Broadband For All, Digital Equity, and BEAD Regional Tribal Consultation
Summary of Challenges and Recommended Strategies
Tuesday, July 12, 2023
Virtual California Tribal Consultation

Biggest Challenges to Achieving Digital Equity
• What communications and broadband infrastructure gaps have been identified within Tribal communities, post-pandemic?   • What do Tribal Governments consider as the primary barrier – physical connectivity, access (including equipment) and availability, cost and affordability, or digital literacy and skills?   • What is the state of Digital Equity across the Tribal Governments?
Tribal Leaders provided the following input in response to the above questions.
• Those who are enrolled members of Tribes but live off-reservation often are denied benefits that only apply to those on reservation land. Important for federal government to understand that some nations don't have land for members to live, so it's important that the benefit extends to those members as well and that flexible funding models be established.   • Each tribe is unique and may face different barriers depending on their unique background and circumstances.   • A lack of funding for improving cellular connectivity means that connectivity deserts remain even when there is home broadband available. This creates a particular challenge for first responders and community members when there is a crisis or disaster.   • There is a need for funding support for staff costs, as organizations often lack revenue to support staff costs during a buildout phase.   • The longstanding lack of investment in rural and Tribal communities is a barrier to digital equity.   • Providers are not eligible for ACP outreach funding.
Recommended Strategies to Achieve Digital Equity
• What are the strengths and weaknesses in the programming now available?   • What outcomes do Tribal Governments want to see as it relates to the development of the BEAD and Digital Equity programs and what recommendations would you provide to achieve them?   • What opportunities does the Tribal Government see for the State, BEAD and Digital Equity to support advancing broadband deployment, adoption, and workforce initiatives?
Tribal Leaders recommended the following strategies in response to the above questions.
• Federal and state governments should explore how they can extend benefits to those who are enrolled members of Tribes but live off-reservation.

- A hybrid approach to connectivity—one that incorporates both fiber and wireless technologies—would help address broadband deserts in areas where terrain makes all wireline deployment difficult.
- Building fiber in remote areas can enable other market-based solutions and technologies, such as better cellular service.
- For funding programs, understanding that fiber infrastructure is not viable in all communities would open up other solutions, such as wireless options.
- There is a desire for funding opportunities for hotspot provision and other flexible uses, especially to serve those off-reservation.
- Infrastructure funding programs should include staffing as an eligible expense.
- Funding is needed to continue outreach for ACP services, including for providers (who are not currently eligible for ACP outreach funding).
- It would be helpful to have staff available to meet with Tribes individually and help them understand which projects and which funding programs best suit their needs. There is a desire to better understand infrastructure programming, and how to determine what would be best: last mile, middle mile or first mile for a given land.
- There is a strong sense that cultural monitoring is very important and therefore important to work closely with tribes when implementing infrastructure.