

CAPITAL PROJECTS FUND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Internet connectivity has become foundational for most activities of modern life; however, many Floridians still lack internet access, or access to internet services, at speeds adequate to conduct remote learning, telehealth appointments, and work from home. This lack of adequate internet access is particularly acute in the rural areas of the state.

OBJECTIVES

The Florida Office of Broadband (Office), housed within the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), intends to use funds from the Capital Projects Fund (CPF) to deploy broadband Internet infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas throughout the state, prioritizing rural areas. Florida's legislature has designated 32 counties as rural, defined in section 288.0656(2)(e), Florida Statutes, as a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer. Twenty-nine of these counties are organized into three Rural Areas of Opportunity (RAO). Rural counties are among the least served areas of the state and have among the lowest per capita personal incomes in the state.

This Grant Plan addresses each of the Capital Projects categories outlined in the guidance. The Office will also use guidance provided in the Florida Strategic Plan for Broadband to identify partnerships, adoption and use goals, and accountability of the projects. The Office will accept applications from local governments, non-profits, or private entities, and award grants based on the allocations shown below.

ALLOCATIONS

Total Allocation	\$ 366,036,869
Administration 5%	\$ 18,301,843
Available for Subrecipient awards	\$ 347,735,026
• 1A-Broadband Infrastructure Projects (70%)	\$ 247,761,206
• 1B-Digital Connectivity Technology Projects (5%)	\$ 13,040,063
• 1C-Multi-Purpose Community Facility Projects (25%)	\$ 86,933,757

PROGRAM PLANS

Broadband Infrastructure Projects will prioritize broadband infrastructure deployment in areas where broadband internet service is not currently available from a terrestrial provider. In areas with internet service at advertised speeds below the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) definition of broadband, the Office will prioritize deployments at scalable speeds of 100 Mbps downstream and upstream. These areas can be identified through current FCC Form 477 data and supplemented by local area speed tests and crowd sourced mapping. Awards will be prioritized by the number of homes and businesses that will be served by the new infrastructure. In the 29 RAO counties, more than 29% of households access the internet with no subscription or have no internet access.

The Office will give priority to Broadband Infrastructure Projects where networks will be owned, operated, or affiliated with local governments, non-profit organizations, and co-operatives. These entities will make their networks available to any service provider who requests access, as long as such access is on a non-discriminatory basis and service is made available to anyone receiving service over

the CPF funded network. Where feasible, the Office will encourage fiber-optic networks deployed directly to the home or business. Other technologies capable of delivering service at the levels mentioned in U.S. Treasury guidance may be deployed where fiber-optic networks are not economically feasible, or other environmental factors make fiber deployment impractical. Internet service providers (ISPs) will be required to offer low-cost plans at speeds no less than the minimum speeds required in treasury guidance. ISPs will also be required to participate in Federal broadband assistance programs including the Affordable Connectivity Plan currently offered by the FCC and any successor plan designated by U.S. Treasury.

The second program will make funding available for **Digital Connectivity Technology Projects**. Areas eligible for these projects may be based on areas having incomes below the state average. Individual household eligibility may be based on participation in Federal income assistance programs, such as free or reduced school lunch, supplemental security income, social security disability income, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and other public assistance programs. The U.S. Treasury defines digital connectivity projects as covering the purchase or installation of devices and equipment. Based on surveys, workshop feedback, and information gathered by the Local Technology Planning Teams (LTPTs), the gap in access is partially related to the availability of electronic devices. Proposals for broadband connectivity to students and other populations will address methods to deliver services through devices and equipment available in public facilities. These projects will make computers and tablets available to qualifying households through a long-term loan program administered by local entities. Such entities may include libraries and other community anchor institutions. Subrecipients will maintain ownership of the devices throughout the term of the loan. Qualifying households will also be eligible to borrow equipment, such as routers, needed to access the internet. The Office will develop a monitoring plan to ensure that households with no computers are prioritized over those receiving laptops from school districts and other programs.

For the third program, the Office will use funding to build and improve **Multi-Purpose Community Facility (MPCF) Projects**. Priority will be given to areas of the state with low to moderate incomes as identified by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) data. The highest priority will be given to areas with no or inadequate community facilities. Communities will be encouraged to submit plans that include spaces for community recreational activities and other services. Monitoring plans will be developed to ensure that communities requesting funding for MPCF Projects are not receiving funding from other programs funding similar projects in the community.

IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY NEEDS

The Office considered factors such as location, population density, socioeconomic factors, and population demographics, including low to moderate income families, when seeking input from communities across Florida. Discussions were held with stakeholders about needs, expectations, and opinions regarding broadband access. The Office used the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) Form 477 data, speed test data from the Florida Broadband Availability Map, the Faster Florida Broadband Map, regional workshops, and LTPTs to identify critical needs within the state.

The LTPTs established under Section 288.9961(4)(b), Florida Statutes, will play a leading role in identifying and prioritizing the critical needs of their respective communities. These teams are composed of stakeholders from various sectors of the community who are familiar with their community's needs and capabilities. This will be particularly important in identifying communities that do not have access to reliable broadband internet services to enable remote learning, working, and telehealth services and identifying facilities that can be upgraded under the Multi-Purpose Community Facility Projects.