

MINUTES

Broadband Development Office Board of Advisors Meeting

April 18, 2023

The Broadband Development Office Board of Advisors (BDOBOA) meeting was held virtually and in person. Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. via Cisco WebEx on April 18, 2023.

Members Present:

Comptroller Glenn Hegar

Alonzo Cantu

Sergio Contreras

Robert McGee

Dr. Scott Muri

Mari Robinson

Members Not Present:

Adriana Cruz

Rep. Trent Ashby

The BDOBOA proceeded on the posted agenda items in the order as follows:

Agenda Item I: Call to Order and Roll Call.

Comptroller Hegar called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

Margeaux Mallick, from the Comptroller's Legislative Affairs team, called each member's name.

Many members were not present Comptroller Glenn Hegar paused proceedings until more members were able to join in order to reach a quorum. Dr. Scott Muri joined at 2:06

Agenda Item II: Adoption of Minutes from Feb. 7, 2023, meeting of BDOBOA.

Hegar moved to approve the minutes from the BDOBOA meeting on Feb. 7, 2023. Minutes were approved.

Agenda Item III: Update from the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) pertaining to its ongoing and future broadband initiatives.

Hegar introduced Henry Stokes and Gloria Meraz as representatives for TSLAC. After some technical difficulties, the presenters were able to begin.

Stokes shared TSLAC's vision and gave updates regarding their E-Rate application support program. Results show that there has been an increased bandwidth and lower cost for internet service in public libraries in Texas.

Texas public library speed test procedures and outcomes were presented. Tests confirm that an increasing number of public libraries are meeting the Federal Communications Commission's standards for high-speed internet. This data is used to inform programs and services.

Stokes also informed the board of the partnerships formed with 11 rural and suburban San Antonio public libraries.

Meraz then presented updates on the Ploud library website program and details about the Ploud library website program, TSLAC CARES, and Community Advancement Packages (CAP).

Meraz discussed TSLAC's comprehensive digital literacy study and the recommended action areas from the study.

TSLAC also offers space and resources for individuals to participate in telehealth using funds from the Telehealth Grant. Ten libraries from across the state are using the Digital Navigators Grant to identify and assist members of their community that need assistance with devices, connectivity, and digital skills. Meraz also shared various digital skills training programs available to libraries statewide. A digital literacy toolkit was also created in partnership with the Texas Workforce Commission and the Texas Center for Literacy and Lifelong Learning.

The presentation concluded with discussion of workforce development partnerships and the resulting benefits.

Sergio Contreras asked if these programs funded with current grants. He also questioned how the Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) funds be used. Meraz explained that some programs are funded through current grant programs.

Alonzo Cantu asked that Meraz to contact him to discuss the use of funds in his area.

Agenda Item IV: Update from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) pertaining to its ongoing and future broadband initiatives.

Hegar introduced Gaby Rowe and Julia Schacherl as representatives for TEA.

Rowe discussed the background of connectivity in education during the pandemic and the details of Operation Connectivity (OC). The goal of OC is to ensure all students in the state have a device and connectivity in their homes. Rowe then reviewed statistics on device and connectivity of students in Texas during the pandemic. She shared the results of the three phases of OC. 1) Bulk Purchas immediately connected students with devices and hotspots. 2) Medium-Term TEA Connect TX (TEACT) connected students to reliable and affordable internet

within the existing structure. 3) Long-Term broadband infrastructure development to close the remaining gap. Contreras asked about funding in the Dallas area. Rowe was able to describe that funding briefly.

Rowe then shared statistics and data that illustrated the impact of the first 2 phases of OC. Enough devices were distributed to provide 1:1 device access to all economically disadvantaged students across the state. To date, 111,412 lines have been ordered by Local Education Agencies (LEAs), totaling \$26,498,443 and 19,365 households have signed up for services.

Schacherl then discussed lessons learned from the first 2 phases of OC.

ACP launched at the same time as OC. Many families chose that program over OC. OC was more restrictive than ACP. LEAs were interested in the program and purchased many lines based on the mapping. LEAs were frustrated with map discrepancies, and LEAs could only serve areas that already had service.

The presentation was concluded with a discussion of plans to use BEAD funding to complete phase three of OC and the barriers to that plan.

There were no questions.

Greg Conte asked Muri to give some local perspective. Muri emphasized that the educational opportunity offered doesn't mean families will embrace the programs. Helping families understand the educational opportunity without fear of bringing it into their homes should be the goal. He also discussed how critical accurate data is in expanding broadband.

Agenda Item V: Update from the BDO on activities related to:

Infrastructure, Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Capital Projects Fund (CPF)

Other program developments.

Hegar introduced Conte to share updates from BDO.

Conte began his discussion with an update on BEAD and DE activities. BDO is in the planning phase and is using the \$5 million initial planning funds granted. The Texas allotment of funds will be announced on June 30 this year. The five-year action plan is due August 28, and the State Digital Opportunity Plan is due at the end of December. Conte then reviewed, from a high level, the public engagement model, including a Statewide Working Group, 12 Regional Working Groups and six outcome-specific Task Forces.

Conte also informed the board that NTIA had issued a request for comment on the DE Act's Capacity and Competitive Program.

Conte then reviewed the status of the five programs included in the proposal to use American Rescue Plan Act funds.

Texas received \$363.8 million for last-mile connectivity programs. The Notice of Funding Available was published on March 6. BDO is accepting applications from April 3 to May 5. Conte stated that this is an active solicitation, so he cannot share any other details or answer questions. He instead referred to the question period that was provided. Responses are posted in ESBID.

There was some discussion surrounding map challenges. The challenges were posted, and affected parties were notified on March 30. Affected parties have until May 15 to respond to challenges, and BDO will then decide on reclassification. Contreras requested a status update on House Bill 2662? David Zimmerman advised that we can't get into deep conversation about the legislation. Conte let him know that a leg tracker was sent. Hegar suggested adding a discussion of legislation to the agenda for the next board meeting in June.

Muri asked about the relationship between Bringing Online Opportunities to Texas (BOOT) and BEAD? Conte informed him that they are separate programs and then emphasized that areas that receive BOOT funds will not be eligible to receive BEAD funding.

Muri asked about Texas' allocation of BEAD funding. Castillo informed Muri that the allocation is expected to be \$2 to \$4 billion. The allocation will be announced on June 30.

Robert McGee asked about the Connect America Fund (CAF) and BOOT relationship specifically, if the census lines be the same in both areas. Conte informed McGee that BEAD is more granular. It's on a location basis not an area. Castillo asked to be given some time to look into answering the question appropriately because this is an open solicitation.

Muri asked about the \$5 million in initial planning funds and about how communities going to be equipped to fill out these grant applications. Conte informed Muri that the BDO is looking at other federal funds to support these programs.

Agenda Item VI: Update from Connected Nation on IJJA planning deliverables.

Hegar Introduce Chris Pedersen from Connected Nation.

Pedersen began his presentation by summarizing the key deliverables prescribed under IJJA. The five-year action plan establishes broadband goals and priorities and provides a high-level plan for connectivity throughout the state. The digital opportunity plan identifies barriers, creates an inventory of assets for advancing digital inclusion and establishes implementation strategies for addressing gaps. The initial and final proposals propose executable broadband grand programs and provide a plan for compliance monitoring.

Pedersen then described the three surveys developed to gather feedback and tap into existing assets within the state. There is a public survey, an asset mapping survey for organizations

working in the broadband arena, and a survey explicitly developed for internet service providers. Pedersen then reviewed the public engagement plan introduced earlier in the meeting by Conte. He then offered a timeline of planned events and deadlines for key deliverables.

Robinson asked if board members were able to serve on task forces. Mr. Pedersen informed Robinson that participation is welcomed, and a contact form is available. Castillo agreed to provide the contact form to all board members.

Muri asked what the success criteria to make sure that we stay on target are. He wanted to know where in the five-year plan the metrics would be for the public to ensure we are staying on track. Pedersen assured Muri that success criteria are being developed into the plan.

Scott Muri asked if documents with details on the project management could be provided. Pedersen agreed to provide those documents.

Muri asked how interested parties can get more information. Conte referred Muri to the BDO website BroadbandForTexas.com.

Agenda Item VII: Discussion on topics and dates of future BDOBOA meetings.

Hagar outlined next meeting date. He asked the BDOBOA if anyone had ideas for agenda items for the next meeting.

Hegar suggested adding a legislative update.

Agenda Item VIII: Public comment.

Hegar opened the meeting up for public comment.

Peter Jones, County Commissioner in Llano County, discussed BOOT eligibility requirements. He wants to know if the eligibility requirements under BOOT will be the same for BEAD and DEA Funding.

Jennifer Harris gave updates from NTIA. The NTIA issued an RFC for Capacity and Competitive Grants, and the comment period closes on May 1. Two more public listening sessions will be held regarding cyber security, and June 30 is when the NTIA will announce the BEAD allocation for Texas.

Agenda Item IX: Adjournment

Hegar called the meeting to close at 3:22 p.m.