

Support for the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program to Expand High-Speed Internet Infrastructure and Access Nationwide

Issue: Millions of Americans still lack access to reliable, high-speed internet, limiting their ability to participate in the digital economy and access critical services.

Proposed Policy: NACo urges continued federal support and timely implementation of the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program to expand broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas. NACo supports robust county engagement in BEAD planning and implementation processes and encourages coordination with local governments to ensure funds address community-specific needs. NACo also calls on federal and state agencies to prioritize affordability, technological flexibility, and future-proof solutions in the allocation and deployment of BEAD resources.

Background: Reliable, high-speed internet access is essential for economic opportunity, educational advancement, healthcare delivery, and civic participation. Yet, millions of residents—particularly in rural, low-income, and tribal communities—still lack adequate broadband service. The BEAD Program, established by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), is the largest broadband infrastructure investment in U.S. history, allocating \$42.45 billion to expand broadband access and adoption.

Under BEAD, each state receives funding to close the digital access gap by deploying infrastructure to unserved (less than 25/3 Mbps) and underserved (less than 100/20 Mbps) locations. Counties play a vital role in identifying coverage gaps, engaging communities, and ensuring that local voices are reflected in state broadband plans. Many counties also provide complementary services—such as digital literacy training and device distribution—that are necessary to realize the full benefits of internet connectivity.

For the BEAD program to succeed, implementation must include coordination with local governments, broadband providers, and anchor institutions. Flexibility in technology deployment, including scalable fiber solutions and fixed wireless where appropriate, will help meet both current and future needs.

Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact: The BEAD program provides transformative opportunities for counties of all sizes to close the broadband availability gap, especially in rural and underserved areas. Investments will drive economic development, support remote education and telehealth, and strengthen local infrastructure and resilience. It will also ensure that broadband deployment decisions are made with direct local input.

Sponsor: Board Member Jennifer Clark, Lake County, Illinois