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Report to the Legislature

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WASHINGTON STATE BROADBAND OFFICE

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Executive summary

Overview

Only with equal access to quality, affordable broadband, can Washington continue to build an equitable economic recovery that strengthens every community throughout the state. Universal broadband infrastructure allows Washington communities and individuals to continue to:

- Attract global investments
- Encourage innovation and research
- Support strong economic performance and long-term prosperity
- Meet the daily demands of modern society

In an effort to assess the state of broadband service in Washington, the Washington State Broadband Office (WSBO) has a Broadband Service Comparison Map. You can view the map online. The map, part of our Digital Equity Dashboard, provides details that allow the state, local communities and interested providers to identify potential areas of need and to determine the best fit for funding opportunities and technologies. The WSBO is adding information that will be useful in expanding broadband across the state. This information includes public/state assets, provider infrastructure, federal and state funds awarded by census block, federal infrastructure and detailed demographic data. Centralizing this data and making it public empowers communities to be engaged and informed. Broadband Action Teams at the community level use this data to focus their decision-making and priorities; these discussions must be community conversations unique to each region.

Key findings

The WSBO has baseline information to identify and quantify need; we are building partnerships and making use of federal, local and private funding to overcome the barriers that have prevented access to and adoption of high-speed broadband services.

Our current BEAD construction maps show that Washington has a total of 215,755 Broadband Service Locations (BSLs) that are without service. That includes a total of 154,061 unserved and 61,694 underserved locations. BEAD defines unserved as having service with speeds below 25 megabits per second (Mbps) for downloads and 3 Mbps for uploads. Underserved locations do not have speeds of at least 100 Mpbs for downloads and 20 Mbps upload. The COVID-19 pandemic taught us that broadband standards, locally and nationally, were not created to meet our state's current demands. Our new normal — where a home serves as medical office, classroom, workplace, hub of commerce and entertainment center — means we must address these deficiencies. There are three primary network deficiency types:

- Bandwidth demands exceed network design and scalability
- Currently deployed technology is incapable of scaling to universally meet state speed goals
- Incomplete residential and business access to affordable, reliable, high-speed internet service

Each of these situations requires a significant capital investment to correct.

WSBO initiatives

To meet Washington's 2024-2028 broadband goals, substantial federal funding, future-proof infrastructure, effective last mile[1] solutions, and community leadership supporting digital equity and inclusion are required. Below are the WSBO initiatives to accomplish these goals.

Foster broadband collaboration to increase project planning

- Host twice monthly Office Hours meetings to share important BEAD application information.
- Host monthly tribal office hours to connect with tribes across the state and support their efforts to bring broadband to their tribal lands.
- These meetings are an important piece of our efforts to build strong relationships across the state.

Continue building on the success of the Digital Equity Dashboard

- Continue to build on county mapping efforts with a Digital Equity Dashboard that gives local partners the information they need to guide local decisions.

Maximize equitable access to all funding opportunities

- Partner with tribes to identify funding priorities and share information on grant and technical assistance opportunities
- Administer state funding to assist local partners in securing federal funds and sharing technical assistance opportunities
- Administer federal funding received by the state
- Promote community engagement to incorporate individuals who represent voices from diverse socio-demographic and geographic locations across the state

Ensure scalable, sustainable, future-proof networks

- Collaborate with communities and providers to identify an ongoing state funding mechanism for infrastructure and services in high-cost areas to ensure the sustainability of last-mile delivery.

Support digital equity and inclusion initiatives

- Participate in digital equity and inclusion initiatives with state partners
- Administer pass-through funding to partners who can build the capacity of community-based organizations and develop a robust cohort of digital navigators
- Require recipients of state infrastructure funding to demonstrate they have available affordable, low-income service options
- Support legislative efforts to identify an ongoing state funding mechanism to subsidize affordability programs, devices and digital literacy skills training

[1] Chapter 237, Laws of 2022 defines last mile infrastructure as "… broadband infrastructure that serves as the final connection from a broadband service provider's network to the end-use customer's on-premises telecommunications equipment."

Introduction

Background

Established in 2019 under RCW 43.330.530, the Governor's Statewide Broadband Office (WSBO) is housed in the Department of Commerce. RCW 43.330.556 , established before BEAD and recent national speed goal updates from the FCC, outlines WSBO's current speed goals for Washington state communities:

> (1) By 2024, all Washington businesses and residences have access to high-speed broadband that provides minimum download speeds of at least twenty-five megabits per second and minimum upload speeds of at least three megabits per second;
>
> (2) By 2026, all Washington communities have access to at least one gigabit per second symmetrical broadband service at anchor institutions like schools, hospitals, libraries, and government buildings; and
>
> (3) By 2028, all Washington businesses and residences have access to at least one provider of broadband with download speeds of at least one hundred fifty megabits per second and upload speeds of at least one hundred fifty megabits per second.

We have built and continue to expand key partnerships, helped launch projects and, most importantly, established a foundation to launch the BEAD's $1.2 billion in funding, including $280 million in proposed state match funds for public entities and tribes.

RCW 43.330.538 requires a biennial report on the activities of the WSBO:

> Broadband office—Reports.
>
> (1)(a) Beginning January 1, 2021, and biennially thereafter, the office shall report to the legislative committees with jurisdiction over broadband policy and finance on the office's activities during the previous two years.
>
> (b) The report must, at a minimum, contain:
>
> (i) An analysis of the current availability and use of broadband, including average broadband speeds, within the state;
>
> (ii) Information gathered from schools, libraries, hospitals, and public safety facilities across the state, determining the actual speed and capacity of broadband currently in use and the need, if any, for increases in speed and capacity to meet current or anticipated needs;
>
> (iii) An overview of incumbent broadband infrastructure within the state;
>
> (iv) A summary of the office's activities in coordinating broadband infrastructure development with the department of transportation and the public works board, including a summary of funds awarded under RCW 43.155.160;
>
> (v) Suggested policies, incentives, and legislation designed to accelerate the achievement of the goals under RCW 43.330.536; and
>
> (vi) Any proposed legislative and policy initiatives.

(2)(a) By December 31, 2022, the office must submit a report to the governor and the appropriate committees of the legislature regarding the provision of retail telecommunications services to unserved areas by public utility districts and port districts as provided in RCW * 54.16.330(10) and 53.08.370(10).

(b) The report must, at a minimum, contain:

(i) The number of public utility districts and port districts providing retail telecommunications services in an unserved area authorized in RCW * 54.16.330(10) and 53.08.370(10); and

(ii) Any recommendations to improve the provision of retail telecommunications services in unserved areas.

[2021 c 293 s 4; 2021 c 258 s 4; 2019 c 365 s 6.]

Report sections

RCW 43.330.538 requires a biennial report on the activities of the WSBO to include:

- An analysis of the current availability and use of broadband (Section 1)
- Information on service delivery to anchor institutions (Section 2)
- An overview of the incumbent broadband infrastructure within the state (Section 3)
- Coordination and funding efforts of broadband funding agencies (Section 4)
- Suggestions related to legislation to facilitate the achievement of state broadband goals (Sections 5 and 6)
- The status of retail communications service provided by public utility and port districts (Section 7)

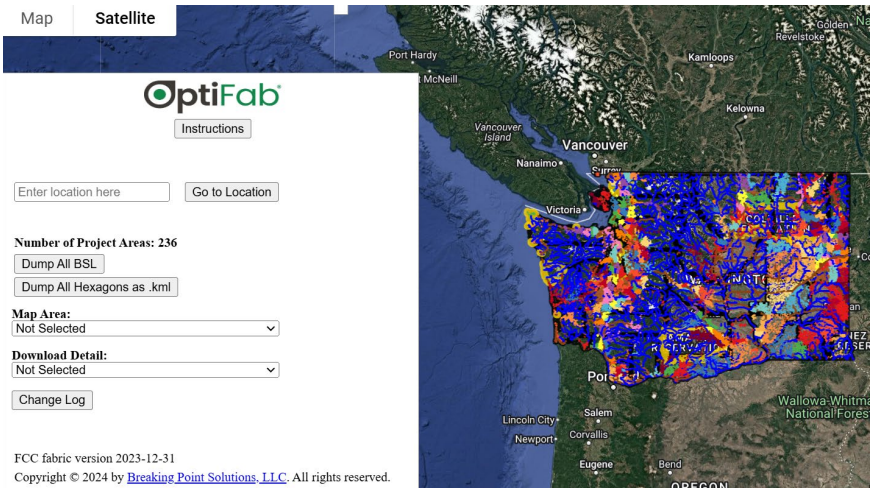
WSBO staffing updates

Every successful state agency requires a collection of skilled and dedicated staff. Since our last reporting period, the WSBO has added additional members to our team to enhance WSBO's capabilities further:

- Sam Ross, broadband infrastructure specialist
- Nick Zehrung, broadband infrastructure specialist
- Lisa Heaton, manager, Broadband Equity
- Sarah Clark, contracts and operations manager, Broadband Equity
- Mary Harding, program manager, Cybersecurity Literacy Program
- Nick Davis, program manager, Broadband Digital Navigator Program
- Brittany Pouley, data manager, Broadband Equity
- Jonas Greene, tribal outreach and engagement manager, Broadband Equity
- Crystal Schoelkopf, administrative assistant
- Devin Proctor, manager, Policy and Communications

Section 1. An analysis of the current availability and use of broadband

Figure 1: WSBO BEAD Construction Map Web Page



Our BEAD construction maps show that Washington has 215,755 Broadband Service Locations (BSLs) without service. That includes 154,061 unserved and 61,694 underserved. BEAD defines unserved as having service with speeds below 25 megabits per second Mbps for downloads and 3 Mbps for uploads. Underserved locations do not have speeds of at least 100 Mbps for downloads and 20 Mbps for uploads.

Our maps show 2,335,650 served BSLs in the state.

Section 2. Anchor institution broadband speed and capacity

Community Anchor Institutions (CAI) are institutions – such as schools, libraries, or hospitals – that play a vital role in their communities. CAIs need access to reliable, high-speed internet and other advanced communication technologies to help bridge the digital divide throughout Washington.

What are Community Anchor Institutions?

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defines Community Anchor Institutions (CAI) as schools, libraries, medical and healthcare providers, public safety entities, community colleges, and other institutions of higher education, and other community support organizations and agencies that provide outreach, access, equipment, and support services to facilitate greater use of broadband service by vulnerable populations, including low-income, the unemployed, and the aged.

WSBO's Digital Equity Dashboard has a CAI map that highlights their locations across the state. The Service Comparison Map allows viewers to further research service levels across the state along with CAI overlays.

K-12 schools are primed to meet the 2026 state goals for anchor institutions. At the time of this report's writing, there was only one school district, Roosevelt, receiving service at less than 1 Gbps or greater symmetrical service. OSPI was in the contracting stage to bring the district up to a 1 Gbps service level. It is

important to note that in our 2022 report OSPI identified 33 school districts that had less than 1 Gbps service. Significant progress has been made in the past couple years to close the digital divide for these districts.

The K-20 Education Network's speed tracking page lists participating school districts and their network speeds.

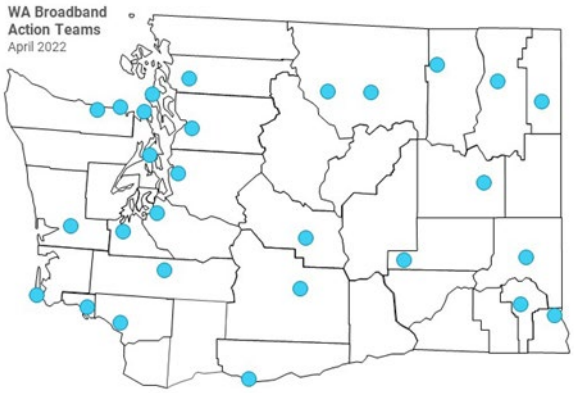
While this data does not reflect connection speeds to each individual school, it is evidence of area service levels. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction is monitoring network speeds for each individual school toward the 2026 goal - that data is not yet publicly available.

Through a collaboration with WSBO in 2022 and 2023, OSPI's Educational Technology Department was able to allocate $3 million to 58 districts across Washington state to support Digital Equity and Inclusionary (DEI) initiatives. This funding supported ongoing DEI work by building on existing frameworks and OSPI programming to support schools access to broadband. For complete details, read OSPI's handout about this critical program.

Section 3. An overview of the incumbent broadband infrastructure within the state

Broadband stakeholder collaboration

Figure 2. Broadband action team locations.



Broadband action team (BAT) program development

The BAT model was founded by Washington State University Extension (Extension). During this reporting period, WSBO and Extension continued to partner to formalize and expand the use of the Extension BAT model across the state as a best practice for local community broadband engagement. Collaborators included Stevens County-Spokane Tribe BAT, and Washington State Library, which is a department of the Secretary of State. The Public Works Board (PWB) and the Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB) also provided input.

BAT leadership directives

- Assist tribes and communities in taking specific, efficient actions to leverage time, resources and funding to achieve identified broadband goals.
- Create a central hub and point of contact for information and support.
- Receive the maximum amount of infrastructure funding available to the state by identifying shovel-ready/application-ready projects.
- Expand resources and share community leadership and services facilitated by Washington State Libraries and Extension offices.

Benefits of BAT-facilitated local collaboration

- Centralize the conversation so their BAT participants have one know group to share and discuss their concerns
- Broadband equity and inclusion efforts
- Connect participants to allow more collaboration on their shared broadband goals
- Early awareness and connection of projects to funding opportunities
- Direct connection to, and communication with, the WSBO
- Develop relationships with providers to support solutions and mitigate duplication of effort
- Community and anchor institution relationships established early in preparation for funding applications
- Statewide best practice and knowledge sharing
- Expose barriers to access and adoption
- Promote awareness of broadband survey/utilize survey resources and results
- Funding application best practice and debriefs

Broadband action team participants

- Elected officials and staff from local, city, county, state, and federal governments
- Tribal representatives
- Health care — hospitals, clinics, community
- Education — K-12, higher education, technical training, etc.
- Libraries
- Businesses — retail, farms, manufacturing, real estate, IT, etc.
- Workforce development
- Economic development
- Internet service providers
- Nonprofits
- Planning organizations
- Public safety/emergency management
- Social services
- Faith-based organizations
- Chambers of commerce
- Transportation planners
- Arts and culture
- Funding entities
- Grant writing
- Other community organizations
- Community members — civic leaders, youth, senior citizens

Provide resources to communities to facilitate broadband infrastructure development

Grant writing assistance

The WSBO provided $1.5 million in funding in summer 2025 to public entities and tribes to begin their planning and engineering as they work to write their application for BEAD funding. The Washington Association of Counties managed the grant application process for local governments. WSBO awarded funds directly to tribes.

Section 4. Coordinating broadband infrastructure development

WSBO participates in Sync

Sync is Washington's Infrastructure System Improvement team and a collaborative partnership among the Public Works Board (PWB), the departments of Commerce, Ecology, Health, and Transportation (WSDOT), and the Transportation Improvement Board. It formed to meet the objectives of RCW 43.155.150 and Sync later expanded to include broadband infrastructure. To support the broadband focus of Sync, the WSBO:

- Engaged in monthly Sync meetings and discussed infrastructure resiliency and sustainability.
- Shared funding data to outline the state picture of overall infrastructure investment.

WSBO activities with WSDOT, USDA, PWB and CERB

- Manage a shared broadband webpage: Broadband Resources and Funding
- Participated in bi-weekly collaboration meetings with PWB and CERB to discuss best practices, coordinate outreach and funding efforts, partner on presentations to key stakeholders, etc.
- Engaged in monthly meetings with WSDOT to discuss right-of-way access and permitting, dig-once opportunities, conduit placement and usage, etc.
- Engaged in regular meetings with USDA to share updates on grants awarded through USDA's Rural Utilities Service program and WSBO.
- We will also partner to develop future opportunities as funding becomes available.

Ongoing collaboration with WSDOT

As WSDOT continues to enact the dig-once law in Chapter 258, Laws of 2021, there is a clear need for coordination with the WSBO. The law elevates the dig-once concept and authorizes WSDOT to lay conduit and retain ownership for leasing to ISPs. In this case, the law treats broadband infrastructure as a utility in terms of process and procedure. Funds for this activity come from the DOT-Motor Vehicle Fund.

WSDOT also provides valuable technical guidance to the WSBO related to poles and pole attachments as they pertain to fish passage areas. In areas where fish passage is being addressed, poles must be relocated one-quarter to one-half mile from the culvert. This will affect aerial attachments and any associated wireless transmission devices during broadband construction, including the upcoming BEAD construction.

WSBO Infrastructure Acceleration Grant, Broadband Infrastructure Program, State Matching Grant Program and direct appropriations[2]

The WSBO is tasked with developing strategies and plans to promote broadband infrastructure deployment and greater broadband access to unserved and underserved areas of the state. Chapter 296, Laws of 2022, Section 1086 authorizes the WSBO to provide funding opportunities to:

- Local governments
- Tribes
- Nonprofit organizations
- Nonprofit cooperative organizations
- Multiparty entities comprised of at least one public entity

Infrastructure Acceleration Grant (IAG)

In FY 2022, the WSBO IAG program was funded by a sub-award of the state's allocation of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Coronavirus State in the second round and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) in the first round.[3] The WSBO may only use this award to fund technology-neutral [4]broadband projects designed to expand access at the lowest cost to the most unserved or underserved residents. In FY 2022, 13 applicants were awarded a total of $141 million. In 2023, WSBO awarded an additional 19 applicants a total of $121.5 million utilizing a sub-award of the state's allocation of ARPA Capital funds.

CERB Rural Broadband Program[5]

Chapter 296, Laws of 2022, Section 1011 authorized the CERB to administer a non-competitive grant and loan program to promote the expansion of access to broadband service in rural and underserved communities for the purposes of economic or community development. Under this statute, awards are for the acquisition, installation and construction of middle-mile and last-mile broadband infrastructure. Funds may also be used for strategic planning in the deployment of broadband service. Eligible applicants include:

- Local governments
- Tribes
- Municipal corporations
- Quasi-municipal corporations

Since its inception, the CERB Rural Broadband Program has awarded more than $35.3 million in loans and grants to 27 recipients. These awards require a 25% cash match and the total of CERB Rural Broadband awards cannot exceed 50% grant for the biennium. CERB did not expend any new broadband funding during this reporting period.

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[2] A complete listing of WSBO programs applicants, requests and awards is also part of the WSBO Grant Programs Legislative Report.
[3] A second round of IAG funding was awarded in FY23. This round was funded by the ARPA Capital Project Fund. The awards can be found in Appendix A.
[4] The term technology-neutral for this grant is defined in the IAG Handbook
[5] More information can be found in the CERB Rural Broadband 2024 Legislative Report.

PWB Broadband Grant and Loan Program

The PWB is authorized under RCW 43.155.160 to administer a competitive grant and loan program to promote the expansion of access to broadband service in unserved areas of the state. Funds may also be used for strategic planning in the deployment of broadband service. Eligible applicants include:

- Local governments
- Tribes
- Nonprofit organizations
- Cooperative associations
- Special purpose districts
- Quasi-municipal corporations
- Limited liability corporations organized for the purpose of expanding broadband access
- Incorporated businesses or partnerships

The PWB is allowed to fund up to 50% of the total project cost in non-distressed and non-Indian Country areas. In distressed or Indian Country areas, the PWB may fund up to 90% of the total project cost.

Applications for PWB funding are competitive and must provide evidence that the project:

- Is maintained for public use for at least 15 years
- Connects the unserved (25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload or less)

The PWB Broadband Construction Program received seven applications seeking a combined total of $23.8 million. The Board approved the awards of $23.8 million in state loan funding at its October 2023 and May 2024 Board meetings. On May 3, 2024, the Board awarded an additional $4.8 million as grant funding for five out of the six top-ranked projects located in distressed and severely distressed communities.

More details are available in the PWB 2024 Infrastructure Loans and Grants report.

Section 5. Suggested policies, incentives, and legislation to accelerate the achievement of RCW 43.330.536 goals

The WSBO discussed with stakeholders, the Digital Equity Forum and legislators about the potential to update the goals included in RCW 43.330.536 to better align with the current structure and timeline of BEAD funding. The original goals were written before the full details of BEAD were understood. HB 1503, which includes updates to the speed goals, was introduced at the time this report was written. WSBO anticipates further discussion on the goals in future legislative discussion and as the BEAD program projects are built.

Section 6. Proposed legislative and policy initiatives

Access and affordability

Access and affordability are the primary concerns when we work to achieve the state goals for universal high-speed broadband. This impacts where and how residents live, the development and competitiveness of businesses, equality in access to medical and social services, and the attainment of education K-12 and beyond. While the state's three broadband funding programs work to increase access through the construction of new networks and upgrading old, affordability is an area that is lagging.

The federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) was one approach to affordability. Unfortunately, ACP was not renewed by Congress, and it ceased operation in June 2024. It was a necessary and vital program that reduced monthly internet subscription costs for low-income residents. The ACP provided a $30 monthly discount on a household's internet service and $75 per household on tribal lands. It also offered a one-time discount of up to $100 toward the purchase of a qualifying device like a laptop or tablet. A total of 358,024 Washington households were enrolled at the time the program terminated.

Lifeline is another federal program designed to support access to phone and internet service for our most vulnerable populations, but it doesn't have the scope and size of ACP. The Lifeline program is the only active federal monthly internet bill discount program. It provides a $9.25 monthly benefit for low-income households or $34.25 for households on tribal lands. Currently, 114,000 Washington households are enrolled.

The need for these types of assistance is not limited to residents in the lowest income brackets, but could be extended to middle-class families with nominal disposable income. The lack of affordable services for families and businesses remains a barrier to meeting our state goals and community opportunity.

Federal BEAD State match funding

The state capital funding match of 25%, intended by Washington legislators in the 2024 capital budget for local governments and tribes is a significant incentive to participate in BEAD. The state has provided $50 million in the capital budget with the intention to provide a total of $300 million in state match funding in the upcoming 2025-27 capital budget. Governor Inslee's proposed 25-27 capital budget included $280 million in match funding. The state match is a critical element for BEAD that is unique to Washington. Local governments and tribes would not have considered participating in BEAD had it not been for the match funding. WSBO will be working closely with the Legislature to ensure state match funding is available to meet the application needs of local governments and tribes applying for BEAD funding in 2025.

Section 7. Retail telecommunications services provided by public utility and port districts

Public utility districts (PUD) and port districts are authorized to provide retail broadband internet services under RCW 51.16.330(10) and RCW 53.08.370(10) respectively. At this time, there are no active PUD or port retail providers of broadband service. Jefferson County PUD is in the process of transitioning into retail service. They are utilizing the open access network they are currently constructing as their starting point for retail service. View Jefferson County PUD projects maps and construction timeline. In total they have seven project areas with an estimated final project completion date of April 2027.

Of the 122 PUDs and ports within Washington, 22 currently provide or are in the process of constructing networks to provide wholesale broadband service. Most of these networks involve partnerships with multiple ISPs to provide retail connection.

According to the Washington Public Utility District Association[6], PUDs have invested more than $607 million in broadband infrastructure, installed about 9,000 miles of fiber and connected more than 64,000 users to broadband service. A total of 160 retail internet service providers lease PUD fiber to serve their customers.

Increasing the number of public utility and port districts engaged in retail broadband

There are steps the state can take to increase PUD participation in retail broadband. These include:

Technical Assistance and Capacity Building

- Offer technical assistance and training to help PUDs develop business plans, network designs, and operational strategies
- Support partnerships between PUDs to share resources, reduce costs, and achieve economies of scale

Providing More Financial Incentives

Offer new or increased tax breaks, grants, or low-interest loans to encourage further infrastructure investments.

Relax Regulatory Barriers

Expedite regulatory processes and reduce governmental hurdles to facilitate faster deployment and operations.

[6] WPUDA telecommunications estimates

Section 8. Broadband equity

The WSBO continues to build capacity to advance broadband equity through grants. The Legislature defines digital equity as "the condition in which individuals and communities in Washington have the information technology capacity that is needed for full participation in society and the economy."[7] To address broadband equity in Washington, the WSBO is implementing the following efforts.

Digital navigators

WSBO's Broadband Digital Navigator Program (BDNP) supports the WSBO's mission to advance digital inclusion for all Washington residents to participate and collaborate online to thrive in today's global society.

Through collaboration, BDNP grantees and their partners promote digital literacy and services, creating equitable digital inclusion. The BDNP also supports the WSBO initiative, "Internet for All in Washington," which reduces digital barriers for Washington's residents through digital literacy, supported connectivity and device distribution.

The BDNP defines a Digital Navigator (DN) as "a trusted member of a community and/or organization who assists individuals, groups and or households in the internet adoption and use of computing devices." Digital navigation services include the distribution of internet-supported devices (laptops, computers, hot spots), and real-time assistance with an option to use digital learning platforms to teach the digital curriculum through in-person, webinar-based and at-your-own-pace options. Between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2024, the Digital Navigator Program's grantees used $2.78 million for devices and $12.2 million to provide digital navigation services to program participants. Between July 1, 2024, and March 31, 2025, the Digital Navigator Program's grantees used $3.5 million for devices and $23.7 million to provide digital navigation services to program participants.

The WSBO anticipates an increasing need for Digital Navigator services due to Washington's expanding broadband infrastructure. Through synergistic partnerships, the BDNP's outcomes will include measurable data to assist in eliminating barriers to connectivity. The BDNP's strategic approach is to inform and collaborate with communities, entities and governments.

Key Highlights

- In Fiscal Year 2022 (FY 22), the BDNP awarded $7.4 million in grant funding to 4 grantees through a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP).
- In Fiscal Year 2023 (FY 23), the BDNP awarded $30.2 million in grant funding to 32 grantees through two competitive RFPs.
- In Fiscal Year 2024 (FY 24), the BDNP awarded $29 million in grant funding to three consortiums to implement the digital navigator proviso in the 2023-25 biennial operating budget. The goal is to increase digital equity and navigation services for state residents. The collective knowledge and experience of the current Digital Navigator grantee cohorts provides progress through services and device access. There are 65 committed consortium members and continuous partnership growth throughout communities in Washington.

[7] Chapter 265, Laws of 2022

Needs of the BDNP

During the 2021-2023 biennium, the BDNP showed there are many areas of Washington that have unmet internet connectivity, accessibility and adoption needs. The BDNP anticipates that in the next five years, digital inequities will outpace the current funding of $30 million for the 2023-2025 biennium. The continuity of Digital Navigator services is imperative to delivering outcomes that eliminate barriers to equitable digital inclusion.

The BDNP FY 24-25 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) received 26 applications requesting $115,331,157 in funding; the BDNP could only award $29 million to three grantees. The NOFO application process revealed a greater need for funding of Digital Navigator services and resources to address the current digital inequities across Washington.

Digital Equity Forum

Established in RCW 43.330.539, Commerce formed the Digital Equity Forum (DEF) to develop recommendations that advance digital connectivity in Washington.[8] WSBO partners with the Office of Equity in this work. In 2024, Commerce entered an Inter-Agency Agreement (IAA) with the Office of Equity to support its leadership of this work. The DEF launched its meetings in December 2021, with a number of associated workshops, stakeholder engagement efforts, listening sessions, and focus groups to listen to local communities and help identify barriers to the very broad topic of digital equity. Recommendations from the DEF will inform future digital equity planning efforts, including work with federally recognized tribes and state agencies involved in digital equity work. It will also inform efforts with partners who play critical roles within their areas of programming and services in underserved and unserved communities including historically disadvantaged communities. As noted elsewhere in this report, while digital equity is a broadly encompassing area of focus for the state, the WSBO's role in this work is related strictly to broadband connectivity, accessibility, and adoption.

Upcoming grants

The WSBO applied for federal Digital Equity Capacity Grant funding in 2024. WSBO will receive $15.98 million in funding from this grant round to support meeting the state's Digital Equity Plan goals. WSBO will use this funding to focus on a Cybersecurity Literacy Program that will develop advanced cybersecurity curricula that can be incorporated into existing literacy training. The program will address online safety best practices and promote responsible digital engagement in a culturally relevant manner for all covered populations. You can read more about the state's digital equity plan in our 2024 Digital Equity Plan report.

WSBO plans to award two digital equity-focused funding opportunities. The Broadband Equity Assistive Technology grant will promote equal access to technology and digital inclusion in online education, employment, and community life for individuals with disabilities. A total of $4.925 million is available, and applicants must apply for funding of at least $1.5 million. The funds were part of the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Coronavirus State & Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) program provided to address the negative economic impacts of the public health emergency. WSBO will report on these activities in the future, as this work has just started.

WSBO will also release $4.85 million in grant funding to support tribal digital navigation work. The Legislature appropriated this funding in 2024 to support federally recognized tribes in eliminating barriers and providing a path forward in equitable digital inclusion through increased access to supporting services such as telehealth,

[8] Chapter 334, Laws of 2021

employment, education, and training. Expect future reports on this work as WSBO announces awards and tribes begin receiving funds.

Appendix A: WSBO ARPA Capital Program Awards

Grantee	Project Title	County	Total Project	Project Award	Match
Franklin County PUD1	Connell and Basin FTTH	Franklin	$4,854,610.00	$4,854,610.00	$0
King County - Ziply	King County | Ziply (Duvall) Project	King	$1,964,090.00	$1,767,681.00	$196,409.00
Kittitas County	Kittitas County	Kittitas	$12,629,002.24	$11,366,102.00	$1,262,900.24
Lincoln County	Deer Meadows and Seven Bays FTTx	Lincoln	$10,625,463.00	$8,921,342.00	$1,704,121.00
Mason County PUD3	Cloquallum Communities Rural Broadband Fiber Expansion	Mason	$3,645,768.00	$3,645,768.00	$0
Okanogan County Electric Co-Op	Okanogan County Connect	Okanogan	$13,316,683.00	$11,985,014.00	$1,331,669.00
Orcas Power & Light Co-Op	OPALCO ARPA - Orcas Island East	San Juan Island	$4,370,994.00	$3,911,649.00	$459,345.00
Orcas Power & Light Co-Op	OPALCO ARPA – Orcas Island West	San Juan Island	$1,379,530.00	$1,242,168.00	$137,362.00
Orcas Power & Light Co-Op	OPALCO ARPA - Outer Islands	San Juan Island	$7,849,719.00	$6,446,206.00	$1,403,513.00
Orcas Power & Light Co-Op	OPALCO ARPA – San Juan Island	San Juan Island	$3,726,988.00	$3,352,904.00	$374,084.00
Port of Skagit County	Bow Outlying Areas FTTx	Skagit	$8,949,168.00	$8,054,251.00	$894,917.00
Port of Whitman County	Port of Whitman FTTx	Whitman	$2,483,912.00	$1,135,475.00	$1,348,437.00
PUD No 1 of Grays Harbor County	Grays Harbor South Elma, Porter and Cedarville Broadband	Grays Harbor	$6,916,366.00	$6,916,366.00	$0
PUD No 1 of Jefferson County	The Inbetweens Fiber	Jefferson	$6,087,687.00	$6,087,687.00	$0
PUD No 1 of Lewis County	Bunker Creek North and South	Lewis	$11,958,421.00	$11,958,421.00	$0
PUD No 1 of Whatcom County - Pt Roberts	Point Roberts FTTx	Whatcom	$3,500,000.00	$3,150,000.00	$350,000.00
Spokane Tribe of Indians	Spokane Tribe HWY 231 FTTH	Stevens	$3,418,063.00	$3,418,063.00	$0
Tri County Economic Development District	Central Stevens County Hybrid	Stevens	$12,000,000.00	$12,000,000.00	$0
Yakima County Public Works	Tieton Fiber	Yakima	$11,310,004.00	$11,310,004.00	$0
Total			$130,986,468.24	$121,523,711.00	$9,462,757.24

Appendix B: PWB Program Awards 2022-24

FY22 PWB Broadband Grant Awards (ARPA SLFRF)

Jurisdiction	Project Name	County	Grant	Loan	Awarded
Kittitas County Auditor	Kittitas County Thorp and Edgemont FTTx Project	Kittitas	$3,338,946.00	$0.00	$3,338,946.00
Port of Clarkston	Port of Clarkston Census Tract 9604 FTTH Broadband Project	Asotin	$2,444,381.00	$0.00	$2,444,381.00
Lewis Co PUD 1	Connecting the Mineral, Elbe, & Ashford Communities of Lewis County	Lewis	$4,733,011.00	$0.00	$4,733,011.00
Lincoln County Auditor	Connecting Lincoln County	Lincoln	$4,162,072.00	$0.00	$4,162,072.00
Port of Clarkston	POC Grantham Elementary Service Area FTTH Broadband Project	Asotin	$1,775,282.00	$0.00	$1,775,282.00
Town of Skykomish	Skykomish Broadband	King	$568,763.00	$0.00	$568,763.00
Jefferson County PUD No 1	Discovery Bay East Fiber Project	Jefferson	$1,096,046.00	$0.00	$1,096,046.00
Port of Columbia	Touchet Valley Broadband	Columbia	$1,165,000.00	$0.00	$1,165,000.00
Clallam County Treasurer	Clallam County Broadband Project	Clallam	$4,525,174.00	$0.00	$4,525,174.00
Pacific County PUD 2	Pacific County Broadband Build BC to Nemah	Pacific	$5,500,000.00	$0.00	$5,500,000.00
Lewis Co PUD 1	Connecting the Greater Vader Community of Lewis County	Lewis	$4,726,647.00	$0.00	$4,726,647.00
Port of Skagit County	Fir Island FTTx	Skagit	$2,152,791.00	$0.00	$2,152,791.00
Port of Coupeville	Central Whidbey FTTx	Island	$4,842,933.00	$0.00	$4,842,933.00
Town of Washtucna	Washtucna Fiber to the Premise	Adams	$788,946.00	$0.00	$788,946.00
Kitsap County PUD 1	Fiber to the Home	Kitsap	$1,939,356.00	$0.00	$1,939,356.00
Total			$43,759,348.00	$0.00	$43,759,348.00

FY23 PWB Broadband Grant/Loan Awards

Jurisdiction	Project Name	County	Grant	Loan	Awarded
Jefferson County PUD No 1	PT Business Fiber Project	Jefferson	$0.00	$1,812,041.00	$1,812,041.00
Total			$0.00	$1,812,041.00	$1,812,041.00

FY24 PWB Broadband Grant/Loan Awards

Jurisdiction	Project Name	County	Grant	Loan	Awarded
Whidbey Telephone Company	Whidbey Telecom - Deer Lake West	Island	$0.00	$3,723,727.00	$3,723,727.00
Jefferson PUD #1	Northeast Olympic FTTP	Jefferson	$1,200,000.00	$2,800,000.00	$4,000,000.00
Okanogan PUD #1	Conconully FTTx	Okanogan	$1,140,000.00	$2,660,000.00	$3,800,000.00
Klick Networks, LLCTrout Lake FTTH		Klickitat	$240,000.00	$560,000.00	$800,000.00
Okanogan County Electric Cooperative	Okanogan County Connect Phase Two	Okanogan	$1,500,000.00	$3,500,000.00	$5,000,000.00
Spokane Regional Broadband Development Authority	South Spokane County Rural Towns Open Access Mid-mile Connectivity	Spokane	$0.00	$2,000,000.00	$2,000,000.00
WhidbeyTel	2024 Clinton	Island	$764,547.83	$3,730,073.00	$4,494,620.83
Total			$4,844,547.83	$18,973,800.00	$23,818,347.83