Bridging the Digital Divide in Texas

Texas Broadband Development Office (BDO)

Day 3 – December 4th
Track Rm 2, Session 1
1:30PM – 2:15PM

Presenter: Lauren Weber

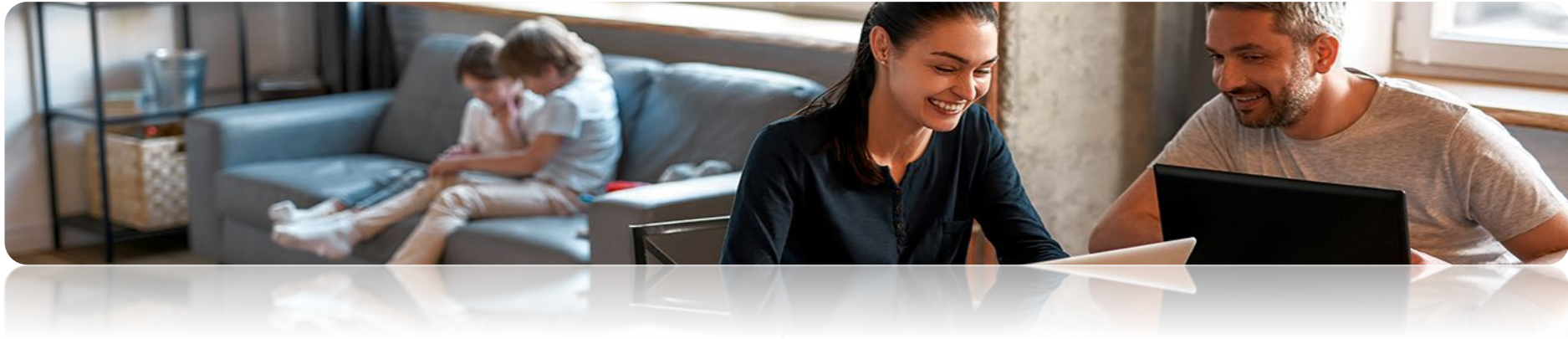# Presenter: Andrea Pacheco

Broadband Impact

- Education
- Telework
- Accessibility
- Public safety
- Access to online markets

- Economic development
- Government services
- Uban revitalization
- Environmental sustainability
- Entertainment

Digital Divide in Texas

- Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently updated their definition of broadband.
- Speed benchmark went from 25 megabits per second (Mbps) for download and 3 Mbps for upload to 100/20 Mbps.

- According to the latest version of the FCC's National Broadband Map, Texas has:
  - 10,117,484 total locations.
  - 383,465 unserved locations.
  - 149,709 underserved locations.

Digital Divide in Texas

Barriers	
Lack of infrastructure	Lack of digital literacy skills
Affordability	Lack of technical support
Access to devices	Perception

House Bill 5 (87R)

- Created the Broadband Development Office (BDO) at the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts in 2021.
- Required the BDO to:
  - Create a state broadband plan (June 2022).
  - Create a broadband development map (January 2023).
    - Latest version published June 2024
  - Implement a program to administer broadband expansion grants
  - Serve as an information clearinghouse for state & federal funding opportunities in Texas.
- Created the BDO Board of Advisors
  - Chaired by Comptroller Glenn Hegar with eight appointed members

Funding Streams

- State General Revenue
  - Broadband Infrastructure Fund (BIF)
  - $1.5 billion
  - Support projects that expand and ensure access to reliable, high-speed broadband
- American Rescue Plan Act
  - Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund (CPF)
  - $500.5 million
  - For capital broadband projects

Funding Streams

- Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)
  - Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program
    - $3.3 billion
    - Support state-administered broadband infrastructure initiatives
  - State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program
    - $55.5 million
    - Support programs designed to ensure information technology capacity needed for participation in society
    - Additional funding is expected but has not yet been announced by NTIA.

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Technical Assistance Program (TAP)

- Empowering Texas counties through no-cost broadband planning support.
- $7 million in CPF funds
- Thirty-two counties were awarded support.

Technical Assistance Program (TAP)

Counties Receiving TAP Services			
Bastrop	Ector	Llano	San Augustine
Blanco	El Paso	Matagorda	Scurry
Brewster	Grayson	Menard	Shelby
Brooks	Grimes	Nacogdoches	Starr
Burnet	Hudspeth	Polk	Trinity
Caldwell	Jeff Davis	Presidio	Tyler
Callahan	Kinney	Reeves	Washington
Culberson	Leon	Refugio	Willacy

Bringing Online Opportunities to Texas (BOOT) Program

- Texas' first competitive broadband grant program aimed at funding infrastructure projects that bring broadband access to end users in eligible areas of the state.
- Awardees were notified June 3, 2024.
- $11.4 million in CPF funds to connect:
    - 1,471 residential locations
    - 92 businesses
    - 15 community anchor institutions

BOOT II Program

- Purpose is to support broadband infrastructure projects that bring high-speed, reliable internet service directly to eligible locations within 24 selected counties.
- Uses both state and federal funds (CPF) totaling $729.9 million
- Potential to connect over 95,000 locations
- [BOOT II Notice of Fundin Availability (NOFA](#)) published on July 11, 2024
- First tranche of awardees notified on Nov. 18, 2024
- Second trance of awardees will be notified in the coming weeks

Texas Broadband Pole Replacement Program

- The purpose is to provide reimbursement to eligible pole owners and broadband service providers for expenses related to replacing poles in rural areas.
- $75 million in BIF funds
- Pole Replacement NOFA published on July 29, 2024.
- Accepted applications until Sept. 10, 2024.
- Awarded $18.5 million in reimbursement requests
- Second NOFA published Nov. 4, 2024
- Applications to be accepted January 6 – 10, 2025
  - $56.5 million remaining balance

Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program

- Administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).
  - BEAD Program
    - Close the availability gap
    - Nationwide investment of $42.5 billion
    - Every state and territory received an allocation
    - Texas's Allocation: $3.3 billion.
    - Required to connect every unserved and underserved location in the state
    - Fiber preference

Broadband Infrastructure Fund (BIF)

- Much of the BIF will be dedicated to providing support to BEAD applicants with the 25 percent match requirement.
- The BDO is considering other allowable uses for the remaining BIF funds to include:
  - Connecting locations that may not be covered by the BEAD program, such as community anchor institutions (CAIs) and multi-dwelling units (MDUs).
  - Establishing a Texas Middle Mile program
  - Developing digital opportunity pilot programs
  - Support new and existing workforce development programs

State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program (SDECGP)

- The BDO received approval on its SDECGP application on November 21, 2024.

- The BDO was allocated $55.5 million to support implementation of the Texas Digital Opportunity Plan (TDOP) and make competitive subawards.

- The approved application lists three activities to support implementation:

  - Establish a Digital Opportunity Grant Program

  - Grow and Sustain a Digital Opportunity Ecosystem

  - Maintain a Living Digital Opportunity Plan

- States have nine months from award date to identify subgrantees for SDECG funds. The period of performance lasts five years from award date.

- The BDO expects to share more on the subgrant opportunity in 2025.

TDOP: Covered Populations

Federal legislation requires prioritizing improving outcomes for covered populations.
85.6% of Texans belong to a covered population.

Covered Population Group	Share of Texas Population
Members of a racial or ethnic minority group (racial or ethnic minorities)[1]	58%
Individuals in households below 150% poverty (low-income households)[1]	23%
Individuals residing in rural areas (rural residents)[2]	22%
Persons who are 60 years of age or older (aging individuals) [1]	18%
Individuals with disabilities[1]	11%
Individuals with limited English proficiency (Individuals who speak English less than "very well" or have low levels of literacy)[2]	27%
Veterans[1]	5%
Incarcerated individuals[2]	1%

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TDOP: Goals

Category	Goal
Broadband Availability and Affordability	• All Texans have access to reliable, affordable internet service at home.
Device Availability, Affordability and Technical Support	• All Texans have access to affordable internet-enabled devices in their home, with corresponding technical support services.
Digital Literacy	• All Texans have a broad foundation of digital literacy skills and access to a continuum of digital skills development programs.
Online Privacy and Cybersecurity	• All Texans feel safe online and are familiar with cybersecurity and online privacy measures.
Online Accessibility and Inclusivity of Public Resources	• All Texans can utilize the internet for public resources and services.

TDOP: Outcome Areas

Education Access and Advancement	• Texas will have access to a higher quality education through online learning opportunities.
Health Improvement	• Widespread broadband adoption will result in improved personal and community health across Texas.
Accessibility of Essential Services	• Texans will have greater access to resources and tools that ensure effective use of public resources.
Civic and Social Engagement	• Texans will be more connected to one another, their communities and their government with improved tools to participate in civic processes.
Economic and Workforce Development	• The Texas economy will grow stronger and more resilient through a more skilled workforce.

Multi-Dwelling Units (MDUs)

- The BDO seeks to address the broadband infrastructure and digital opportunity needs of Texans living in MDUs.

- BDO released a Request for Information (RFI) to gather feedback from knowledgeable entities on the landscape of broadband availability in MDUs.
    - 51 responses were collected from Oct. 1-22, 2024.

- The BDO is reviewing RFI responses and will use that information to inform a possible future grant program.

- The office anticipates sharing findings at a future monthly roundtable.

Workforce Development

- The BDO is focused on strengthening ties with the telecommunications industry in effort to address any potential workforce deficits due to historic infrastructure buildout.
- The office recently published a workforce development webpage serving as an informational resource.
- The page highlights broadband workforce complications and job opportunities.
- The office is currently exploring opportunities and determining the best avenues for support.

Points of Engagement and Resources

- [Industry Roundtables](#) – hosted virtually on the last Tuesday of every month at 3 p.m. CST.
- Monthly newsletter and announcements
  - [Sign up](#)
- [BroadbandForTexas.com](#)
- [DigitalOpportunityForTexas.com](#)

Questions

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