

Montana State Library Funding Guide - 2022

Broadband

Overview

The passage of “The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)” and the “Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA),” has resulted in significant funding to improve rural broadband access and to expand digital inclusion programs. Montana Senate Bill 297 allocated ARPA money to broadband projects located in unserved or underserved areas. The Montana Department of Administration (DOA) is distributing these funds under the ConnectMT program. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration, (NTIA) has received IIJA funds to establish multiple programs addressing broadband and digital equity needs. This funding guide provides an overview of these programs and their potential benefit to libraries.

ConnectMT Grant

Description:

The State of Montana has received \$275 million of ARPA funds that will be allocated via competitive grant awards. Applicants must provide a match of at least 20% of the proposed projects cost and must also commit to deploying enhanced and improved internet communications in Montana. Eligible applicants for this program include an incorporated business or partnership, a political subdivision, an Indian tribe, a Montana nonprofit organization, a limited liability company, an incorporation, or a cooperative entity that is organized for the purpose of expanding broadband access. Libraries are not eligible to receive funds but can coordinate with eligible entities to provide upgraded broadband services to libraries as part of the grant application.

Broadband development projects must be located in unserved or underserved. (For definition and map, see <https://connectmt.mt.gov/>) Eligible costs must be associated with the acquisition and installation of infrastructure related to implementation of the “middle mile” and/or the “last mile” infrastructure that can support broadband service scalable to speeds of at least 100 Mbps download and 100 Mbps upload.

Applications must indicate the number of community anchor institutions that will be served by the improvements. “Anchors” includes **libraries**, township/city halls, fire and police stations, county buildings, state facilities, public safety locations, hospitals, medical office buildings, rural health clinics, nursing homes, and educational institutions. Libraries should contact service providers to provide information on the importance of including libraries in broadband adoption. (*See links for information on broadband adoption to share with providers.*) As noted below, applications serving anchors will be more competitive.

Applications will be ranked according to criteria established by the Connect MT Communications Advisory Commission. Some proposed scoring criteria relevant to libraries include:

- Percent of tribal/local government/school district funds contributed as total of eligible costs
- Number of new customers passed vs. currently served locations - including households, businesses, farms, & community anchor institutions.
- Free public access offered at community center for broadband service for 3 years (*A community center could be located at library.*)
- Evidence of Community Support - Examples include letters of support describing the need for broadband improvements. (*Library may want to submit letter of support if the library is included as part of the funding application.*)

Timeframe - Next Steps:

Estimated application period opens on January 26, 2022. Submission deadline is March 28, 2022.

STEP 1: Monitor ConnectMT website for map of unserved areas. Contact service provider to determine if they are submitting an application.

STEP 2: Convene meeting with community anchor institutions and broadband service providers to discuss potential application and importance of libraries and broadband adoption.

STEP 3: Assess library's broadband needs & work with provider/applicant to include broadband service to library as part of grant submittal.

STEP 4: Submit plans & cost estimates for public access computers if library is interested in housing a "community center" space.

STEP 5: Letter of Support. If applicable letter should state commitment of local government, libraries or schools to provide matching funds.

Note: Montana State Library previously contracted with a tech firm to conduct technology assessments for all public and branch libraries in Montana. This assessment has been used by libraries to upgrade their equipment and cabling to take advantage of faster speeds. This assessment may provide useful information for the ConnectMT grant. Some libraries may want to complete a new assessment to reflect current upgrades.

Digital Equity Act

Description:

NTIA has established [six broadband programs](#) to distribute funds from the IIJA. The largest of these programs is the “Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program.” The BEAD Program provides \$42.45 billion, to be distributed among states to support broadband planning and related capacity efforts, from mapping, staffing state/territory broadband offices, to outreach and coordination with local communities. Funds will be released after the FCC completes mapping of broadband availability. States and territories will then propose projects that meet the following statutory priorities: provide broadband to unserved areas (those below 25/3 Mbps), underserved areas (those below 100/20 Mbps), and community anchor institutions (1/1 Gbps). Libraries are community anchor institutions.

Additionally, libraries will be able to directly apply for funds under the Digital Equity Act Competitive Grant Program. Eligible applicants include local governments, nonprofits, and community anchor institutions. This program is appropriated for \$1.25 billion over five years to promote digital inclusion and equity. Examples of projects include:

- Training programs that cover basic and advanced digital skills
- Workforce development programs
- Free or low-cost equipment provided to covered populations
- Constructing, upgrading, or expanding public access computing centers

A Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFA) is anticipated in the spring of 2022. To prepare for this funding opportunity, libraries should begin planning for digital inclusion efforts. Start by conducting an inventory of the library’s existing digital inclusion resources and reach out to potential partners/stakeholders for ideas on how to supplement these efforts or meet other needs in the community. The resource section of this guide includes links to several toolkits to assist with digital inclusion planning.

Next Steps:

STEP 1: Begin planning for digital inclusion program

STEP 2: Monitor Broadband USA web site for NOFA & Grant application

STEP 3: Identify community partners, budget & submit grant

STEP 4: Monitor ConnectMT website for state planning efforts related to IIJA. Submit comments. (See note)

Note: The State Library is encouraging the ConnectMT program to work with the state and local libraries to develop digital equity plans. Watch for future notices for opportunities to submit comments.

Resources

Grant Information

State of Montana ARPA Broadband Grants, <https://connectmt.mt.gov/> or call: 1-844-406-ARPA(2772)

National Telecommunications and Information Administration

<https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/news/latest-news/ntias-role-implementing-broadband-provisions-2021-infrastructure-investment-and>

American Library Magazine

<https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/what-libraries-need-to-know-about-the-digital-equity-act/>

Planning Resources

Planning for Public Access Computers in Libraries, <https://www.ala.org/pla/initiatives/digitallead/public-access-computers-playbook>

Conducting Broadband Assessments for Libraries, <https://internet2.edu/community/community-anchor-program/cap-library-resources/toward-gigabit-libraries/>

National Digital Inclusion Alliance

https://www2.ntia.doc.gov/files/toolkit_042913.pdf

National Telecommunications Information Administration -Broadband Adoption

https://www2.ntia.doc.gov/files/NTIA_2013_BroadbandUSA_Adoption_Toolkit.pdf

American Library Association – Libraries Role in Broadband Adoption

https://www.ala.org/news/sites/ala.org.news/files/content/Broadband_11-08-16_0.pdf

Other broadband funding sources & resources:

Federal Funding: <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/resources/federal/federal-funding>

USDA Rural Development: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/telecommunications-programs>

Montana Telecommunications Association: <https://www.broadbandmt.com/>

Broadband Map, <https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov> (Find providers in your area)

Prepared by:



<https://home.msl.mt.gov/>



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