

TRBP COG Application of Interest

Question-by-Question Guidance for COG's

This guide is intended to help Councils of Governments (COG's) understand the intent behind each application question and provide examples of the types of information that may be included in responses. Responses do not need to be lengthy or overly technical - clear, concise and regionally grounded answers are encouraged.

Before You Start

- Treat this as an interest and readiness application. It helps TARC/BDO understand your region, staffing approach and ability to execute the scope.
- If you don't have perfect data, you can still apply. Use:
 - best estimates
 - local knowledge
 - prior planning
 - known gaps (rural areas, affordability barriers, device limitations, etc.)

Section 1: COG Identification & Contacts

What these questions are asking:

TARC needs to know who the applicant is and who will be accountable for the program at the COG level.

What to include:

- Official COG name and region
- Counties and key communities served
- Primary Contact: person who can answer application and program questions

Answer tips:

- If your primary contact is not the future Digital Access Specialist, that's ok - just ensure they can coordinate internally.

Section 2: Regional Broadband & Digital Opportunity Context

Question 5: "Provide a concise overview of your region's broadband and digital opportunity landscape..."

What this is asking:

Give a snapshot of the region's current conditions such as broadband connectivity, adoption, affordability and readiness. This is not a full plan, but it should show you understand the situation.

Good topics to cover (pick what you know):

- Rural vs. urban differences in the region
- Where gaps are most visible (specific counties, corridors, communities)
- Adoption barriers (cost, device access, skills, language)
- Existing assets and momentum (libraries, coalitions, known ISP provider activity)
- Recent or ongoing broadband efforts (local plans, studies, grants, BDO Technical Assistance Program (TAP) participation)

Examples of planning documents/efforts you might reference:

- Broadband infrastructure assessments
 - county/regional broadband availability studies (unserved/underserved areas)

- feasibility studies for last-mile or middle-mile corridors
 - anchor institution connectivity assessments (schools, libraries, hospitals)
- Community surveys or listening sessions about internet affordability and reliability
- Mapping initiatives
 - known dead zones and weak coverage areas
 - public Wi-Fi inventories
- Prior regional planning efforts connected to statewide/federal work
 - participation in BDO initiatives like TAP
 - BEAD challenge participation, provider engagement or data validation work

Question 6: “Briefly describe 1–2 digital opportunity challenges...”

What this is asking:

Identify the biggest barriers to residents using broadband meaningfully even if service exists.

Examples of digital opportunity challenges (you can adapt):

- Affordability: households can’t sustain monthly subscription costs
- Device limitations: mobile-only households, insufficient computers for job/school needs
- Digital skills: residents need basic computer/internet training
- Language access: limited multilingual training/support
- Senior populations: low device confidence and fear of scams/fraud
- Workforce barriers: lack of local digital skills training aligned to jobs
- Limited staff capacity: no sustained staffing to coordinate partners and programs

How to strengthen your response:

- Name the population(s) most impacted (rural residents, low-income households, seniors, students, ESL communities).
- If you can, include a simple metric (even approximate):
 - “Large portions of our rural counties rely on mobile-only internet.”
 - “Digital literacy programs are limited outside of our largest city.”
 - “Many households lack reliable devices for telehealth/job searches.”

Section 3: Regional Capacity, Partnerships & Convening Experience

Question 7: “Describe your COG’s experience convening partners...”

What this is asking:

COGs are regional conveners. TARC/BDO want to see you can bring people together and keep coordination moving.

Examples of relevant convening experience:

- Broadband/digital inclusion coalitions
- Multi-jurisdiction planning groups (cities/counties/EDC’s)
- Working groups with ISDs, libraries, workforce boards and hospitals
- Public meetings or stakeholder sessions tied to grants/plans
- Hosting BEAD-readiness discussions, broadband summits, or regional listening sessions

Tip:

It doesn’t have to be strictly broadband if your COG has not engaged in broadband planning efforts yet. Transportation planning convenings, hazard mitigation planning, CEDS planning, etc. count if they show you can coordinate multiple partners.

Question 7 (Part 2): “How many convenings/workshops/meetings...”

How to answer:

Estimate the number you’ve hosted or participated in over the past 12 - 24 months that relate to:

- broadband planning, digital inclusion, tech access, community engagement
- related capacity building that shows coordination ability

Question 8: “List up to 10 partner organizations engaged...”

Examples to list:

- Libraries
- School districts, community colleges, universities
- Workforce boards and training providers
- Cities and counties
- Housing authorities and public housing partners
- Community-based nonprofits
- Faith-based organizations
- Healthcare providers
- ISPs/WISPs/cellular providers
- Foundations or philanthropic partners

Question 9: “List up to three prior broadband/digital opportunity initiatives (with quantitative outcome)...”

What this is asking:

Show you can execute and produce measurable progress.

Examples with metrics: Digital literacy

- “Trained 250 residents across three counties; 12 workshops hosted.”
- “Distributed 1,800 laptops through school/library partnerships.”
- “Installed 22 public Wi-Fi hotspots in parks/community centers.”
- “Completed a broadband plan identifying 2,000 unserved households.”

If you don’t have metrics, use what you have: number of meetings, counties served, partners engaged, surveys collected, etc.

Question 10: “Please describe your COG's overall strategy for identifying, engaging, and collaborating with stakeholders and community assets throughout this program to advance digital opportunity. This should include your approach to: Asset Mapping...Stakeholder Engagement...Sustainable Regional Collaboration...”

What this is asking: Explain how you will identify and document regional resources needed to build a Regional Digital Opportunity Plan.

Asset Mapping

What “assets” can include (planning and digital opportunity) see below:

Community anchor institutions

- libraries, schools, colleges, hospitals, city halls, community centers
- public computer labs, workforce centers, community clinics
- public Wi-Fi locations, towers, rooftops, water tanks, existing middle-mile routes (as applicable)
- local champions, nonprofit networks, trusted messengers for outreach

Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Collaboration

What this is asking: Describe a realistic engagement plan (who you'll engage, how often and why).

Examples of strong engagement plans:

- "10–15 listening sessions across counties in the first 6 months."
- "Establish a Regional Digital Opportunity Working Group meeting monthly."
- "Target 30+ unique organizations across sectors (ISDs, libraries, workforce, healthcare, housing, nonprofits, providers)."
- "Use a mix of in-person sessions and virtual convenings to reach rural areas."

Tip:

Explain how you will reach underserved populations: partner with libraries, social service providers, trusted messengers, and host sessions at accessible locations.

Question 11: Have you identified any intra-COG or broader regional collaboration opportunities that could strengthen or expand the impact of the Texas Regional Broadband Program (TRBP)?

What this is asking: If yes, briefly describe the collaboration(s), including the partners involved, the type of coordination anticipated and how this collaboration would support regional broadband or digital opportunity planning efforts.

This question is meant to identify existing or potential collaboration, not to require formal agreements.

COGs are not expected to have:

- MOU's executed
- Contracts in place
- Funding commitments secured

Instead, TARC and BDO are looking for:

- Regional thinking
- Willingness to coordinate across boundaries
- Opportunities to avoid duplication and leverage existing efforts

Work across departments within the same COG, such as:

- Planning, economic development, transportation, housing, or workforce divisions
- GIS or data teams supporting broadband mapping
- Emergency management or public safety staff supporting asset inventories

Tip (as an example answer):

Coordination between the COG's planning and economic development departments to integrate broadband planning with regional workforce and economic development strategies.

Question 12: "Who will serve as the key lead / Regional Digital Access Specialist?"

What this is asking: Who is responsible for day-to-day coordination and execution?

Acceptable staffing models:

- Assign an existing planner/economic development staff member
- Hire a new regional specialist
- Interim staffing while recruitment is underway

Important note:

The program is designed for COG-led capacity. If contracting support is needed for certain tasks, the COG should still retain ownership, coordination and accountability.

Question 13: Existing Documents/Uploads

ACFR = Annual Comprehensive Financial Report. It's a standard financial report produced by local governments/COGs and is used for compliance/eligibility review.

"Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (ICRA) or Indirect Cost Certification (ICC)" Provide whichever applies to your organization. If you don't have a negotiated rate, provide the certification option if allowed.

"Existing broadband/digital opportunity planning documents" This can include: broadband plans, digital equity plans, TAP reports, feasibility studies, surveys, mapping products, summaries of initiatives, etc.

Section 4: Additional Information**Question 14: "Describe any other initiatives this program would complement..."**

What this is asking: Show TRBP will strengthen, not duplicate what's already happening.

Examples you can reference:

- BEAD coordination (local permitting/readiness, stakeholder coordination, adoption readiness)
- Middle-mile coordination and corridor planning
- Digital Equity planning work
- USDA ReConnect planning support
- ARPA-funded device/Wi-Fi programs
- Texas Library Commission programs
- Workforce and education initiatives tied to digital skills

How to answer:

Briefly describe how TRBP staffing will help your region coordinate and sustain these efforts.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Writing a full plan in the application (not needed)
- Listing partners you cannot realistically engage
- Being overly vague ("We will do outreach") without explaining how
- Overcommitting to implementation beyond your readiness
- Forgetting to connect challenges → activities → outputs

What Strong Applications Will Show

- Clear understanding of regional gaps and populations impacted
- Evidence of convening experience and partner relationships
- Practical engagement and asset mapping approach
- Credible staffing plan (even if hiring is pending)
- Alignment with complementary initiatives (BEAD, middle-mile, local plans)
- Clear, measurable outputs over time (meetings held, assets mapped, plans drafted, trainings conducted, etc.)