



Report in Brief

March 20, 2025

Background

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has listed expanding affordable, high-quality broadband to every American as an objective in its 2022–2026 Strategic Plan. However, the combination of standing up new broadband programs and increasing access to broadband is an ongoing, nationwide challenge.

NTIA is responsible for administering \$48.2 billion provided by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) for four different broadband programs, namely the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment program, the Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Grant program, the Digital Equity Act program, and the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program. Each has different programmatic requirements, but they all aim to expand broadband infrastructure and promote broadband adoption and use.

Why We Did This Evaluation

The evaluation objective was to identify potential challenges for deploying broadband to underserved and unserved communities. We interviewed NTIA and state and territory broadband office representatives, surveyed broadband offices, and sent questionnaires to industry stakeholder associations.

NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION

Broadband Stakeholders Identified Various Challenges Affecting Broadband Deployment

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WHAT WE FOUND

We asked broadband officials and industry stakeholders to identify challenges they face with deploying broadband to underserved and unserved locations. In response, broadband officials and industry stakeholders identified challenges with the following: (1) statutory requirements, (2) Notice of Funding Opportunity provisions, (3) supply chain and labor market shortages, and (4) NTIA's communication process.

Our report describes these challenges and does not make recommendations.

SUMMARY OF IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

The challenges identified by broadband officials and industry stakeholders could impact their ability to successfully deploy broadband as required by IIJA.

Challenge 1: Statutory Requirements Could Negatively Impact Deployment Efforts

Broadband stakeholders identified statutory timelines to deploy broadband and lengthy permit processes as concerns that could negatively impact the broadband programs' ability to deploy broadband services.

Challenge 2: BEAD NOFO Provisions Could Negatively Impact Deployment Efforts

Broadband stakeholders identified the aggressive timeline for subgrantee selections and technology requirements and exclusions as concerns that could negatively impact broadband deployment.

Challenge 3: Simultaneous, Nationwide Deployment Could Exacerbate Supply Chain and Labor Market

Broadband stakeholders expressed concerns about possible deployment delays due to supply chain disruptions, workforce shortages, and inadequate broadband office staffing.

Challenge 4: Broadband Officials Expressed Concerns with NTIA's Communication Process

Some broadband officials said NTIA's communication of crucial information pertaining to technical guidance and tools was untimely or inconsistent.