FloridaCommerce

(formerly Florida Department of Economic Opportunity)

Performance Report

Capital Projects Fund

2023 Report

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Executive Summary

The Florida Office of Broadband (Office) submitted its approved Capital Projects Fund Grant Plan electing to participate in all three (3) Capital Projects Fund Programs: 1A. Infrastructure ($247,761,206) plan approved, 1B. Digital Connectivity Technology ($13,040,063) plan pending approval, and 1C. Multi-purpose Community Facility ($86,933,757) plan approved. During this reporting period the applications and scoring criteria were developed for the Infrastructure and Multi-purpose Community Facility programs and posted to the Office website. The application window for the Broadband Infrastructure Program competitive grant opened February 28, 2023, and closed on April 21, 2023. The application window for the Multi-Purpose Community Facility Program opened July 5, 2023, and closes October 5, 2023, after 90 days. The Office has conducted approximately thirty-eight (38) in-person or virtual stakeholder meetings to identify statewide and local needs related to infrastructure and barriers to internet access to make informed decisions while reviewing submitted applications. Office staff continue to engage the Local Technology Planning Teams (LTPT) established in all sixty-seven (67) Florida counties (s. 288.9961, F.S) through in-person visits and attendance at their local meetings. Florida also coordinated the Capital Projects Fund Infrastructure Program with the Broadband Opportunity Program (s. 288.9962, F.S.) funded through the American Rescue Plan Act State Fiscal Recovery Funds ($380,000,000) to ensure no overbuild occurs and to reach as many unserved and underserved locations as possible. The Office is denying applications in Federal Committed areas (Rural Digital Opportunity Fund and Re-Connect) where federal awards have been made. With the buildout performance period for RDOF and Re-Connect six (6) to eight (8) years, the Office is concerned defaulted areas will remain unserved as there will be little time to solicit, award, and complete construction in those areas within the period of performance for both American Rescue Plan Act Funds and Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Funding under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Maps, applications, scoring criteria, program grant plans, project plans, awarded projects and general Broadband information may be found on the Office of Broadband website.

Uses of Funds

1A. Broadband Infrastructure Projects (70%): *In advance of opening the application cycle for this program the Office posted the application and scoring criteria to its website and conducted two (2) informational webinars to delineate the eligible applicants and activities associated with the Program. The competitive grant application cycle for the Infrastructure Program opened February 28, 2023, and closed April 21, 2023. A total of 170 applications were received for the program, totaling $772,367,702 in requested funding. Application information (location, amount requested) and associated service area maps were posted to the Broadband Office website for public viewing and the Office conducted an open comment period from April 7, 2023, through April 28, 2023, to allow existing service providers and Florida residents to provide comments related to the applications. Internet Service Providers notified the Office where applications overlapped their existing or planned service areas to eliminate overbuilding specific locations and citizens provided input to identify areas not covered. Upon completion of the review, scoring and ranking process, the Office awarded 63 projects totaling $247,503,055 that will provide high-speed, reliable internet to 59,090 locations including 53,158 homes, 4,472 businesses, 1,303 farms and 157 community anchor institutions exceeding the initial estimate of 48,400 locations provided in our Program Plan by 22%. All awarded projects have been screened to ensure they met the Program criteria of directly enabling work, education and telehealth as well as identifying a critical need discovered or exacerbated by the pandemic. Remaining funds allocated to this program ($258,151.00) will be utilized to encourage expansion in areas where the original project omitted some unserved outlying areas with any remaining*

funds being reallocated to the other two programs. Agreements for these projects are being drafted and are anticipated to be fully executed by August 31, 2023. Based upon review of the awarded applications all projects will be completed by February 2026, well in advance of the Award closing date of December 31, 2026.

- *Activities Implemented: Application cycle opened February 28, 2023, and closed April 21, 2023. Of the 170 grant requests received totaling $772,367,702 in funding, 63 projects were awarded totaling $247,503,055 which will serve 59,090 locations exceeding the estimated 48,400 locations submitted in our Plan by 22%.*
- *Planned Activities: Execute agreements with the 63 Awardees by August 31, 2023. Grant managers will conduct bi-weekly communications with award recipients to ensure projects are progressing in a timely manner, identify potential risks early to enable corrective action, and provide technical assistance where warranted. The Office has retained a reputable contractor to perform monitoring and compliance oversight. The Office is using the modified guidance provided by Treasury and will use Fixed Price Subrecipient awards. Through our contracted partners, we will be able to review project costs for reasonableness and have limited the eligible activities to those related to the construction portion of the project.*
- *Data Collection: Reporting elements required under the Treasury guidelines were incorporated into the Agreements and Awardees will be required to report the information in the on-line portal used to track project accomplishments and disbursements.*
- *Notable Challenges: The only challenge noted thus far is obtaining the Fabric ID for each of the premises included in our projects. Some of the Awardees have not yet received the necessary license from CostQuest to obtain that information, but the Office has been told the licenses will be forthcoming. As there are no executed agreements, reporting won't be an issue.*
- *Ancillary Costs: Office staff salary, creation of the Grant and Program Plans, application intake, review, scoring and ranking of applications, and performance of Pre-Award risk assessments. Licenses for mapping tools such as ArcGIS Enterprise and On-Line mapping were procured, and the Office has compiled a series of internal maps to inform decisions on unserved and underserved locations. A public-facing map has been created and posted to the Office website to identify existing federal commitments (RDOF, Re-Connect) and recent Office Program awards have been approved to dissuade potential applicants from applying for funding in these areas.*

1B. Digital Connectivity Technology Projects (5%): *The Office continues the question and response phase of this program with Treasury and program has not yet been approved.*

1C. Multi-purpose Community Facility Projects (25%): *The application and scoring criteria for this Program has been completed and posted to the Office website. There has been significant interest in this program, particularly in low-income and rural communities as it will provide access to telehealth, enable work and education for those who will now have access to high-speed, reliable internet but cannot afford the cost even with the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), in which all subrecipients are required to participate, due to ancillary costs associated with initial connection. While our program allows for new construction, the Office is encouraging rehabilitation of existing facilities as new construction takes a considerable amount of time to satisfy environmental review, permitting, and engineering design leaving little time for the actual construction. The application cycle opened for this Program on July 5, 2023, and will remain open for ninety (90) days, through October 5, 2023. Two (2) technical assistance webinars are*

scheduled within three (3) to four (4) weeks of application cycle opening to reiterate eligibility and activity requirements. Grant and Program Plans for all Capital Projects Fund activities have been posted to the Office website since approval of the Grant Plan so the public at large and potential applicants have had access to the requirements for quite some time.

- *__Activities implemented:__ The Office has posted the program guidelines, the application, and the scoring criteria to the office website for applicant review. The application portal opened on July 5, 2023, and will remain open for ninety (90) days, until October 5, 2023. As of June 30, 2023, the application window had not begun, and no applications had been received.*
- *__Planned Activities:__ Open the on-line Application Portal July 5, 2023, and it will remain open for a period of ninety (90) days until October 5, 2023. The Office will conduct two (2) statewide technical assistance webinars to address the eligibility questions and provide responses to the general public and potential applicants. The first webinar will be July 25, 2023, and the second webinar will be held August 16, 2023.*
- *__Individuals and Households Benefitting__: No data available yet.*
- *__Notable challenges:__ No challenges identified to date.*
- *__Overview and outcomes of ancillary costs:__ Ancillary costs include Office staff to manage the program, contractors to create the draft application and scoring criteria to be reviewed and approved by the Office, and contractor to design and deploy the on-line application portal through which the applications will be submitted. Future ancillary costs will include Office staff to manage the program, contractors to review and preliminarily score the applications, contractor to perform monitoring and compliance functions, and contractor to maintain the on-line portal and associated records.*

Florida dedicated $380M in State Fiscal Recovery funds from the American Rescue Plan Act to implement expanded high-speed, reliable, affordable Broadband Internet to unserved areas in compliance with s. 288.9962, F.S. The initial competitive solicitation for applications funded under this program opened November 2022 and resulted in 110 applications with 85 projects awarded totaling $226,681,452. These projects will lead to a potential 9,469 homes, 8,422 businesses, 831 farms and 157 community anchor institutions being connected in 53 Florida counties through 16,496 miles of newly deployed fiber optic cable and 1,894 square miles of fixed wireless service. A second application solicitation for this program opened April 28, 2023, and is set to close July 21, 2023, to award the remaining program funds. The Office has dedicated significant man-hours to developing GIS mapping to provide applicants with a public facing GIS map identifying service areas for which applications to deploy Broadband will not be accepted as those areas have been awarded federal or state funding for broadband infrastructure deployment.

Promoting Broadband Access to Unserved and Underserved Communities

The Office seeks to always reach out with urgency to unserved and underserved communities, and the Broadband website is capable of translating all content to Spanish and Haitian Creole. During the community engagements noted above, particularly where it involved organizations representing underrepresented populations, the Office encouraged those organizations to actively disseminate potential broadband activities to their constituencies. Through emphasis in the scoring criteria placed on serving rural communities, 52% of the initial round of awards for the Broadband Opportunity Program will benefit Florida's Rural Areas of Opportunity. Through funding available under the various programs such as the Capital Projects Fund, Broadband Opportunity Program and Broadband, Equity Access, and

Deployment (BEAD), the Office intends to serve all citizens of the State following the guidance put forth by the U.S. Treasury and *Executive Order 13985, as issued on January 20, 2021 (EO 13985)*.

a) **Objectives:** *All Florida Programs set an overall goal of providing access to high-speed, reliable, affordable Broadband Internet access to all Floridians with a priority on serving rural and low-income areas.*

b) **Awareness:** *The Office provided news releases about the available programs through the Executive Office of the Governor and information posted to the Office website. Through conversations with Florida's Internet Service Providers, the Office encouraged their support in advertising these activities and most posted multiple language notice on their websites as well as advertising the Affordable Connectivity Program.*

c) **Outcomes:** *The Office continues to strive to make affordable, high-speed, reliable broadband Internet available to every citizen in the State. Progress will be gauged through ongoing communications with the Local Technology Planning Teams, Community Anchor Institutions and Community Organizations to expand existing awards into unserved areas beyond the scope of the original award.*

Labor

There are no projects in place as agreements are in the drafting process, however, agreements include the requirements of Treasury guidance related to the workforce.

Community Engagement

*The Office of Broadband's primary community engagement method has been through collaboration with the state's (67) **Local Technology Planning Teams (LTPTs)**, one for each county. Florida Commerce has taken an active community engagement approach and has at least one staff member present at the overwhelming majority of these community meetings, including dozens of in-person facilitations and technical assistance visits. These meetings represent a way for communities to express their communities' needs and plans to FloridaCommerce, as well as to give feedback about the Office's programs. It also ensures that communities can provide specific, community-level suggestions about project areas to service providers, who also attend the large majority of these LTPT meetings.*

Additionally, the Office holds a monthly virtual meeting with leaders from all LTPT's across the state. This monthly meeting is always well-attended and is another forum for team leads to engage with the Office about its programs, and to seek technical guidance. The Office has also held informational webinars about each of its Capital Projects Fund Programs and daily answers questions about the scope of the programs and eligible uses of the funds. Finally, the Office's Capital Projects fund application itself is a valuable source for documenting community input and feedback on proposed projects. The application requires proof of both community support, best evidenced by LTPT support letters and meeting minutes in order to receive all possible points in the scoring and review process.

A significant amount of the specific community-level engagement comes from the LTPTs themselves. These teams are comprised of local community members, local government officials, and leaders in various areas of the community as prescribed in s. 288.9961 of the Florida Statutes. This allows for a truly local perspective and empowers team members to influence the direction of the community initiatives and priorities.

Although the programmatic activities of the Office of Broadband for the CPF are for the benefit of all Floridians, the Office ensures that it conducts outreach including traditionally unserved populations, persons with disabilities, rural community members and others outlined in the CPF program guidance. The Office has conducted technical assistance calls and meetings with organizations in every county, collecting data and educating these community representatives on all aspects of broadband delivery and adoption. The Office continues to give presentations at both local and statewide association conferences and meetings, ensuring that it reaches as many community stakeholders as possible. Stakeholders the Office has conducted outreach to include, but are not limited to:

- *The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)*
- *The Hispanic Federation of Florida*
- *Florida Telecommunications Relay, Inc.*
- *The Seminole Tribe of Florida*
- *The Miccosukee Tribe of Florida*
- *Seniors on a Mission*
- *The Florida Association of Counties*
- *The Florida League of Cities*
- *Opportunity Florida*
- *The North Florida Economic Development Partnership*
- *Florida's Heartland Region of Opportunity*
- *The Florida Regional Councils Association*
- *The Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI)*
- *Communications Workers of America*
- *The Learning Alliance*

*The Office has been in contact with more than 500 stakeholders since the beginning of the CPF award. This number will continue to grow as new programs including the **Multipurpose Community Facilities** and **Digital Connectivity Programs** are rolled out.*