



**Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG)  
Joint Powers Authority Agenda**

**STAFF REPORT**

To: ESCOG Joint Powers Authority  
From: Scott Armstrong, Regional Broadband Coordinator  
Subject: Informational Broadband Update  
Meeting date: October 22, 2025  
Prepared on: October 10, 2025

Attachments: none

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The following report provides information and updates associated with regional broadband activities. I would be happy to discuss these topics or any other broadband-related topics in more detail at your convenience.

**General Broadband Information:**

The Inyo-Mono Broadband Consortium (IMBC) website (<https://ConnectedEasternSierra.net/>) includes broadband-related information for residents, businesses, and Internet Service providers in our region. The site also includes a variety of tools, such as a speed tests, broadband needs estimator, service issue reporting options, and several broadband-related maps. *Funding for this project has been provided in full or in part through a grant by the Rural and Urban Regional Broadband Consortia Grant Account of the California Advanced Services Fund, a program administered by the California Public Utilities Commission.*

**Grants Information:**

*FFA Round 2 Grant, Limited Opportunity (Construction):*

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) Round 2 for the Last-Mile Federal Funding Account (FFA) grant is limited to projects in the 6 counties in which no Federal Funding Account grants were awarded. Those six counties include *Inyo*, Calaveras, Contra Costa, Monterey and Trinity Counties.

The application window closed on June 2. Stimulus Technologies, Golden State Connect Authority and Frontier submitted a total of 13 applications. Public information on the projects hasn't yet been made public in the CPUC Broadband Portal. No other applications submitted during the initial FFA application round will be evaluated or awarded.

Information related to the 11 FFA Round 2 project applications can be found in the CPUC Broadband Portal. Type "Inyo" in the County Name box, then click "Go" to show only those applications for project areas in Inyo County. The first three listings (Inyo 1, Inyo 2 and Kern) are from the first round of FFA applications and will not be considered during this round.

You can view the FFA Round 2 project application locations on the FFA Public Map. To view the approved project locations from the first round of FFA applications, select the Federal Funding Account Awards layer. You may want to deselect the FFA Eligible Counties and the Federal Funding Account Locations layers to make it easier to the project locations.

Since the combined cost of all FFA Round 2 project applications in Inyo County far exceeds the allocation for the County, we're expecting only a handful of the submitted applications to be approved for FFA funding. Several of these project areas were also included in applications submitted for BEAD grant funding (see the article below). The evaluation and award process could last through this fall with construction starting in 2026.

The grant requires the construction of reliable last-mile infrastructure to deliver synchronous 100Mbps or better Internet service, a 5-year freeze on Internet service costs, and low-cost Internet service plans.

- CPUC FFA Awards and Recommendations: <https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/industries-and-topics/internet-and-phone/broadband-implementation-for-california/last-mile-federal-funding-account/federal-funding-account-awards>
- CPUC Broadband Portal: <https://broadbandportal.cpuc.ca.gov/>
- CPUC FFA Awards Dashboard: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/cpuc.broadbandsupport/viz/FederalFundingAccountAwardsDashboard/FFADashboardOriginal>
- CPUC FFA Public Map: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/9fb1e88c59c44178b1768c1f03d77543/page/Page>

### *BEAD (Construction):*

The Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program is a Federal broadband construction grant program that aims to connect all unserved locations to the Internet at speeds of at least 100Mbps/20Mbps.

The CPUC is administering the implementation of the State's BEAD construction grant program, and the State is required to have project applications for all unserved locations in its Final Proposal to the NTIA. Eligible locations are shown on the CPUC's Bead Post-Challenge map (the reddish dots

represent unserved locations), and project areas are required to be entire Census Block Groups with an option to exclude up to 10% of the eligible locations. Census Block Group boundaries can be enabled in the map in the Political Boundaries menu, but you'll need to zoom in a bit to be able to see that feature on the map.

The NTIA issued a policy update to the BEAD program on June 6, 2025, which required states to revise their BEAD subgrantee selection process. This notice modified the technologies allowed for funding as well as the scoring rubric for applications. The emphasis on fiber was removed, and licensed fixed wireless, unlicensed fixed wireless, and low-earth-orbit satellite are to be evaluated as equivalent to fiber-optic service. Every state was required to conduct at least one additional subgrantee selection round, referred to as Benefit of the Bargain rounds, using the new tech-neutral rules and scoring rubric. Additionally, the NTIA rescinded all Final Proposal approvals in other states that occurred prior to the publication of the policy update notice, and it required states to reevaluate the applications based on the updated guidance.

Following two Benefit of the Bargain project application rounds, the last of which closed on October 3, the CPUC has been evaluating project applications and preparing its Final Proposal which is due to the NTIA on November 21.

Providers indicated that applications were submitted for all Census Block Groups in Inyo County, and for the two northernmost Census Block Groups in Mono County. It is highly likely that other applications were submitted as well, including applications from low-earth-orbit satellite Internet service providers. The full list of BEAD project applications in our region should be available in late November, and updated subgrantee selection and timeline information is available on the State's BEAD 2.0 Subgrantee Selection Process web page.

- CPUC BEAD Post-Challenge Map: <https://register.challenge.cpuc.ca.gov/>
- NTIA June 6 Policy Update Notice: [https://broadbandusa.ntia.gov/funding-programs/policies-waivers/BEAD Restructuring Policy Notice](https://broadbandusa.ntia.gov/funding-programs/policies-waivers/BEAD_Restructuring_Policy_Notice)
- CPUC BEAD 2.0 Subgrantee Selection Page: <https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/industries-and-topics/internet-and-phone/broadband-implementation-for-california/bead-program/bead-subgrantee-selection>

### *USDA BTA 2023 (Technical Assistance only, no construction):*

The USDA Broadband Technical Assistance contract work for the network-design projects for Hammil (Mono County) and Furnace Creek (Inyo County) was completed a couple weeks ago.

### *CASF Rural & Urban Regional Broadband Consortia Grant Account (funds the IMBC):*

The CPUC issued a proposed decision and proposed modifications to Appendix C (Appendix C drives the IMBC work plan) for the Regional Broadband Consortia (RBC) Grant Account and will be on the CPUC's October 30 Voting Meeting Agenda.

Key points from the proposed decision and proposed modifications:

- Potentially align the RBC grants with the fiscal year, resulting in a 5-month gap in grant funding, possibly implemented as a no-cost (unfunded) extension of current grants through June 30, 2026. The grant that funds the IMBC is scheduled to expire on January 31, 2026.

- Recommend no increase in funding above the current \$200,000 per grant year.
- Allow reimbursement for BEAD project work.
- Allow for Tribal Regional Broadband Consortia.
- Allow a variance of potentially 10% between budgeted costs and actual costs, reducing the need for Commission approval for minor budget modifications.
- Allow for reimbursement of administrative costs, such as work required to submit payment requests, progress reports, etc., that are not currently included as reimbursable work products.
- Include reimbursement for future broadband expansion activities with a letter from the Director. This will help us easily incorporate future broadband expansion programs into our work plan and to get reimbursed for that work.

With the expected gap in IMBC funding and my planned retirement on March 1, 2026, I'm working with the ESCOG Executive Director, County Administrators, City Managers and County IT Directors to plan for a future RBC Grant application with updated work plan activities.

**BUDGET IMPACTS:**

None.

**LEGAL REVIEW:**

Not applicable.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

None, informational only.