Agenda/Table of Contents

- ➢ BDO Background
- ➢ BDO Updates
  - ➢ BEAD
  - ➢ Building the Texas Broadband Workforce Program
  - ➢ Middle Mile
  - ➢ Technical Assistance Program (TAP)
  - ➢ BOOT
- ➢ Expanding Regional Capacity Program
- ➢ Q&A

Broadband Impact

- Education
- Telework
- Accessibility
- Public safety
- Access to online markets

- Economic development
- Government services
- Uban revitalization
- Environmental sustainability
- Entertainment

Digital Divide in Texas

Barriers	
Lack of infrastructure	Digital literacy skills
Affordability	Technical support
Access to devices	Trust and safety concerns

Digital Divide in Texas

- According to the latest version of the FCC's National Broadband Map, Texas has:
  - 10,096,058 total locations.
  - 167,807 unserved locations.
  - 77,230 underserved locations.

House Bill 5 (87R)

- Created the Broadband Development Office (BDO) at the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts in 2021.

- Required the BDO to:

  - Create a state broadband plan (June 2022).

    - Updated Texas Digital Opportunity Plan (TDOP) published in 2023.

  - Create a broadband development map (January 2023).

  - Implement a broadband development program to administer broadband expansion grants.

  - Serve as a clearinghouse of information regarding broadband connectivity in the state.

Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program

- BEAD Program application evaluation is underway.

- $3.3 billion in federal funding to connect every eligible unserved and underserved location in Texas.

  - 245,035 BEAD-eligible locations in Texas.

- National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) BEAD Restructuring Policy Notice changes include:

  - Technology neutrality.
  - Removal of non-statutory requirements.
  - Benefit of the Bargain Round.
  - Compressed schedule of events.

BEAD Program Updates
Updated Timeline

Subgrantee Documents Published

June 26

Benefit of the Bargain Round (BOBR)

July 9-22

State Application Challenge Process

July 23 –

Aug. 22

Application Evaluation and Deconfliction

August - September

Building the Texas Broadband Workforce Grant Program

- The Building the Texas Broadband Workforce Grant Program NOFA was posted on June 23 with a July 31 application deadline.

- The program provides $25 million in grant funding to successful applicants to build or expand fiber optic training programs and grow a skilled and robust Texas broadband workforce.

- 19 applications received; BDO has begun evaluations.

  - $60 million in funding requested across all applications.

  - $3.9 million offered in match funding.

- Award announcements are expected in the fall.

Texas Middle Mile (TMM) Program

- TMM Program goals:
  - Expand broadband availability
  - Strengthen network resiliency
  - Enhance affordability
- Additionally, the program incentivizes projects to include infrastructure enhancements that will directly support or integrate with flood detection and monitoring systems in vulnerable areas.
- TMM Program Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) posted Aug. 22
- Applications must be submitted through the BDO Application Portal by Nov. 20 at 2 p.m. CT.
- Additional details available on the TMM Program webpage.

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Technical Assistance Program (TAP)

- TAP was established to deliver no-cost broadband planning services to counties that lack the resources and capacity to undertake their own planning initiatives.

- Each participating county exits the program with a comprehensive county broadband plan.
  - $6 million in CPF funding awarded to Cobb, Fendley & Associates (CF) to conduct the work.
  - All 32 counties that applied for the program were awarded.

- Planning work to date:
  - 6 published county broadband plans
  - 12 county broadband plans being finalized
  - 14 counties are beginning their work with CF.

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Bringing Online Opportunities to Texas (BOOT) Program

- The first round of BOOT was established as a competitive grant program to build last-mile broadband connections that increase high-speed internet service to Texans in eligible areas of the state.

- $120 million in CPF funding made available.

- Impact
  - $11.2 million was awarded to connect:
    - 1,468 residential locations.
    - 77 businesses.
    - 15 community anchor institutions

BOOT II

- The second round of BOOT was a competitive grant program aimed at funding countywide infrastructure projects.

- Two counties in each of the Comptroller's 12 economic regions were selected on a demonstrated need, measured by the percentage of eligible locations lacking broadband service at speeds of 100/20 Mbps.

- Impact

  - The BDO was able to award projects in 21 of the 24 selected counties.

  - $623.4 million in BIF and CPF funding was awarded to connect:

    - 61,185 residential locations.

    - 18,255 businesses.

    - 2,191 community anchor institutions.

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Expanding Regional Capacity Program

- The BDO and TARC have partnered to launch a new statewide initiative on digital access and opportunity entitled, the "Expanding Regional Capacity Program".

- The program funds participating COGs to designate essential staff to implement activities and gauge broadband planning needs.

- Assessments of the state's digital landscape revealed a critical need for expanded local capacity to address broadband and digital opportunity issues.

- The program is designed to empower COGs as local leaders in creating long-term and sustainable solutions for digital access.

Expanding Regional Capacity Program: Scope

- All COGs are eligible for participation.

- The program seeks to leverage existing resources and knowledge to ensure efficient use of resources.

- This is a planning-focused initiative versus construction or infrastructure.

Expanding Regional Capacity Program

Program Goals	Action
Develop local expertise	Fund and support planning commissions to hire a Regional Digital Access Specialist.
Facilitate collaboration	Convene stakeholders and partners to build strong regional networks.
Create action plans	Guide the development of comprehensive regional digital opportunity plans that align with statewide goals.
Provide Resources	Offer ongoing technical assistance and educational resources to support Regional Digital Access Specialists in their local efforts.

Expanding Regional Capacity Program

Organization	Roles and Responsibilities
COGs	Leads on-the-groundwork, including community engagement, developing and implementing plans and strategies, and fostering local partnerships.
TARC	Serves as the program's fiscal agent and administer the funds. They will oversee the day-to-day operations and provide essential support to COGs.
BDO	Provides the funding and overall guidance for success of the program, ensuring it remains aligned with the BDO's statewide mission to bridge the digital divide.

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Expanding Regional Capacity Program

Expected Impact	
Short-term	Regions will have a dedicated leader (Regional Digital Access Specialist) and a clear, data-driven plan for their community.
Medium-term	An increase in coordinated, regional efforts to improve digital access and skills, moving from planning to action.
Long-term	This program will increase economic resilience and quality of life by ensuring all Texans can participate in and benefit from the digital world.

Expanding Regional Capacity Program: Next Steps

- The program is in its initial phase.

- BDO and TARC are actively outlining the immediate next steps.

- TARC will soon launch the application process for COGs and finalize agreements with participants.

- BDO and TARC will provide regular updates as the program progresses.

Expanding Regional Capacity Program

Program Timeline	
2025-2026	• Awardee selection and agreements
2026-2027	• Full program implementation • Partnership development • Measuring progress
2028	• Program conclusion • Final report on outcomes

Questions

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