



# Alaska Statewide Broadband Advisory Board

Alaska Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development

Minutes for Special Board Meeting- August 19, 2024, at 10:00 AM AKDT.

Approved by the Statewide Broadband Advisory Board October 21, 2024

## Attendance

### Present:

Members: Michael Brase; Charles Carpenter; Representative Bryce Edgmon; Ana Hoffman; Senator Lyman Hoffman; Glenda Ledford (Chair); Thomas Lochner; Kathleen Moran; Christine O'Connor; Laurel Shoop; Mary Swain; and Tara Sweeney (Vice Chair).

Staff Present: Lisa Von Barga, Deputy Director; and Kalynn Himes, Administrative Specialist.

Members Absent: Travis Million; Steve Noonkesser; and Charlene Stern.

### I. Call to Order and Roll Call

The Chair called the meeting to order at 10:00am.

Kalynn Himes called the roll, and twelve members of the board were present at the time the meeting was called to order. Quorum was met.

### II. Approval of Agenda

**Motion by Laurel Shoop to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Thomas Lochner. Approved by unanimous consent.**

### III. Declarations of Conflict of Interest

None.

### IV. Approval of Minutes from Prior Meetings

- a. Regular Meeting April 15, 2024
- b. Special Meeting May 10, 2024

**Motion by Thomas Lochner, seconded by Mary Swain to approve both the Regular Meeting Minutes of April 15, 2024, and the Special Meeting Minutes of May 10, 2024. Approved by unanimous consent.**

### V. Subcommittee Reports

None.

### VI. Staff Reports

- a. Alaska In-State Mapping Challenge

Director Lochner gave an update on the In-State Mapping Challenge. The Mapping Challenge public review was for 30 days. The challenge period followed, lasting another 30 days. The ABO received 30,368 challenges to the mapping. The rebuttal period was a third 30-day timeframe, and 6,000 rebuttals were received. The final phase was the mediation period, also for 30 days. The Alaska Broadband Office (ABO) reviewed all challenges and rebuttals, and then made decisions based on the information provided. The full challenge process ended on August 4, 2024. Test data was sent to NTIA for an initial review. The ABO anticipates filing the final Mapping Challenge Data for NTIA approval this Friday, August 23, 2024.

#### **b. Alaska Broadband Grant Program**

Director Lochner updated the Board on the Alaska Broadband Grant Program. Director Lochner described the Initial Proposal Volumes 1 and 2. Volume 1 was the Mapping Challenge and Volume 2 is the development of the Alaska Broadband Grant Program. submitted, Initial Proposal Volume 2. The ABO has been in negotiations with NTIA about what the Alaska Broadband Grant scoring and evaluation process will look like. No approval has been received yet.

Director Lochner also informed the Board the Division of Community and Regional Affairs is developing a new online grant portal. The Alaska Broadband Grant Program will be the first grant to use the portal. We are close to approval and the final version of the Grant Program, and it will be published on the ABO website when ready.

#### **c. Digital Equity Grant Programs**

Deputy Director Von Bargaen provided updates to the Board on the Digital Equity Grant Programs. Deputy Director Von Bargaen first explained the Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program as the second of three Digital Equity programs provided for in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The State of Alaska is receiving its first tranche of funding, \$5.6 million, for Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program from NTIA this year. The Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program is specific for implementing aspects of states' Digital Equity plans, created under the Digital Equity Planning Grants. The Grant Program is for states and territories and includes a Tribal set aside.

ABO submitted their Capacity Grant application at end of May 2024, and just finished round three of curing and are expecting approval in the next 30 days.

The State of Alaska has included 3 components in the grant application. First is an in-state Capacity Grant Program, second is to run baseline surveys to measure performance, and third is a comprehensive plan update. The Capacity Grant Program has a five-year timeframe and will receive funding in two additional tranches of about \$2.5 million each in the subsequent two federal fiscal years. The ABO has developed the draft Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the Alaska Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program, and it is currently under initial review. She further explained the ABO is hoping to go live in the online grant portal between October 15 and November 1, 2024. The ABO has limited time to run the in-state grant program as NTIA requires a list and descriptions of all projects run under grant program to be submitted to the agency within nine months of the federal award. Projects and descriptions were not submitted to NTIA along with the application in May because ABO is running a competitive grant program to solicit what those projects will be.

Michael Brase asked if the advisory group can see the draft documents for the grant program done to date. Lisa said documents will be public and posted on the ABO website.

Deputy Director Von Bargaen gave a brief introduction to the Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program, the third program under the IJJA. The Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program is open to any municipality, nonprofit organization, Tribal entity, or Community Anchor Institutions across the United States, and thusly will be a highly competitive program. NTIA is making sure that what is being funded under the Competitive Grant Program is different from what is being funded under the Capacity Grant Program. The ABO will be providing some guidance on the Competitive Grant Program on the website soon, encouraging people to look at their partnerships and submit strong applications coming from the Alaska entities.

Deputy Director Von Bargaen finalized her comments by addressing requests made by email from Board member Brase. Mr. Brase requested a copy of the Broadband Workforce Development Plan. Ms. Von Bargaen said she would send an approved draft copy to all Board members. Mr. Brase also requested copies of the meeting recordings, and Ms. Von Bargaen indicated staff was working with IT to get copies uploaded to the ABO website. Board member Brase asked when he could expect the copies and Ms. Von Bargaen responded they documents would be sent after today's meeting.

## **VII. Referrals to the Technical Working Group**

None.

## **VIII. Unfinished Business**

None.

## **IX. New Business**

### **a. Information Item Only: Determination of Conflict of Interest**

Boards and Regulations Advisor, Sara Chambers provided a summary regarding the matter. There was a request a Pacific Dataport/Microcom to make a presentation to the Board. The Board asked for an ethics determination, and the matter was referred by Chair Ledford to the Department of Law. The Department of Law determined that if one company gave a presentation, then all companies would need to be allowed to make presentations. The scope, time and availability of the Board, as well as open a fair process for everyone to know about the opportunity made it impossible for all companies to have fair opportunity to present. It was determined that in the spirit of equity to not allow any companies to make individual presentations to the board.

### **b. Approval to Place the Technical Working Group on Hiatus**

**Motion by Tara Sweeney to Place the Technical Working Group (TWG) on Hiatus, seconded by Mary Swain.**

Director Lochner explained that the Technical Working Group was established to provide technical advice to the Alaska Statewide Broadband Advisory Board (SBAB), but it needs to be done in a way that allows the Board to get the information without putting the individual members of the TWG in a position where they cannot work on grant opportunities managed by the ABO. The SBAB asked the TWG to rate the non-fiber technologies. That ended up being a very complicated request, effectively requiring engineering in those locations. The hiatus is to prevent a potential conflict of interest.

Charles Carpenter asked if the TWG had any meetings. Deputy Director Von Barga and Christine O'Connor responded in the affirmative that there were three meetings. Ms. O'Connor stated that the scale and scope of the request of the TWG was unmanageable, recognizing that the experts on the TWG would likely be involved in BEAD projects.

Charles asked if they needed to view the TWG meeting minutes and Lisa let him know they were online. Tara Sweeney, there was a lot of work done early on by the TWG. Mary Swain weighs in we have received information from the TWG.

Deputy Director Von Barga thanked the TWG for all their work. She clarified the purpose of the hiatus is to protect the members of the TWG and their need to continue unhindered in their professional positions.

**There being no further discussion, the motion passed by unanimous consent.**

#### **X. Public Comment**

Shawn Williams from Pacific Dataport recounted the timeline of Technical Working Group (TWG) meetings, stating that June 7 and June 19 were functional meetings, July 2 and July 11 both ended due to lack of quorum, and July 19 was cancelled. Mr. Williams stated he appreciated Sara Chambers and Chair Ledford following up on the ethics request. Mr. Williams then asked if the TWG is put on hiatus, and no one can give presentations, where is the technical knowledge coming from. Mr. Williams asked a second question of Director Lochner inquiring about the 6000 challenges, curious how many challenges were accepted and how many rebuttals were accepted.

Director Lochner stated that the information is transparent and will be posted on the ABO website by tomorrow afternoon.

Christine O'Connor clarified that the first two TWG meetings were quite in-depth and not merely organizational.

Shawn Williams repeated his question about where technical advice will come from. Director Lochner referred to House Bill 363, confirming the SBAB is to provide technology-neutral input, recommendations and advice. The SBAB board members provide their expertise in their specific areas of knowledge and provide recommendations. Deputy Director Von Barga responded the ABO is also planning on hiring an engineering firm to provide technical assistance to the Broadband Office.

#### **XI. Board Member Business from the Floor**

None.

#### **XII. Next Meeting Date**

The next regularly scheduled meeting date is October 21, 2024.

#### **XIII. Adjournment**

**Motion by Mary Swain to adjourn, seconded by Steve Noonkesser, and approved unanimously.**

The meeting adjourned at 10:37am on May 10, 2024.