

➤ **Overview**

This Request for Information (RFI) aims to position the State of New Mexico and its service providers for success in obtaining middle-mile grant funds from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). Several questions are posed to identify and coordinate applications for NTIA's Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program.

Key sections of the document follow:

Section A: Background
Section B: Input Required to Enable State Collaboration for NTIA Application
Section C: Administrative Considerations

A. Background

➤ **Introduction: NTIA Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program**

The federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) commits over \$45 billion for broadband deployment via the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). One component involves the \$1 billion *Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program*.¹

This program provides grants for the “construction, improvement or acquisition of middle mile infrastructure.” NTIA notes that “*the purpose of the grant program is to expand and extend middle mile infrastructure to reduce the cost of connecting unserved and underserved areas to the internet backbone.*”

➤ **Middle-Mile Expansion Program**

The State of New Mexico recognizes that many unserved and underserved communities lack the availability of high-speed middle-mile networks. Due to this gap, last-mile service providers are unable to cost-efficiently upgrade or extend their last-mile networks, which must interconnect with the middle-mile networks to reach the Internet backbone. Moreover, several stakeholders depend upon dedicated high-speed backhaul, including mobile network operators (MNOs), data centers, research and education networks, public agencies, large enterprises, etc.

The New Mexico Office of Broadband (OBAE) aims to foster the deployment of open-access middle-mile infrastructure across the State. This strategy requires a multifaceted response involving funding and coordination of open-access middle-mile network deployment. Key objectives include projects that are non-duplicative, leverage existing or planned high-capacity middle-mile networks, and target unserved and underserved communities. This strategy is a central component of the Connect New Mexico program, which focuses on driving affordable, universal broadband access to all households, businesses, and community anchor institutions.

¹ [NTIA, Notice of Funding Opportunity, Middle Mile Grant Program](#)

➤ **Purpose of the RFI to Ensure State Collaboration**

New Mexico benefits from the coordinated expansion of middle-mile infrastructure. The New Mexico Office of Broadband Access and Expansion (OBABE) intends to apply the RFI process to: 1) demonstrate to the NTIA how a particular project supports the State's broader strategy to deliver universal broadband access; 2) identify and minimize overlapping projects through convening meetings among applicants and identifying partnership opportunities.

In fact, NTIA stipulates the requirement for collaboration with the state broadband office:

*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.*²

With respect to NTIA's requirement, OBABE welcomes the opportunity to: a) review applications; b) provide a letter of support; c) identify other project partners (private, public, non-profit, etc.) that may be interested in collaborating (e.g., capacity purchase, cost sharing, filing support letters, etc.); d) identify potential areas of overlap with other applications and convene meetings between applicants if mutually agreed upon.

B. Input Required to Enable State Collaboration for NTIA Application

➤ **Please provide the following information**

1. Applicant name
2. Primary applicant type (Single Entity or Partnership)
3. Primary entity type: 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, or economic development authority; or a partnership of two (2) or more entities
4. Project Scope
 - a. Scope of application geography (New Mexico-only or multi-state)
 - b. New Mexico counties and communities included in the proposed build (and, if applicable, other states)
 - c. Overview of the proposed route or service area(s), including information regarding rurality and socio-economic indicators in the area to be served by the proposed project

² NTIA, Notice of Funding Opportunity, Middle Mile Grant Program, Pages 22-23

- d. The level of need in the proposed service area(s), including but not limited to: communities considered unserved and underserved in the proposed service area(s); existing last-mile technologies in the project area; other general economic conditions

5. Potential Impact on Last-Mile Connectivity

- a. Project's potential impact toward catalyzing last-mile deployment, as well as last-mile service providers, which are project partners and their engagement approach (e.g., providing letters of commitment, agreements, or contracts)
- b. Description of the proposed middle-mile service offerings, including the pricing of the services to be offered over the proposed facility
- c. Where possible, demonstration of how a decline in middle mile costs are likely to flow through to consumer broadband prices

6. Competitive Landscape

- a. Existing middle mile service offerings in the area, and how this project addresses gaps and other challenges and attempts to avoid overbuilding
- b. Open access policies, including the nondiscrimination, interconnection, and network management practices that would be adopted to maximize participation by New Mexican stakeholders which may seek today, or in the future, cost-effective access to the middle-mile capacity to reach the public Internet (Note: These include the aforementioned stakeholders – e.g., last-mile and regional service providers, MNOs, data centers, research and education networks, public agencies, large enterprises, etc.)

7. State Collaboration and Support

- a. Please indicate if the applicant plans to seek a letter of support from OBAE.
- b. Please confirm that the applicant is planning to share their application with OBAE.
- c. Please indicate if the applicant is open to collaborating with OBAE on a potential state-coordinated application. (Note: OBAE has discussed potential public-private partnership opportunities in which public agencies can benefit from a project's network capacity in exchange for cash and/or in-kind contributions.)
- d. Please describe any other type of support required from OBAE.

C. Administrative Considerations

➤ Timeline

Please provide your response by **Tuesday, August 23rd**. This timely response will enable OBAE to understand the merits of your application, identify any partnership opportunities, and ensure NTIA applications are complementary and non-overlapping.

➤ Responses

Parties are requested to submit their response via email to: broadband@state.nm.us. Please send any questions regarding the RFI to this email address.

➤ Response and Format

OBAE appreciates and welcomes all feedback. Please ensure that your response includes:

- Name of organization
- Representative or contact name, title, and affiliation
- Contact information, including address, phone, and email
- Signature of representative or contact

➤ Confidentiality

All information received through this request is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). However, if you include proprietary information, please mark it “confidential” to ensure it remains such.

If noted as “confidential”, the information provided in response to this RFI will be treated as trade secret information and not subject to publication or dissemination until otherwise made available by NTIA and/or the applicant.