



Alaska Statewide Broadband Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Alaska Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development

Minutes for Rescheduled Regular Board Meeting- December 18, 2024, 10:00 AM AKDT.

Approved by the Statewide Broadband Advisory Board February 26, 2025.

Attendance

Present:

Members: Michael Brase, Charles Carpenter, Representative Edgmon, Anastasia Hoffman, Chair Ledford, Thomas Lochner, Travis Million, Steve Noonkesser, Christine O'Connor, Laurel Shoop, Mary Swain.

Staff Present: Lisa Von Bargen, Deputy Director; and Kalynn Himes, Administrative Specialist.

Members Absent: Senator Hoffman, Kathleen Moran, Charlene Stern.

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

The Chair called the meeting to order at 10:00am. Kalynn Himes called the roll, and eleven members of the board were present at the time the meeting was called to order. Quorum was met.

II. Approval of Agenda

Motion by Charles Carpenter to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Thomas Lochner.

Approved by unanimous consent.

III. Declarations of Conflict of Interest

None.

IV. Approval of Minutes from Prior Meetings

a. Regular Meeting October 21, 2024

Motion by Travis Million to approve the prior meeting minutes, seconded by Charles Carpenter.

Approved by unanimous consent.

V. Subcommittee Reports

None.

VI. Staff Reports

a. Digital Equity (DE) Grant Programs (Deputy Director Von Bargen)

i. DE Grant Programs Overview

ii. Alaska Digital Equity Capacity Grant

1. Application Period and Grant Portal

2. Technical Assistance

Lisa Von Bargen gave an update of the Digital Equity (DE) Grant Programs. The State DE Capacity Grant application was submitted by the Alaska Broadband Office (ABO) to NTIA on May 23, 2024, and was approved in early November 2024 and the ABO is using that to fund our in-state grant program.

There is a component of the federal state Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program that is specific to native entities and is open right now, tribal applications are due to NTIA February 7, 2025. The third is the DE Competitive Grant Program. The program does not go through states or territories but is being operated

directly by NTIA. \$1.25 billion is available nationwide for the program and applications were due September 23, 2024. The NTIA expects to begin issuing awards in April of 2025. We anticipate this program to be significantly over-subscribed.

Deputy Director Von Bargen gave a recap of the Alaska Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program. The first tranche funding amount was \$5.6 million, and about \$3.5 million of that is being used to run the in-state Alaska Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program. The in-state Program was released last Friday, December 13, 2024, and is open for a 120-day application period. Division of Community and Regional Affairs has launched a grant portal platform through which both ABO Grant Programs are being deployed. It is located on the Alaska Broadband Office webpage with tutorials. The 120-day application period ends in mid-April, followed by a 90-day review period, with awards announced the middle of July 2025.

There will be eight Virtual Office Hours Technical Assistance Sessions, a schedule of which is listed in the grant program NOFO and listed on the ABO website. There will also be three in-person Technical Assistance Workshops in different areas of the state. Those dates will be finalized in January 2025 and posted on the ABO website.

b. Alaska In-State Mapping Challenge (Director Lochner)

Director Lochner gave an update on the Alaska In-State Mapping Challenge. The ABO made sure Broadband Serviceable Locations were identified within the state, about 56,000 in total (20k under-served and 36k unserved). NTIA required a very rigid structure on how that data was formatted for final submittal. We anticipate final approval of the Mapping Challenge Data happening within the next week. The ABO can continue to remove BEAD-eligible BSLs as funding is awarded under other grant programs. NTIA is continuing efforts to remove BSLs that are not legitimate locations, such as water towers, crashed plane wreckage, etc.

c. Alaska Broadband Grant Program (Director Lochner)

- i. Application Period and Grant Portal**
- ii. Tribal Consultations**
- iii. Technical Assistance**

Director Lochner provided a summary of the Alaska Broadband Grant Program which launched on December 16, 2024. This was possible with input from the public, NTIA, and the team in the ABO, DCRA, and the Commissioner's Office. We are very proud of the product published. NTIA requested some minor changes prior to release of the program. The changes included: 1) the ability to increase subscription prices over time tied to Consumer Price Index inflation; 2) clarification that applicants (especially smaller, or non-traditional providers) may have one person serving in multiple roles, or contractors/consultants performing roles identified in the list 17 executive and managerial positions that must be clearly identified in the application. The application period will run through April 14, 2025.

There will be four upcoming Tribal Consultations, and four general Technical Assistance Sessions beginning mid-January and running every week through mid-February.

Charlie Carpenter asked for clarification about small companies filling multiple positions with a limited number of staff. Mr. Carpenter asked if a minimum staff number was identified or could one person fill all 17 roles. Director Lochner responded there are no set criteria. Technically yes, one person could fill all

roles, but the application also requires applicants display the appropriate amount of experience in each role.

d. Board Vacancies (Deputy Director Von Bargen)

Deputy Director Von Bargen announced two resignations from the Board in the past few days. She explained Laurel Shoop has moved to new department and is now unable to continue representing the Department of Education. Tara Sweeney has also submitted her resignation as a member of the business community. Tara was also Vice Chair of the board. Ms. Von Bargen requested the Board members please think about replacement candidates.

Charlie Carpenter asked if action to replace the Vice Chair position could take place at this meeting, and if so, he would like to nominate Christine O'Connor. Deputy Director Von Bargen stated of the Board can amend the agenda and take action at this meeting if desired.

Chair Ledford asked if there was a motion to amend the agenda.

Motion by Charles Carpenter to amend the agenda to vote on the position of Vice Chair, seconded by Ana Hoffman. The motion was approved by unanimous consent.

Motion by Charles Carpenter to nominate Christine O'Connor for the position of Vice Chair, seconded by Travis Million. A roll call vote was taken resulting in 9 Yeas and 0 Nays. The motion passed.

Chair Ledford welcomed Christine to the Vice Chair position.

VII. Unfinished Business

None.

VIII. New Business

None.

IX. Public Comment

Shawn Williams asked when answers to the questions submitted during the public comment period about the grant program would be published? Director Lochner responded they were posted within a week of public comment period closing and were on the website for about three weeks. When the final NOFO was posted the FAQ sheet was removed from the website as it had become outdated. The ABO is currently updating the FAQ sheet to align with the NOFO and it will be posted Friday, December 20, 2024. Director Lochner offered to answer Shawn's questions specifically if they were sent directly to him.

X. Board Member Business from the Floor

XI. Next Meeting Date

The next regularly scheduled meeting date is February 17, 2025. It was pointed out that February 17th is a holiday, so Deputy Director Von Bargen said staff would reach out to the Board to find an alternative meeting date.

XII. Adjournment

Chair Leford adjourned the meeting at 10:32am on December 18, 2024.