

# Virginia Broadband Affordability and Adoption Planning Grant Program

## Application Process



## **Background**

Access to affordable, reliable high-speed internet, universally across the Commonwealth continues to play a critical and growing role in the ways in which people work, learn, raise families, and receive health care. Full digital opportunity – gaining access to broadband uninhibited by barriers of affordability and adoption - is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services. Through the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act’s Broadband Access, Equity, and Deployment (BEAD) and Digital Equity Act programs, states will be able to develop a full picture of the barriers broadband access, affordability, and adoption. Governor Youngkin and the General Assembly have designated the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development’s Office of Broadband (DHCD) to lead these efforts.

The Department of Housing and Community Development has been designated by Governor Youngkin as the administering entity for the federal Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment program and the Digital Equity Act programs. Virginia received \$5 million in BEAD planning funds to support to support the development of local and tribal broadband adoption and affordability plans.

Additional assistance and questions regarding this planning grant program and application process should be directed to:

**Tamarah Holmes, Ph.D. Director, Office of  
Broadband**

**Cameron Lewis, Digital Opportunity Coordinator**

[cameron.lewis@dhcd.virginia.gov](mailto:cameron.lewis@dhcd.virginia.gov)

804-929-4271

**Digital Opportunity Email Address**

[digitalopportunity@dhcd.virginia.gov](mailto:digitalopportunity@dhcd.virginia.gov)

Please refer questions regarding your application submittal through CAMS to

[digitalopportunity@dhcd.virginia.gov](mailto:digitalopportunity@dhcd.virginia.gov)

## **Program Description**

The Virginia Broadband Affordability and Adoption Planning Grant Program will serve as an opportunity for local and state/federally recognized Tribal governments in Virginia (or their designated community development organizations) to conduct needs assessments, identify priorities, and develop plans with implementation strategies to address and promote digital opportunity in their communities.

The purpose of these plans will be to provide eligible applicants an opportunity to prepare for BEAD non-deployment, federal Digital Equity Act, as well as other governmental and philanthropic funding and programs by assessing the digital needs in their community and proposing sustainable solutions to addressing these identified needs within their implementation plan.

## **Eligible Applicants and Partners**

Eligible applicants must be a local government or a state/federally recognized Tribal government. While local governments and state/federally recognized tribal governments must be the grantee and applying entity, they may work with a community development organization to develop their plan.

## **Plan Minimum Requirements**

### 1. Digital Divide Assessment:

- Provide a detailed assessment of the existing digital divide within the locality or community including but not limited to identifying underserved areas and populations.
- Quantify the disparities in broadband access and adoption rates among different demographic groups.
- Highlight any barriers to broadband access and digital opportunity, such as affordability, lack of digital literacy, or limitations related to broadband adoption.

### 2. Asset Inventory:

- Conduct an inventory of existing broadband-related services and resources within the locality and community.
- Identify potential partners and stakeholders who can contribute to the implementation of the plan.
- Assess available community resources that can be leveraged to promote digital opportunity.

### 3. Implementation Strategy:

- Provide a clear and detailed implementation strategy on how the grant funds will be utilized to address the identified digital gaps and needs within their community.
- Identify potential projects, initiatives, or programs that will be funded to improve broadband affordability and adoption.
- Describe how the plan will ensure the long-term sustainability of the initiatives beyond the grant period.

### 4. Milestones and Outcomes:

- Set measurable milestones to track the progress of the plan's development.
- Define specific and achievable outcomes to be reached by the end of the grant period.
- Describe the methodology for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the plan on digital opportunity within the community.

## **Application Minimum Requirements**

### 1. Planning Process:

- Describe the planning process that will be undertaken to develop the broadband affordability and adoption plan.
- Outline the timeline for key milestones in the planning process.
- Explain how community engagement and input will be integrated into the plan's development.
- Discuss the importance of planning for broadband affordability and adoption in your locality.

### 2. Budget and Financial Accountability:

- Present a detailed line-item budget outlining how the grant funds will be utilized.
- Provide information on how financial accountability and transparency will be maintained throughout the implementation process.

### 3. Overall Quality:

- Clarity and coherence of the application.
- Clearly defined key milestones in the timeline.
- Thoroughness and attention to detail.
- Professionalism of the proposal.

### 4. Organizational Capacity

- Discuss your capacity to administer the planning process, including the extent to which you will identify community partners or procure consulting assistance.

## **Selection Process**

Awardees will be selected through a merit review process on a rolling basis. DHCD reserves the right to revoke an award due to a material misrepresentation and/or failure to remain within compliance of the program requirements. DHCD reserves the right to reject applications or request edits in proposed activities prior to approval. If the total funding request exceeds the funding available by the Application Due Date, DHCD will conduct a competitive review, based on the following criteria (discussed above).

<i>Category</i>	<i>Point Value</i>
1. Planning process:	25
2. Budget and Financial Accountability:	25
3. Overall quality:	25
4. Organizational capacity:	25
<i>Total:</i>	100

### **Technical Assistance, Application Development**

DHCD staff is available to provide technical assistance on the development of an application. Please reach out to DHCD staff prior to engaging a private consultant. *DHCD staff strongly recommends engagement of technical assistance throughout application development.*

### **Project Financing & Funding Amounts**

Awarded grant funds may cover up to 100% of the expenses incurred during the development of this plan and pre-approved by DHCD. Grants made under this program are not intended to fully fund the program of interest, but rather to address any costs or burdens incurred by the organization in the development of the plan. DHCD intends the average grant made under this program will be \$25,000.

Counties, Cities, and Tribal governments may apply jointly. Applications including more than 1 county, city, or tribal government must meet planning requirements unique to the individual counties, cities, or tribal governments.

### **Application Due Date**

Applications will be accepted and evaluated by DHCD on a rolling basis until allocated funds are fully obligated. If funding remains available, applications will be considered in the order of submission. Interested organizations are encouraged to apply as soon as possible to begin development of their affordability and adoption plan. Please note that DHCD Offices close at 5:00 p.m. Therefore, staff will not be available to provide CAMS technical assistance after 5:00 p.m.

### **Centralized Application Management System**

DHCD manages all grants through the Centralized Application and Management System (CAMS). If your organization does not already have a CAMS profile, it is recommended that your organization complete registration as soon as possible. Please register using the “Registration” tab on the [CAMS Home Page](#). DHCD reviews requests according to the order in which they are received and notifies organizations of approval or denial within five business days. The approval of a registration request creates a CAMS profile for the organization by which it can apply for funding programs. Please note that all application questions and required

materials are outlined below. Applicants are encouraged to reference these questions and materials prior to beginning their submission.

Once registered, organizations can submit applications for funding. Please reference the [CAMS User Guide](#) on how to submit an application and submit any questions to [digitalopportunity@dhcd.virginia.gov](mailto:digitalopportunity@dhcd.virginia.gov).

### **Reporting Requirements & Structure, Reimbursement Structure**

Grantees are expected to provide monthly reports in CAMS. Monthly reporting requirements will include, but is not limited to, an overview of the prior month's activities/expenditures and a preview of the forthcoming month's activities/expenditures. Activities should be consistent with your approved timeline.

Remittance requests for reimbursement of grant activities must be submitted through CAMS. Please contact DHCD staff with additional questions on submitting requests for reimbursement.

### **Audit Policy**

The Office of Broadband will require applicants to comply with the Department of Housing and Community Development's audit policy, which is in compliance with state and federal regulations, located at <https://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/sites/default/files/Docx/audit-policy/dhcd-auditpolicy.pdf>

### **Public Disclosure of Applications**

All forms and supporting documents submitted as part of the application packet will be treated as a material representation of fact upon which DHCD will rely in awarding funds. Applicants should be aware that DHCD may make all or portions of their applications for grants under the Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program available publicly for review. If there are any concerns regarding this public display of forms and supporting documents, please contact DHCD staff.

### **Additional Federal Requirements**

DHCD reserves the right to include additional reporting and compliance requirements during the implementation period based upon requirements imposed by the National Telecommunications and Information Association (NTIA) or National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

### **Anticipated Award Announcement**

DHCD Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis. DHCD will review applications and approve awards monthly. Please note, that any applications submitted after the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month

will be held for review until the following month.

All awardees are required to upload their most recent/current audit or financial documents into CAMS prior to issuance of the contract for execution. Please see our audit policy located at <https://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/sites/default/files/Docx/audit-policy/dhcd-auditpolicy.pdf>.

### **Evaluation Process**

DHCD staff will conduct an initial eligibility and administrative screening of submitted applications for completeness, and to ensure that the applicant is eligible to receive funding under the program. Applications not submitted by an eligible applicant will be eliminated from further review. DHCD may continue the review process for an application that is timely submitted by an eligible applicant but is missing certain information or documentation required by this program. In such cases, DHCD may ask the applicant to provide any missing or incomplete materials during this initial review prior to approval or denial of the application.

Once an application is deemed eligible and complete, DHCD will conduct a merit review, to be conducted by DHCD staff. The merit review process will review the application to ensure its conformity with the program objectives, eligible activities, and related costs/budget. The purpose of this review is to provide information to the technical soundness and merits of the application. During the merit review, DHCD may ask applicants to submit additional information to clarify or to further substantiate the representations made in their applications. In addition, if deficiencies are identified during the merit review, the applicant may be contacted by DHCD and asked to revise the application accordingly. Applications will be approved and awarded based on the rolling approval process and monthly review cycle.