



# Alaska Statewide Broadband Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Alaska Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development

Minutes for Regular Board Meeting – April 14, 2025, 10:00 AM AKDT.

The minutes were approved by the Board on June 16, 2025.

## Attendance

Members Present: Michael Brase, Charles Carpenter, Ana Hoffman Chair Ledford, Thomas Lochner, Travis Million, Kathleen Moran, Steve Noonkesser (10:09am), Christine O'Connor, Mary Swain (10:05am), and Faye Tanner.

Staff Present: Lisa Von Barga, Deputy Director; and Jan Cox, DCRA Grants Administrator III.

Members Absent: Speaker Edgmon (staff Laib Allensworth attended on behalf of), Senator Hoffman, and Charlene Stern. One board position is vacant.

## Call to Order and Roll Call

The Chair called the meeting to order at 10:04am. Deputy Director Von Barga called the roll, and nine members of the board were present at the time the meeting was called to order. Two board members joined shortly after the roll was called making the total present eleven. Quorum was met.

### I. Approval of Agenda

Motion by Kathleen Moran to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Travis Million. The agenda was approved by unanimous consent.

### II. Declarations of Conflict of Interest

None.

### III. Approval of Minutes from Prior Meetings

#### a. Rescheduled Regular Meeting February 26, 2025

Motion by Thomas Lochner to approve the prior meeting minutes, seconded by Mike Brase. The minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

## IV. Subcommittee Reports

None.

## V. Staff Reports

### a. Alaska Digital Empowerment Capacity Grant Program (Deputy Director Von Barga)

#### i. Grant Program Rebrand

Deputy Director Von Barga explained the Alaska Broadband Office had rebranded the in-state grant program name from Digital Equity to Digital Empowerment because the term empowerment better embodies the intent of the program. She clarified the name of the federal program maintains the term equity, as does the State Digital Equity Plan. The Plan name remains unchanged as it is a published document, and the name will be changed when a comprehensive update is complete.

#### ii. Application Results

Deputy Director Von Barga provided a summary of the application results for the Alaska Digital Empowerment Capacity Grant Program. She explained the application period ended on Saturday, April 12,

2025. Six applications were received requesting \$8,440.667.05 in funding. The total amount of grant funding available is \$3,453,186.90 resulting in a \$5 million oversubscription of the program. She further reported one applicant requested just over \$3 million. Ms. Von Bargen went on to explain the four review and scoring phases, and the associated timeline of the program.

**b. Alaska Broadband Grant Program (Director Lochner)**

**i. 30-Day Executive Order Impact Review**

**ii. Application Timeline Update**

Director Lochner addressed both items together. He stated the Alaska Broadband Office (ABO) instituted a 30-day pause to the application period of the Alaska Broadband Grant Program through May 14, 2025. He went on to explain that timeline is already being pushed back because NTIA has advised the ABO new federal guidance on the program is not expected until mid-May. Upon receipt of the new federal guidance, Director Lochner estimated a one-week revision timeline of the NOFO by the ABO. Director Lochner estimated the ABO would extend the application period by another 60 days upon release of the new NOFO, but that would depend on the extent of the federal revisions.

He encouraged potential applicants to continue working on aspects of the application that are unlikely to change, specifically Criterion 3 (Financial Capacity) and Criterion 5 (Technical Capacity). Director Lochner explained the most likely changes include those related to the President's Executive Order on DEI, and the low-cost and middle class affordability options. Director Lochner estimated applications would be due in early August of this year.

Director Lochner then explained he would like to get feedback during this meeting from potential applicants about the need for a 30-day public comment period for the updated NOFO. He requested the input because NTIA is not going to require a public comment period, and it will be up to individual states to decide. It was determined formal feedback would be sought during Public Comment.

Michael Brase asked Director Lochner if the Board could be provided with the proposed changes planned by NTIA. Director Lochner explained that information is not available as it is under review by Commerce Secretary Lutnick and the ABO has only received some information about potential changes in verbal discussions.

Christine O'Conner asked Director Lochner about the timeline for availability of the majority of Alaska's BEAD grant funding. She asked if Alaska would be able to request a full drawdown upon approval of the Final Proposal by NTIA. Director Lochner explained the timeframe of the extended application period, the ABO application review period, the NTIA Final Proposal review period, and the NIST review period, and estimated the ABO would be able to begin drawdown of funds used for grant awards sometime in early March 2026.

Christine O'Connor said she had heard reports that other states were having difficulty drawing down funds. Director Lochner attributed that to onerous reporting requirements and said reporting is something anticipated to be revised with all the anticipated changes and that should address the drawdown issues.

**VI. Unfinished Business**

None.

**VII. New Business**

None.

#### **VIII. Public Comment**

Shawn Williams encouraged the Alaska Broadband Office to have a 30-day comment period for the update Notice of Funding Opportunity mentioned by Thomas Lochner during his report on the Alaska Broadband Grant Program. Mr. Williams asked for an update on the status of the recordings of the two listening sessions held in late March regarding possible changes to the program. Deputy Director Von Barga responded she believed the issue had been corrected, but said she would confirm.

Thomas Lochner asked for additional input from the attending public regarding the need for a public comment period of the revised Notice of Funding Opportunity for the Alaska Broadband Grant Program once all the new federal guidance had been incorporated.

Shawn Williams reiterated his positive support of a public comment period.

There was no comment, so Deputy Director Von Barga further encouraged the attending members of the public, many associated with potential applicants, to provide input.

Kelly Williams stated it is very important all stakeholders have the time to fully understand the changes and supported the public comment period.

Amber McDonald commented in the chat that she agreed the comment period is important and appreciated, and it gives a chance to review the new rules and ask any necessary questions if there are any.

There being no further public comment, Chair Ledford closed the public comment period of the meeting at 10:29am.

#### **IX. Board Member Business from the Floor**

None.

#### **X. Next Meeting Date**

The next regularly scheduled meeting is scheduled for June 16, 2025. Deputy Director Von Barga said if something critical arose, a special meeting could be called.

#### **XI. Adjournment**

Chair Ledford adjourned the meeting at 10:31am on April 14, 2025.