

# TECHNOLOGY NEUTRAL DOESN'T MEAN TECHNOLOGY BLIND

BEAD Can Still Support Fiber, But  
Communities Need to Speak Up



BEAD FUNDING

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

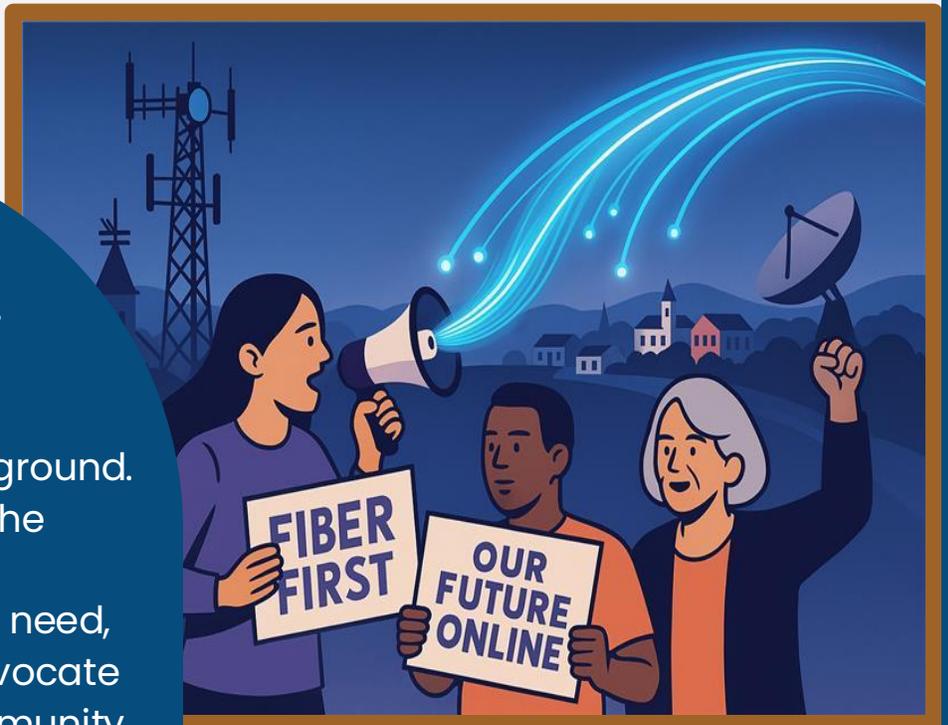
***“Conventional wisdom holds that cities are powerless, mere creatures of the State, subordinate political units of nations. Conventional wisdom is wrong.” – Bruce Katz & Jeremy Nowak, The New Localism***

In every successful public-private partnership that I have led, one element has always stood out. It is not the scale of the investment or the novelty of the technology. It is the presence of a clear and committed public sector leader.

A single determined mayor, county official, board member or city manager can move an infrastructure project from whiteboards to shovels in the ground. These leaders do not wait for the perfect moment or flawless conditions. They recognize the need, build local consensus, and advocate relentlessly for what their community deserves.

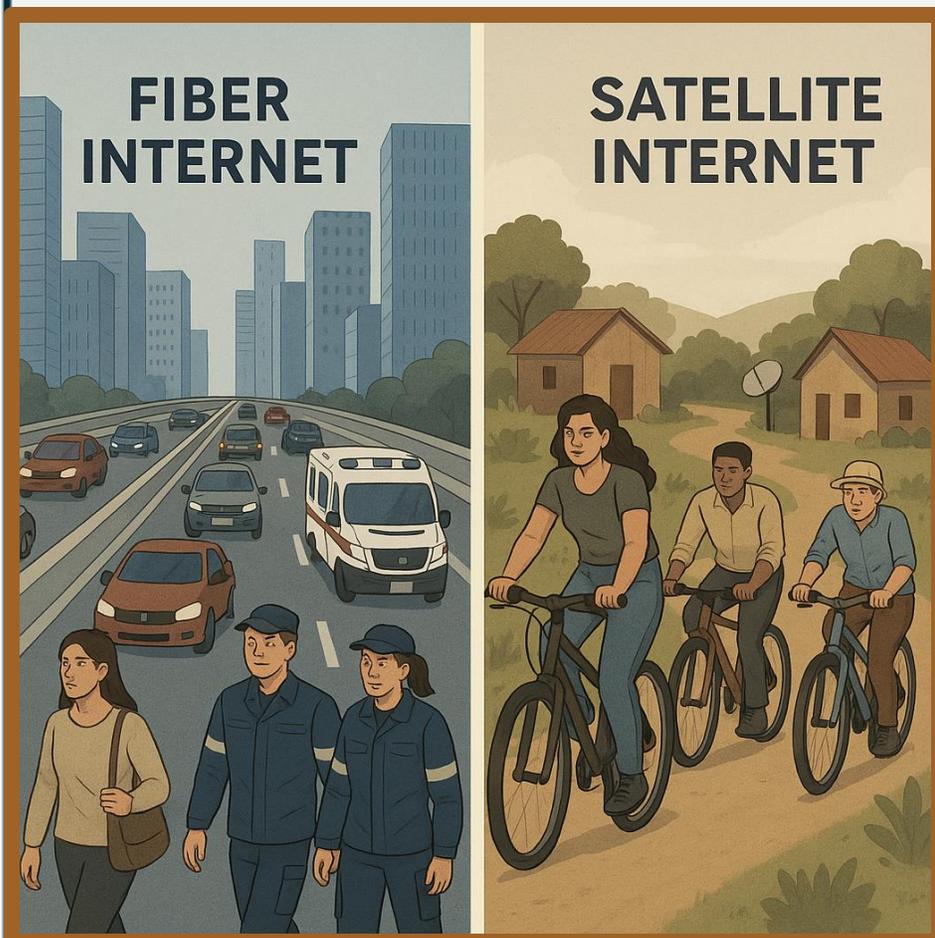
That kind of leadership is exactly what this moment calls for.

The rules for BEAD funding have shifted, and not in fiber’s favor. But communities are not powerless. Local voices can still make the case for lasting infrastructure. But they must do it now, and they must do it clearly.



This article is a call to current and future local leaders. The window to act is open now , but only for a limited time. If you believe your community deserves more than the minimum, this is the time to speak up with urgency, with precision, and with purpose.

# THE RULES HAVE SHIFTED AND SO HAVE THE STAKES



Fiber is equivalent to building a road. It creates a foundation that supports everything from daily commutes to emergency response and long-term economic growth. Satellite internet is more like handing out bicycles. It may work for now, but it cannot carry the same load or meet the same demands. One is infrastructure that lasts. The other is a temporary solution that will not scale with a community's needs.

As a result, technologies like fixed wireless and low-earth orbit satellites (e.g., Starlink, Kuiper) are more likely to receive funding. These are often cheaper to deploy and quicker to install; however, they do not offer the same reliability or capacity as fiber, especially over time.

After months of waiting, the NTIA is moving forward with its newly issued guidance on how states can distribute BEAD broadband funding. The update is significant. It shifts the landscape in a direction that makes it more challenging to build long-term infrastructure with BEAD grants.

States are in a 90-day sprint to revise their broadband grant programs. These revisions must follow a stricter "technology neutral" framework. This means fiber, which is widely recognized as the gold standard, can no longer be prioritized simply because of its quality. Instead, the primary factor in funding decisions is now cost of deployment.

# SHORT-TERM FIXES COME WITH LONG-TERM COSTS

This is a clear departure from how the BEAD program was originally intended to work. Many communities have been preparing to build future-proof broadband networks. A good portion of these communities will now be asked to accept stopgap solutions that do not meet long-term need and will require ongoing upgrades. There are real consequences to this shift. In a case study for a city in California, The Broadband Group found that satellite wireless could not meet the technical requirements for essential public services. The city determined that fiber is necessary for local fire departments and first responders to have reliable support during wildfires or other emergency events. Fiber was recognized as not a luxury, but as a necessity for community safety. Many municipal services depend on consistently reliable, high-capacity infrastructure, not just basic connectivity.



**The guidance from NTIA is final. The timeline is set. Communities must now ask what options are still available to secure lasting, high-performance broadband.**

# LOCAL INPUT CAN STILL MAKE FIBER POSSIBLE

The original Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is still the foundation for the BEAD program. The law defines a category called “priority broadband projects.” These are networks that must “easily scale speeds over time to **meet the evolving connectivity needs** of households and businesses; and support the **deployment of 5G, successor wireless technologies**, and other advanced services.”

States may be able to use this definition to continue supporting fiber projects. Even under the new rules, it is possible to justify fiber as the only viable choice. But to do so, States need detailed information to support their case.

Communities can help by identifying specific technical needs that low-cost alternatives can not meet. For example, only fiber offers the availability, low latency, high capacity, and symmetrical speeds required to support mission-critical services like emergency dispatch, smart traffic systems, remote healthcare monitoring, or connected school campuses.



Fixed wireless and satellite often fail to reliably meet those standards at scale, especially as bandwidth needs inevitably increase over time.

In other words, these are not hypothetical features. They are real, measurable requirements that fiber can deliver, whereas other technologies are often unable. That makes fiber a defensible choice for priority broadband project areas under NTIA rules.

# 90 DAYS (AND COUNTING) WILL SHAPE THE NEXT 20 YEARS

Local and state authorities must work together within this new set of rules if they want to see the delivery of long-term infrastructure. City planning departments have data that internet providers and state governmental entities do not. **Communities can advocate for these essential services by emailing: broadband plans, emergency service requirements, utility planning and technical assessments, and long-range growth projections.** Conversely, the State Broadband Offices should consider opening portals to facilitate information sharing. Strong local input can directly influence whether fiber remains part of the solution.

The latest BEAD guidance makes it harder to fund long-term solutions, but it does not remove the possibility. There is still room for leadership, for advocacy, and for practical action that puts communities first.

State Broadband Offices hold the funds, but you hold the facts. If you are a City Manager, a Mayor, a Planner, or simply someone who believes your community deserves lasting infrastructure, now is the time to step forward.



**Share your data. Make your case. Local support may be the difference between buffering and a connected community when it matters most.**

# HOW THE BROADBAND GROUP CAN HELP

The Broadband Group (TBG) is a leading telecommunications consulting and business advisory firm. For over 25 years, TBG has developed Business Plans, Network Specifications, Engineering Designs, Financial Models, and Deployment Strategies for utilities, municipalities, and many of the nation's Top-Selling Master Planned Communities.

TBG acts as a trusted advisor focused on city and community-wide broadband planning, empowering land developers, utilities, and municipalities to execute informed decisions on implementing high-performance connectivity strategies. We challenge traditional industry metrics and ensure the value chain is maximized for cities and communities seeking to secure investments in advanced wired and wireless network infrastructure.

At TBG, connectivity extends beyond wired and wireless infrastructure. It is about meaningfully connecting individuals and businesses to the world around them through the use of broadband-enabled technologies. It is about understanding how people live, how businesses work, and how communities thrive. It is about creating broadband infrastructure that meets the information needs of today, as well as the emerging new technologies of tomorrow.

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