

129—22.5(8B) Application review process and award of grant funds.**22.5(1) *Period for public comment and validation process.***

a. Following the expiration of the deadline for the receipt of applications stated in the NOFA, the office will open a period for public comment as it relates to such applications. Any member of the public will be permitted to submit comments regarding applications received by the office through the means specified in the NOFA.

b. As required by Iowa Code section 8B.11(3) as amended by 2019 Iowa Acts, House File 772, the period for public comment will include the opportunity for the public to submit factual information as part of a validation process to address claims that a targeted service area forming the basis of an application received by the office is currently served with broadband service at or above the download and upload speeds specified in the definition of targeted service area. Examples of such factual information the office would consider particularly probative of current service include:

(1) Signed attestations submitted to the office under penalty of perjury on forms provided by the office that such targeted service areas are currently served with broadband service at or above the download and upload speeds specified in the definition of targeted service area.

(2) Bills or invoices provided to or received by customers in such targeted service areas which identify current broadband service at or above the download and upload speeds specified in the definition of targeted service area.

To the extent such factual information is credible and verifiable, the office may consider such factual information in considering the relative need factor set forth in Iowa Code section 8B.11(4) “a” and paragraph 22.5(3) “a” in determining whether, to which projects, and in what amount(s) to award grant funds. In addition, to the extent such factual information is credible and verifiable, such factual information may result in the disqualification of a project where the factual information demonstrates that a material portion of the proposed project is currently served with broadband service at or above the download and upload speeds specified in the definition of targeted service area. Further, to the extent such factual information is credible and verifiable, the office may incorporate such factual information into its next renewed determination of whether a communications service provider offers or facilitates broadband service at or above the download or upload speeds specified in the definition of targeted service area and thereby subsequent iteration of the statewide map, as determined and updated in accordance with Iowa Code section 8B.10(1) as amended by 2019 Iowa Acts, House File 772, and rules 129—20.3(8B,427) and 129—20.4(8B,427).

22.5(2) *Review committee.* Following the expiration of the deadline for the receipt of applications stated in the NOFA, the office will supply all applications received by the deadline and otherwise warranting review in accordance with the terms, conditions, and requirements of the NOFA, these rules, and Iowa Code chapter 8B to a review committee established by the office comprised of representatives selected by the office from schools, communities, agriculture, industry, and other areas. The review committee will review the applications and provide input/make recommendations to the office regarding whether, to which projects, and in what amount(s) to award grant funds, in accordance with the terms, conditions, and requirements of the NOFA, these rules, and Iowa Code chapter 8B.

22.5(3) *Office final decision.* Following the office’s receipt of the review committee’s input or recommendations and the closure of the period for public comment, the office will review all applications received by the deadline and otherwise warranting review in accordance with the terms, conditions, and requirements of the NOFA, these rules, and Iowa Code chapter 8B; the input/recommendations made by the review committee; and any public comment received, all in accordance with the terms, conditions, and requirements of the NOFA, these rules, and Iowa Code chapter 8B, and make a final agency decision regarding whether, to which projects, and in what amount(s) to award grant funds for the installation of broadband infrastructure that facilitates broadband service in targeted service areas at or above the download and upload speeds specified in the definition of targeted service area.

a. In so doing, the office will take into consideration the following factors, in accordance with and in the manner specified by the terms, conditions, and requirements of the NOFA, affording the greatest weight to the factors in subparagraphs 22.5(3) “a”(1), 22.5(3) “a”(2), and 22.5(3) “a”(3):

(1) The relative need for broadband infrastructure in the area and the existing broadband service speeds, including whether the project serves a rural area(s). Existing broadband service speeds may be determined by reference to the statewide map referenced in rule 129—20.4(8B,427), although the office may also take into consideration factual information received through the validation process pursuant to and in accordance with Iowa Code section 8B.11(3) as amended by 2019 Iowa Acts, House File 772, and paragraph 22.5(1)“b.”

(2) The applicant’s total proposed budget for the project, including the amount or percentage of local or federal matching funds, if any, any funding obligations shared between public and private entities, and the percentage of funding provided directly from the applicant.

(3) The relative download and upload speeds of proposed projects for all the applicants.

(4) The specific product attributes resulting from the proposed project, including technologies that provide higher qualities of service, such as service levels, latency, and other service attributes as determined by the office.

(5) The percentage of the homes, schools, and businesses in the targeted service area(s) forming the basis of the project that will be provided access to broadband service at or above the download and upload speeds specified in the definition of targeted service area as a result of the project. The number of homes, schools, and businesses in a targeted service area may be determined by reference to the statewide map referenced in rule 129—20.4(8B,427). To the extent possible in light of the current unit of measurement incorporated into current maps and data sources relied on by the office (i.e., census blocks), considering this factor is the means by which the office ensures underserved areas within targeted service areas are, to the extent possible, reduced or eliminated.

(6) The geographic diversity of the project areas of all applicants.

(7) The economic impact of the project to the area.

(8) Any other factors deemed relevant by the office as stated in the NOFA.

b. In determining whether, to which projects, and in what amount(s) to award grant funds, the office will not:

(1) Base its decision on the office’s prior knowledge of any applicant except for information obtained by the office during the application process or period for public comment; or

(2) Make an award that exceeds 15 percent of any communications service provider’s total estimated allowable project costs for a proposed installation of broadband infrastructure.

22.5(4) Notice to applicants of decision and right to appeal. The office shall notify each communications service provider awarded a grant by the office of the office’s decision(s) in accordance with the terms and conditions of the NOFA. The office will also post such decision(s) online at iowagrants.gov and ocio.iowa.gov/broadband. Unsuccessful applicants are solely responsible for reviewing such websites to determine their award status. Such agency decision(s) shall become final unless, within ten days of such email transmission or posting, an applicant which was adversely affected by a decision of the office files a request for a contested case proceeding pursuant to 129—Chapter 6. Failure to challenge the office’s decision under this rule by filing a request for a contested case within the ten-day period shall waive any claims an applicant may have related to the office’s administration of the process and otherwise be deemed a failure to exhaust administrative remedies.

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