Alaska Statewide Broadband Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Alaska Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development
Minutes for Rescheduled Regular Board Meeting – February 26, 2025, 10:00 AM AKDT.
Approved by the Statewide Broadband Advisory Board April 14, 2025.

Attendance

Members Present: Michael Brase, Charles Carpenter, Chair Ledford, Thomas Lochner, Kathleen Moran, Steve Noonkesser, Christine O'Connor, Charlene Stern, Mary Swain, and Faye Tanner.

Staff Present: Lisa Von Bargen, Deputy Director; Melissa Kookesh, Tribal Liaison; and Jan Cox, DCRA Grants Administrator III.

Members Absent: Speaker Edgmon (staff Laib Allensworth attended on behalf of), Anastasia Hoffman, Senator Hoffman, and Travis Million.

Call to Order and Roll Call

The Chair called the meeting to order at 10:04am. Deputy Director Von Bargen called the roll, and eleven members of the board were present at the time the meeting was called to order. Quorum was met.

I.   Approval of Agenda

The agenda was accepted as presented.

II.   Declarations of Conflict of Interest

None.

III.   Approval of Minutes from Prior Meetings

   a. **Rescheduled Regular Meeting December 18, 2024**

Motion by Christine O'Connor to approve the prior meeting minutes, seconded by Mary Swain. The minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

IV. Subcommittee Reports

None.

V.   Staff Reports

   a. **Welcome New Board Member – Faye Tanner (DEED Designee)**

Chair Ledford welcomed the new board member, Faye Tanner, the designee from the Department of Education and Early Development. Faye Tanner introduced herself to the Board and expressed her eagerness to be a part of the Board.

   b. **Board Vacancies**

Deputy Director Von Bargen reported one remaining vacancy on the Board for the Business seat vacated by former member Tara Sweeney. Ms. Von Bargen asked the Board to provide staff with recommendations for potential candidates to be considered by the Governor's Office.

   c. **Digital Equity (DE) Grant Programs**
       i. **DE Grant Programs Overview**
       ii. **Alaska Digital Equity Capacity Grant**

1. **Application Period and Grant Portal**
2. **Technical Assistance**

Deputy Director Von Bargen gave an update of all the Digital Equity (DE) Grant Programs including the Planning Grant, the Capacity Grant, the Competitive Grant, and the Capacity Grant for Native entities.

Deputy Director Von Bargen further gave a recap of the Alaska Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program. The report included the grant program timeline of the 120-day application period ending in mid-April, followed by a 90-day review period, with awards announced the middle of July 2025.

Ms. Von Bargen then provided a schedule of grant technical assistance opportunities, including the eight Virtual Office Hours sessions, and two in-person Technical Assistance Workshops in Juneau and Anchorage.

d. **Alaska Broadband Grant Program**
   i. **Application Period and Grant Portal**
   ii. **Tribal Consultations**
   iii. **Technical Assistance**

Director Lochner provided a summary of the Alaska Broadband Grant Program including the application period ending on April 16, 2025. He further provided a summary of the Tribal Consultations and Technical Assistance sessions scheduled in Fairbanks, Juneau, and Anchorage, and online.

Steve Noonkesser asked for clarification about the $10,000 Extremely High Cost Per Location Threshold (ECHT). Director Lochner explained the difference between the threshold for last mile and middle mile, and the $10,000 number is for last mile only in the sustainability model. He further responded FAQ #55 explains how the calculation works.

Christine O'Connor asked how the NTIA CostQuest model costs compared to Alaska's ECHT. Director Lochner replied the CostQuest figures were not reasonable for Alaska.

Director Lochner asked the board members to advocate for Congressional approval of tax relief for the broadband infrastructure grant awards.

VI. Unfinished Business

None.

VII.   New Business

None.

VIII.   Public Comment

Shawn Williams from Pacific Dataport asked three questions. Mr. Williams asked how applicants should work with the sustainability model as it does not address Low Earth Orbit Satellites (LEOs), only fiber builds. Director Lochner responded that the model is being refined. Mr. Williams asked if the deadline of the grant program would be extended to account for new federal guidance. Director Lochner replied that we were unsure at this time, but the Alaska Broadband Office is operating under a fixed 365-day timeline to complete the grant program and submit awards to NTIA for approval. Mr. Williams asked when the final

version of the Pre-Determined Project Areas (PDPAs) would be posted. Director Lochner replied he hoped it would be prior to March 28, 2025, and further confirmed the latest version of Appendix I takes into account all the enforceable commitments.

IX. **Board Member Business from the Floor**

Chair Ledford asked Director Lochner if the ABO expected a delay in the availability of funding for the program given the expected federal changes. Director Lochner replied with 99% confidence that he did not anticipate a delay in funding availability.

X. **Next Meeting Date**

The next regularly scheduled meeting date is scheduled for April 14, 2025. Director Lochner requested the meeting date be pushed back by a few days as April 14th is the deadline for the Alaska Broadband Grant Program. Postponing the meeting a few days will allow the ABO staff to report on the application status of the program. Deputy Director Von Bargen said she would reach out to the Board to reschedule, likely to the following Monday, April 21, 2025.

XI. **Adjournment**

Motion by Christine O'Connor to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Steve Noonkesser. The motion was approved by unanimous consent. Chair Leford adjourned the meeting at 10:52am on February 26, 2025.