (coaxial DOCSIS 3.1 or higher, licensed fixed wireless) for the most costly to reach BSLs or necessary middle mile stretches that do not have service drops. Alternative technology may be used to reduce costs until the per location cost is under \$6,000, with the remaining locations connected via fiber.

Benefits of Establishing a EHCT Prior to Round 1 Applications

WSBO anticipated to reach 100% connectivity, BEAD projects will be approximately 45% end to end fiber and 55% hybrid. By establishing an EHCT prior to the first round of applications, WSBO and applicants receive multiple benefits. These include:

- Applicants have all options available when designing projects so they do not have to go through costly redesign. Without an established EHCT, all first round of applications would have to be end to end fiber builds to meet program guidelines.

- The most challenging to reach project areas in the state have viable options for connection, operations and maintenance. Without an established EHCT, these project areas most likely would not receive applications, as the cost of construction, operations and maintenance would be too high with an end to end fiber build.
- Increased accuracy of projected project costs. Without an established EHCT, applicants may underestimate the project cost in order to be awarded the project. With an EHCT, more applicants will be competing for the project area and significant underestimations will be more easily identified.
- Mitigation of costs associated with lengthy middle mile runs between areas with service drops. Without an established EHCT, the costs for many projects significantly increase due to lengthy middle mile runs. The result is a higher BEAD outlay and reduced likelihood to achieve 100% connection to all un/underserved BSLs.

Prioritization and Scoring

Once applications are reviewed to assure their completeness and adherence to BEAD requirements, awarding comes down to prioritization and scoring. Prioritization and scoring is outlined in the [Initial Proposal Volume 2](#) in sections 4.2 through 4.10 and has set standards for review and award:

- **A project area receives multiple applications for priority broadband project builds** - The published priority broadband project scoring matrix is used to objectively rate the applications. The highest scoring application becomes the apparent successful applicant. The WSBO Director may select a different apparent successful applicant if there are significant concerns about the highest rated applicant's managerial, financial, operational or technical capability.
- **A project area receives a priority broadband project application that doesn't exceed the EHCT and an application for another last-mile broadband deployment project** – The priority broadband project becomes the apparent successful applicant, as the BEAD priority is end-to-end fiber service. The WSBO Director may select a different apparent successful applicant if the priority broadband project applicant has a significantly higher Minimal BEAD Program Outlay or there are significant concerns about the highest rated applicant's managerial, financial, operational or technical capability.
- **A project area receives a priority broadband project application that exceeds the EHCT and an application for another last-mile broadband deployment project** – The applications are scored using their respective published scoring matrices. The highest score becomes the apparent successful applicant. The WSBO Director may select a different apparent successful applicant if the highest scoring applicant has a higher Minimal BEAD Program Outlay or there are significant concerns about the highest rated applicant's managerial, financial, operational or technical capability.
- **A project area receives no priority broadband project applications and multiple applications for another last-mile broadband deployment project** – The published other last-mile broadband deployment project scoring matrix is used to objectively rate the applications. The highest scoring application with the highest percentage of fiber connections becomes the apparent successful applicant. In situations where the highest scoring application does not have the highest percentage of fiber connections, selection of the apparent successful applicant is at the discretion of the WSBO Director. Additionally, the WSBO Director may select a different apparent successful applicant if there are significant concerns about the highest rated applicant's managerial, financial, operational or technical capability.