

**RURAL BROADBAND TASK FORCE**  
Tuesday, September 13, 2022, 1:30-3:00 p.m. CT  
Nebraska Public Media  
1800 N 33rd Street, Board Room, Lincoln, Nebraska  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Ed Toner, Nebraska Information Technology Commission  
Mary Ridder, Nebraska Public Service Commission (video)  
Senator Bruce Bostelman, Nebraska Legislature  
Dan Curran, Nebraska Department of Economic Development  
Tom Shoemaker, Pinpoint Communications  
Andrew Whitney, Bryan Health  
Andrew Buker, University of Nebraska  
Ron Cone, ESU 10

**Members on Video (Non-voting)**

Senator Curt Friesen, Nebraska Legislature  
Zachary Hunnicutt, Hunnicutt Farms  
Gwen Kautz, Dawson Public Power District (video)

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Daniel Spray, Precision Technology; Steve Wellman, Nebraska Department of Agriculture

**OPENING BUSINESS, ROLL CALL NOTICE**

The chair, Ed Toner, called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. There were eight members present at the time of roll call. A quorum existed to conduct official business. The meeting announcement was posted on the Nebraska Public Meeting website on Sept. 1, 2022 and the Rural Broadband Task Force website on Sept. 2, 2022. The agenda was posted on the Rural Broadband Task Force website on Sept. 6, 2022.

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act was posted on the wall.

**APPROVAL OF THE [MARCH 18, 2022 MINUTES](#)\***

**Mr. Cone moved to approve the meeting minutes. Mr. Shoemaker seconded. Roll call vote: Toner-Yes, Ridder-Yes, Curran-Yes, Shoemaker-Yes, Whitney-Yes, Buker-Yes, and Cone-Yes. Results: Yes-7, No-0, Abstained-0. Motion carried.**

**UPDATES—FEDERAL BROADBAND FUNDING**

**Broadband Working Group.** Cullen Robbins reported that the Connect Nebraska Working Group consists of representatives of the state budget office, governor's office, Nebraska Public Service Commission and the Nebraska Information Technology Commission/Office of the CIO. The working group is coordinating federal broadband funding programs. A new website with information on federally funded broadband programs is available at <https://broadband.nebraska.gov>.

**Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Programs Administered by NTIA**

**Middle Mile Grant Program.** The NTIA Middle Mile Grant program is a competitive grant program. Applications are due Sept. 30. Applicants from Nebraska are required to coordinate with the state

broadband coordinating entity. A form is available on the Nebraska Public Service Commission's website. Completed forms should be submitted by Sept. 23.

**Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD).** Nebraska submitted its application to receive BEAD planning funds. The NTIA is reviewing applications and is expected to award funding to most states in October. The Nebraska Public Service Commission will be administering the funds and plans to hire staff, begin outreach activities, and develop a new broadband map when planning funds are awarded. Nebraska will receive a minimum of \$100 million in BEAD funding. The NTIA is expected to determine the final allocations for states in the spring of 2023.

**State Digital Equity Planning.** Nebraska will receive \$600,000 to complete a state digital equity plan. After completing their plans, states will be able to apply for follow-on funding to establish a digital equity grant program. States will receive a minimum of \$7.2 million from this program.

#### **American Rescue Plan Act**

Nebraska will receive \$128.7 million in funding from the Capital Projects Fund administered by the U.S. Department of the Treasury. LB 1024 allocated the funding by congressional district and determined how the funding would be used. Funding for \$87.7 million for broadband deployment projects in Congressional Districts 1 and 3 was approved by the Department of the Treasury in August. The Department of the Treasury is reviewing the state's application for the use of the remaining funds for multi-purpose community facilities which enable work, education and health monitoring remotely in Congressional District 2.

LB 1024 directed the Nebraska Department of Economic Development to administer the Capital Projects funding. The Department of Economic Development is finalizing an agreement to have the Public Service Commission administer the funding for broadband projects.

## **HOW CAN THE TASK FORCE AND MEMBERS SUPPORT THE BROADBAND WORKING GROUP AND FEDERALLY FUNDED STATE BROADBAND EFFORTS**

Ms. Byers shared the following suggestions for how the Rural Broadband Task Force can support planning efforts:

- Getting updates on BEAD and Digital Equity planning efforts at meetings
- Providing feedback on BEAD and Digital Equity planning during meetings
- Help identify digital equity best practices and resources
- Submitting a letter of support/endorsement for the Digital Equity and BEAD plans during the 30-day comment period prior to submission of final plans

Individual members and their organizations can also:

- Help host/organize/publicize Digital Equity and/or BEAD listening sessions
- Help identify digital equity best practices and resources
- Participate in regional digital equity planning efforts
- Submit written comments during the 30-day comment period for BEAD and Digital Equity Plans

Commissioner Ridder asked if the task force's subcommittees would be a good source of information and recommendations. Members also suggested working with the Nebraska Library Association and Nebraska Hospital Association to spread the word at their meetings and conferences. Ron Cone shared information about a speed test for K-12 students.

## **BROADBAND UPDATES**

- **Broadband Bridge Grant Program.** The Public Service commission received 115 applications requesting nearly \$57 million in the second round of the Broadband Bridge Grant Program. Grants are expected to be awarded in December.
- **NUSF Reverse Auction.** The Nebraska Public Service Commission established a framework to take funding not used by a carrier to have a reverse auction to assist other carriers. \$13.1 million was available from funding originally allocated to Frontier. However, only one bid was received for approximately \$23,000. The Commission will be examining ways to better distribute this funding.
- **RDOF Reverse Auction.** The FCC approved NextLink's application to receive \$25 million to provide broadband to 14,000 locations in Nebraska. After the FCC did not approve LTD's bids in Nebraska, NextLink is the largest winning bidder in Nebraska.
- **FCC Broadband Map.** The FCC is expected to release the first iteration of its new broadband map in November. The NTIA has announced that it expects to use the second iteration of the map to allocate BEAD funding.

## **RECOGNITION OF DEPARTING MEMBERS**

Chair Ed Toner recognized Senator Curt Friesen and Commissioner Mary Ridder who will be leaving their elected positions in January. Both Senator Curt Friesen and Commissioner Mary Ridder have been actively involved in the Rural Broadband Task Force and have been instrumental in implementing many of the task force's recommendations.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Ed Toner thanked Nebraska Public Media for hosting the meeting.

**Shoemaker moved to adjourn. The motion was seconded. All were in favor.  
Chairperson Toner declared the meeting adjourned the meeting at 2:16pm CT.**

Meeting minutes were taken by Lori Lopez Urdiales and reviewed by Anne Byers, Office of the CIO.