



NOFO SUMMARY

Enabling Middle Mile Infrastructure Program- \$1 billion grant program to support deployments of middle mile infrastructure.

The Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Grant (MMG) Program provides funding for the construction, improvement, or acquisition of middle mile infrastructure. The purpose of the grant program is to expand and extend middle mile infrastructure to reduce the cost of connecting areas that are unserved or underserved to the internet backbone.

Key Dates

- Complete applications must be received by NTIA through the Application Portal **no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) on September 30, 2022.**
- **NTIA expects to complete its review, selection of successful applicants, and award processing by February 16, 2023.** NTIA expects that the start date for awards under this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) will be no earlier than March 1, 2023.
- NTIA anticipates announcing awards made under the MMG Program on a rolling basis during calendar year 2023.

Eligibility

- To apply for the MMG Program, an entity must be a State, political subdivision of a State, Tribal government, technology company, electric utility, utility cooperative, public utility district, telecommunications company, telecommunications cooperative, nonprofit foundation, nonprofit corporation, nonprofit institution, nonprofit association, regional planning council, Native entity, economic development authority, or any partnership of two (2) or more of these entities.

Anticipated Amounts

- NTIA will make up to \$980,000,000 available for federal assistance under the MMG Program (\$1,000,000,000 minus two percent set aside to cover NTIA's administrative costs).
- NTIA expects to make awards under this program within the following funding range: \$5,000,000 to \$100,000,000. The period of performance for grants issued pursuant to this program ends five years from the date on which the grant funds are made available to the eligible entity.

Period Performance

- Period of Performance To be eligible to obtain a middle mile grant, an eligible entity shall agree to complete the buildout of the middle mile infrastructure described in the application by not

later than five (5) years after the date on which amounts from the grant are made available to the eligible entity.

Extension

- Extensions- An eligible entity may submit a request for an extension, which must include the justification for such an extension and all relevant circumstances. At the request of an eligible entity, the Assistant Secretary may extend the buildout deadline by not more than one (1) year if the eligible entity certifies that:
 - (i) the eligible entity has a plan for use of the grant funds;
 - (ii) the project to build out middle mile infrastructure is underway; or
 - (iii) extenuating circumstances require an extension of time to allow completion of the project to build out middle mile infrastructure.

Cost Sharing or Matching

- The amount of a middle mile grant awarded to an eligible entity may not exceed 70 percent of the total project cost.

Buildout Benchmarks

- Buildout Benchmarks Buildout benchmarks will be established as a condition of any middle mile grant. An eligible entity that receives a middle mile grant shall demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Assistant Secretary that it has completed the buildout of 40 percent of project miles by the end of the second year after the award date, 60 percent of project miles by the end of the third year, 80 percent of project miles by the end of the fourth year, and 100 percent of project miles by the end of the fifth year.
- For the sake of clarity, the project must be completed, lit, and operating no later than five years from the date on which the grant funds are made available to the eligible entity.

Prioritization of Applications Meeting Statutory Criteria

- As directed by Section 60401(d)(2) of the Infrastructure Act, the MMG Program will prioritize applications that meet at least two of the following five criteria:
 1. The eligible entity adopts fiscally sustainable middle mile strategies.
 2. The eligible entity commits to offering non-discriminatory interconnection to terrestrial and wireless last mile broadband providers and any other party making a bona fide request.
 3. The eligible entity identifies specific terrestrial and wireless last mile broadband providers that have (i) expressed written interest in interconnecting with middle mile infrastructure planned to be deployed by the eligible entity; and (ii) demonstrated sustainable business plans or adequate funding sources with respect to such interconnection described in (i).
 4. The eligible entity has identified supplemental investments or in-kind support (such as waived franchise or permitting fees) that will accelerate the completion of the planned project.
 5. The eligible entity has demonstrated that the middle mile infrastructure will benefit national security interests of the United States and the Department of Defense.

Connections to Anchor Institutions

- Each applicant seeking an award to build middle mile infrastructure using fiber-optic technology shall certify that the proposed project, upon completion, will include direct interconnection facilities that will facilitate the provision of broadband service, at speeds not less than 1 Gigabit per second for downloads and 1 Gigabit per second for uploads to anchor institutions located within 1,000 feet of the middle mile infrastructure.

NTIA will offer technical assistance and may provide additional guidance on this issue:

I. Highly Skilled Workforce

To ensure that applicants have the technical and operational capacity to carry out the project, applicants must submit a plan for ensuring that the project workforce will be an appropriately skilled and credentialed workforce (including by the applicant and each of its contractors and subcontractors). For purposes of this Section, the “project workforce” includes those employees of the applicant, its contractors, or subcontractors directly engaged in the physical construction of the middle mile infrastructure, but does not include support staff of senior management. The plan for a highly skilled workforce should include the following information:

- The ways in which the applicant will ensure the use of an appropriately skilled workforce, e.g., through Registered Apprenticeships or other joint labor-management training programs that serve all workers;
- The steps that will be taken to ensure that all members of the project workforce will have appropriate credentials, e.g., appropriate and relevant pre-existing occupational training, certification, and licensure;
- Whether the workforce is unionized;
- Whether the workforce will be directly employed or whether work will be performed by a subcontracted workforce; and
- The entities that the applicant plans to contract and subcontract with in carrying out the proposed work.

II. Advancing Equitable Workforce Development and Job Quality Objectives

A skilled workforce is critical to meeting infrastructure buildout timelines under the Infrastructure Act and connecting households across the country to reliable, affordable, highspeed broadband. A well-trained workforce will also allow for the safe deployment of sustainable networks. To meet the workforce needs of the MMG Program, applicants must make appropriate investments to develop a skilled, diverse workforce for the jobs that the applicants need to fill. Each applicant must provide the information described below as part of its application:

- A description of how it will support the development and use of a highly skilled workforce capable of carrying out MMG Program work in a manner that is safe and effective.
- A description of the applicant’s participation in sector-based partnerships among employers, education and training providers, unions and any other labor-management organizations, the public workforce system, unions, and worker organizations, and community-based organizations that provide relevant

training (including through Registered Apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships that are integrated with Registered Apprenticeships, or other quality work-based learning programs) and provide wraparound services to support workers to access and complete training (such as child care, transportation, mentorship, etc.), to attract, train, retain, or transition to meet local workforce needs and increase high-quality job opportunities.

- A description of how the applicant will plan to create equitable on-ramps into broadband-related jobs (e.g., how entities plan to engage or partner with stakeholders like State, Territorial, and local workforce boards, training partners, labor and community organizations); maintain job quality for new and incumbent workers engaged in the sector; and continually engage with labor organizations and community-based organizations to maintain worker voice throughout the planning and implementation process.
- A description of how the applicant will ensure that the job opportunities created by the MMG Program and other broadband funding programs are available to a diverse pool of workers, including by engaging in targeted outreach to populations that have traditionally been underrepresented in broadband and information technology jobs, including but not limited to women and people of color. Applicants should be prepared to report on the demographics of the workforce (including contractors and subcontractors) that is engaged on a project utilizing MMG Program grant funding (this will be aggregate workforce data only, not personally identifiable information), and should expect that this data will be made public.
- A description of other equitable workforce development and job quality activities the applicant participates in, including, for example:
 - Providing Registered Apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships tied to a Registered Apprenticeship, joint labor management partnerships, and other high-quality, on-the-job training opportunities, which may include minimum requirements of contractor or subcontractor job hours to be performed by apprentices; and ensuring that such programs lead to employment with wages at rates not less than the rates prevailing on projects and other eligible activities of a similar character in the locality as determined by the Secretary of Labor in accordance with subchapter IV of chapter 31 of title 40, United States Code.
 - Offering “quality jobs.”
 - Prioritizing the hiring of local workers, implementing robust and specific plans to recruit historically underrepresented populations facing labor market barriers, and ensuring that they have reasonable access to the job opportunities created by the applicant. Such populations may include communities of color, women, and other groups (such as persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ people, disconnected youth, individuals in recovery, individuals with past criminal records, including justice impacted and reentry participants, serving trainees participating in the SNAP, TANF, and WIC, and veterans and military spouses).

State Coordination on Broadband Projects

- Prospective non-State and non-Tribal Government applicants must, prior to submitting an application, coordinate and consult with the State Broadband Office or other coordinating body located in the jurisdiction in which the eligible entity proposes to deploy middle mile infrastructure to ensure that the proposal is consistent with the State's broadband plan and priorities.

Application and Submission Information

- Address to Request Application Package Application forms and instructions are available at <https://grants.ntia.gov/>.
- Applications will be accepted until the deadline and will be processed as received. Application packages, or portions thereof, submitted by email, paper, or facsimile will not be accepted.

Budget Narrative and Detailed Budget Justification

- Each applicant must submit a Budget Narrative and a Detailed Budget Justification Spreadsheet through the Application Portal at <https://grants.ntia.gov/>.
- All budget information must support the dollar amounts identified in the SF-424 and SF-424C and demonstrate that the project or activity meets the eligible use requirements in the Infrastructure Act and this NOFO.

Eligible Uses of Funds for the MMG Program

- Based on the scope of the MMG Program, below are non-exclusive examples of eligible uses of MMG Program funds:
 - Construction, improvement, and/or acquisition of facilities and telecommunications equipment required to deploy middle mile broadband facilities;
 - Engineering design, permitting and work related to environmental, historical and cultural reviews;
 - Personnel costs, including salaries and fringe benefits for staff and consultants required for the implementation of the MMG Program (such as project managers, program directors, subject matter experts, grant administrators, financial analysts, accountants, and attorneys);
 - Reasonable, post-NOFO, pre-application expenses in an amount not to exceed \$50,000. Pre-application expenses, which include expenses related to preparing an application, may be reimbursed if they are incurred after the publication date of this NOFO and prior to the date of issuance of the grant award from NTIA, except that lobbying costs and contingency fees are not reimbursable from grant funds. These costs should be clearly identified in the proposed project budget and must be approved by NTIA and the Grants Officer in writing to be considered allowable. Additionally, preapplication costs are incurred at the sole risk of the applicant and will not be reimbursed by NTIA if the proposed project does not receive an award pursuant to this program; and
 - Other costs necessary to carrying out programmatic activities of an award, not to include ineligible costs described below in Section IV.I.2 of this NOFO.

Review Process for the MMG Program

The review process will be divided into several stages, as outlined below:

1. Initial Administrative and Eligibility Review of Complete Application Packets
 - a. After determining that an application is complete, NTIA will evaluate whether the proposed project meets the Infrastructure Act's threshold eligibility criteria (see Section III above) before entering proposals into the Merit Review stage:
 - First, as directed by Section 60401(d)(3) of the Infrastructure Act, each applicant must provide evidence sufficient to demonstrate that it "is capable of carrying out a proposed project in a competent manner, including by demonstrating that the eligible entity has the financial, technical and operational capability to carry out the proposed project and operate the resulting middle mile broadband network."
 - Second, as directed by Section 60401(e)(3)(A) of the Infrastructure Act, each applicant (i.e., eligible entity) must certify that the proposed project will, upon completion, be capable of supporting retail broadband service.
 - Third, as directed by Section 60401(f) of the Infrastructure Act, each applicant must commit to a non-federal cost share of no less than 30 percent of the total project cost. Under the statute, only Tribal governments and Native entities may request a partial or complete waiver of this requirement for (i) the effective delivery and administration of middle mile grants to Tribal governments; or (ii) the construction, improvement, or acquisition of middle mile infrastructure on trust land. In the event that a Tribal government or Native entity seeks such a waiver, such entities must submit documentation substantiating the need for that waiver.
 - Fourth, as directed by Section 60401(e) of the Infrastructure Act, each applicant must make a binding commitment to prioritize at least one of the following via the funded middle mile network:
 - a. Connecting middle mile infrastructure to last mile networks that provide or plan to provide broadband service to households in unserved areas;
 - b. Connecting non-contiguous trust lands; or
 - c. The offering of wholesale broadband service at reasonable rates on a carrier-neutral basis.
 - Fifth, as directed by Section 60401(e)(3)(D) of the Infrastructure Act, an eligible entity that receives a middle mile grant award to build a middle mile project using fiber-optic technology shall offer interconnection in perpetuity, where technically feasible without exceeding current or reasonably anticipated capacity limitations, on reasonable rates and terms to be negotiated with requesting parties. Such interconnection must include both the ability to connect to the public internet and physical interconnection for the exchange of traffic.
2. Merit Review

- a. Applications satisfying the Initial Administrative and Eligibility Review will be evaluated by at least three objective reviewers who have demonstrated expertise in the programmatic and technical aspects of the Middle Mile Grant Program. Reviewers will evaluate applications according to the following evaluation criteria and will independently score each application based on a scale of 0-100.

a. Project Purpose and Benefits (60 points)

- i. Extent to which the project will either (a) facilitate deployment of high-speed broadband networks to currently unserved or underserved areas or (b) improve affordability in already-served markets (e.g., by reducing interconnection costs for last-mile providers or providing opportunities for competitive providers to offer last-mile service). (20 points)
- ii. Whether the project will offer non-discriminatory interconnection in perpetuity, where technically feasible without exceeding current or reasonably anticipated capacity limitations, on reasonable rates and terms to be negotiated with requesting parties. Such interconnection must include both the ability to connect to the public internet and physical interconnection for the exchange of traffic. (10 points)
- iii. Whether the provider commits to offering access to the funded middle mile infrastructure, in perpetuity, on an open access basis. (10 points)
- iv. Extent to which the project will otherwise benefit the proposed service area, including, but not limited to, by (a) facilitating development of carrier-neutral interconnection facilities; (b) improving the redundancy or resiliency of existing middle mile infrastructure; or (c) including direct interconnect facilities that will facilitate the provision of broadband service to anchor institutions located within 1,000 feet of the middle mile infrastructure at speeds of at least 1 Gbps symmetrical. (10 points)
- v. Comprehensiveness and appropriateness of the proposed technical solution for meeting the community's needs, considering the offering's capacity and performance characteristics. Reviewers will consider the proposed network's ability to serve anticipated last mile networks, and to meet the increasing needs of the households, businesses, and anchor institutions in the areas linked by the middle mile facilities at issue. Reviewers will score favorably construction projects that are "shovel ready" and capable of completion within a two-year period. (10 points)

b. Project Sustainability (40 points)

- i. Applicant's organizational capability to complete the specific project proposed. (5 points)
- ii. Reasonableness of the applicant's proposed budget. (10 points)
- iii. Project's fiscal sustainability beyond the award period. (10 points)
- iv. Applicant's commitment to contribute a non-federal cost share of more than 30 percent of the total eligible project costs as reflected in the proposed project budget. (5 points for non-federal share between 30 and 40

percent, 10 points for non-federal share between 41 and 50 percent, 15 points for more than 50 percent non-federal share)

3. Programmatic Review

- a. Prioritization Applications will be prioritized for programmatic review as follows:
 - i. NTIA will first review any application that received a mean score of 80 or higher during the Merit Review and for which the applicant has demonstrated that it will meet at least two of the five requirements set forth in Section 60401(d)(2) of the Infrastructure Act
 - ii. NTIA will next review any other application receiving a mean score of 80 or higher during the Merit Review;
 - iii. Applications receiving scores below 80, for which the applicant has demonstrated that it will meet at least two of the five requirements set forth in Section 60401(d)(2) of the Infrastructure Act (see Section V.A.1), may be entered into Programmatic Review after review of the prioritized applications in the event that (a) the Programmatic Review results in a slate of proposals that do not utilize the entirety of available MMG Program funds or (b) evaluation of other applications is deemed warranted at a later stage in the process to ensure geographic diversity or appropriate diversity in project sizes. At this stage of the review, applications with scores below 80 for which the applicant has demonstrated that it will meet at least two of the five requirements set forth in Section 60401(d)(2) of the Infrastructure Act (see Section V.A.1) will receive priority before other applications with scores below 80.