



# IBEW POLICY BRIEF

## Chapter 7: Broadband

The IBEW supports policy efforts to ensure all Americans can access affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband, particularly those expanding access for rural, unserved, and underserved communities. Recently, this access has become even more vital, as high-speed broadband is now used for both medical care and education services.

### Recent Developments

#### Broadband Funding in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) includes a historic investment of \$65 billion in broadband infrastructure funding to ensure all Americans have access to high-speed broadband internet. Funding will spread across several grant programs for states and communities.

#### The \$42.45 billion BEAD Program

The most extensive broadband grant program created under BIL is the \$42.5 billion Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. BEAD supplies grants to states to accelerate broadband deployment. The Biden-Harris administration announced the funding each state will receive under the BEAD program in June 2023. Nineteen states will receive at least \$1 billion.

The Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) will administer the program. Each state will receive a minimum of \$100 million, with 10 percent set aside for underserved high-cost areas. States must certify they have met 100 percent of "unserved" regions before funding deployment begins in "underserved" areas.

The IBEW has been working with federal and state officials to advocate for the BEAD program to include the strongest labor standards allowed under the law, including pushing for employer neutrality for workers to organize and collectively bargain, and for contractors to pay workers at least the local prevailing wage.

### **Other BIL Broadband Programs**

NTIA will also offer broadband infrastructure funding for the following:

- The \$14.2 billion Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) provides a monthly subsidy to low-income households for their broadband service
  - The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced in January that nearly 23 million households benefit from ACP
  - However, if Congress does not appropriate additional funding the program will run out of money by April 2024
- Digital Equity Grants: \$2.75 billion to establish two new grant programs that promote digital inclusion and equity in historically underserved communities
- Tribal Broadband Connectivity Fund: \$2 billion
- Middle-mile broadband infrastructure: \$1 billion
- Rural communities: \$2 billion
- Appalachian Regional Commission's High-Speed Internet Initiative: \$100 million

### **Broadband in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021**

The Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds program, a part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), provided \$350 billion in emergency funding for water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure investments. In addition, the Biden-Harris administration included labor standards in the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. Companies receiving funds through this program must pay their workers at least prevailing wages or provide significant wage and hour information to the federal government.

The ARPA also includes \$10 billion in Coronavirus Capital Projects Funds. The Department of Treasury officials who will administer the funding have stated they prefer states to use these funds for broadband.

### **Pending Priorities**

The IBEW supports policies that ensure federal taxpayer dollars encourage unions and collective bargaining.

### **Ensuring Unionized High-Road Employers Receive Funding**

The IBEW's primary objective is to ensure high-road unionized employers are first in line to receive federal and state grants for building broadband service infrastructure. Meeting this objective requires federal and state agencies responsible for disbursing broadband funding to mandate that a contractor has a demonstrated record of compliance with labor and employment laws.

Federal and state agencies can do this through pre-certification and required reporting of violations. Agencies can also attach standards to ensure workers are paid at least the prevailing wage and to exclude low-road contractors and subcontractors from receiving government contracts. The IBEW supports incorporating labor standards and bid preferences for responsible contractors on all broadband programs, encouraging highly skilled family-supporting job creation.

The Department of Commerce’s BEAD program demonstrates that the Biden-Harris administration is following through with its promise to support the creation of middle-class, union jobs in the telecommunications sector. The BEAD guidelines are as follows:

- To be eligible for funding, states must document and certify they have consulted and coordinated with labor unions to develop their buildout plans
- States must prioritize employers and contractors with a demonstrated record of compliance with federal labor and employment laws
- States must ensure use of a highly skilled workforce to build the BEAD-financed broadband network
- Contractors can fulfill the requirement for highly skilled workforce through graduates of registered apprenticeships or other joint labor-management training programs
- The BEAD program strongly encourages and incentivizes paying workers prevailing wages and using a unionized workforce or project labor agreement (PLA)
- Companies that don't certify they are paying prevailing wages are to report specific information about the quality of the jobs they are creating
- Companies must disclose their plans for the continuity of the workforce
- The BEAD program provides authority for and encourages the use of labor peace agreements

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