Interview Guide—Meetings with Local Government Entities

Coordination with various groups, such as Local Government Entities (LGEs), is necessary to meet the requirements outlined in the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Five-Year Action Plan and the planning documentation required by the State Digital Equity Planning Grant program.

> **This interview guide is a tool to assist State/Territory (S/T) Broadband Offices in preparing for and engaging with interested parties to further an understanding of high-speed Internet availability in their respective areas. It provides direction for initial discussions and is not comprehensive of all topics that an S/T may need to discuss.**

The guide will 1) outline why meeting with LGEs is important, 2) frame a meeting agenda and targeted outcomes, as well as 3) provide best practices for preparing for and conducting meetings with LGEs.

Why Engagement Matters

Successful S/T Broadband Office engagement with LGEs relies on open and transparent communication focused on gaining an understanding of how the BEAD and Digital Equity programs impact LGEs and learning about current and planned LGE activity related to digital equity. Engaging with LGE's is important because it:

- Opens dialogue to better identify and understand community priorities and needs
- Develops early buy-in for high-speed Internet plans;
- Includes diverse expertise and experiences;
- Encourages transparency, which builds trust by demonstrating responsible stewardship of state and local resources; and
- Expands awareness of BEAD and Digital Equity, mobilizing others to act collectively.

Understanding Local Government Entities

S/T Broadband Offices should engage early with LGEs to assist in the navigation of the planning stages. LGEs possess a unique awareness of the local regulations that impact infrastructure projects, as well as the landscape of community groups and covered populations in the area. Under the BEAD Program, LGEs can apply to be a subgrantee and must be included in the S/T's Five-Year Action Plan along with S/T strategic plans to improve high-speed Internet infrastructure. The State Digital Equity Plan should also holistically align with the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan. The S/T Broadband Office can use these meetings to gauge where the LGE stands and evaluate what coordination or assistance is needed.

Local Government Entity Types
- City
- County
- Town
- Village
- Local District
- Special Service District
- Conservation Districts
- School Districts
- Community Development & Renewal Agency
- Municipal Government
- Regional Planning Agency
- Other Political Subdivision across S/T

High-Level Meeting Agenda and Targeted Outcomes

Pre-Meeting Preparation

Basic logistics should be considered and discussed prior to meeting. **Figure 1** captures key elements to consider when conducting an in-person, virtual, or hybrid meeting.

IN-PERSON		VIRTUAL		HYBRID
LOCATION	**EQUIPMENT**	**SOFTWARE & LOGISTICS**	**EQUIPMENT**	*Combine in-person and virtual elements to meet physical and technological constraints of attendees*
• Consider location access details (ADA accessibility, parking, ability to physically distance) • Provide directions for finding the meeting room once on site • Include enough seating for all participants • Communicate current health protocol guidance (masking, testing) • Set up closed captions or make other considerations for multiple languages	• Evaluate what AV needs the meeting has (projector, screen, conference speakers) • Determine if participants can access location Wi-Fi and prepare guidance for how to access it	• Understand web applications participants are familiar with using (Zoom, WebEx, Teams, etc.) • Note if any constraints exist for using the selected application (free versions available, time limits on use) • Offer to start the meeting earlier for those wishing to check their connection	• Share information on what video/camera technology, software, or connectivity is needed (or preferred) for participation • Plan for an alternate method to participate if technology or access issues arise (call-in number or different video application) • Set up the virtual meeting to include a transcript that is made available to all participants after the meeting	

Figure 1 - Meeting Formats and Considerations

<u>*Note:*</u> Meeting planning should not be one-sided. While the S/T Broadband Office might suggest one venue or software for the meeting, remaining open to alternatives proposed by the LGE may assist scheduling.

Evaluate Meeting Logistics

Once the S/T Broadband Office has established whether the meeting is in-person, virtual, or hybrid of the two, evaluate the meeting logistics.

- **Number of Voices:** Meetings with an individual participant group are preferable as the focused format invites more open, detailed, and transparent dialogue. If a meeting has numerous groups participating, consider the potential impact on the level of details gathered for the selected topics.
- **Availability:** Consider using a polling application (FindTime poll in Outlook, Doodle, Survey Monkey, etc.) to determine attendee availability. If the meeting topic allows, consider offering multiple sessions or formats for attendees to participate.
- **Meeting Size:** Plan for meeting space in accordance with the size of the planned engagement. Understand who the LGE wants to bring into the meeting and the size of the group.
- **Duration:** Assess questions in the Discussion Guide from the context of the meeting timeframe, realizing that one question posted to several groups may take as long as several questions posed to a smaller group.

Prepare Agenda in Advance

Developing and sharing an agenda in advance of meetings will help inform attendee perspective, set expectations about discussion areas, and bring the right participants to the table. Below is a sample agenda S/Ts can use to shape LGE discussions. *Note:* S/Ts can modify the agenda as needed.

Establish Targeted Outcomes

LGE engagement should seek to advance one or several of the following objectives:

- Establish relationship and rapport between the LGE and the S/T Broadband Office
- Provide a uniform, base understanding of the BEAD and Digital Equity programs
- Share the S/T's planning and implementation timelines and ongoing engagement plans
- Gain high-level understanding and clarity on the LGE's understanding of the current state of broadband deployment and priority concerns
- Establish feedback mechanisms to capture additional input from LGE

Agenda Topic	High-level Objective
Welcome & Introductions	➤ *Review meeting purpose and facilitate participant introductions, to include position and role in planning and implementation processes.*
Review Meeting Goals	➤ *Set expectations / desired outcomes as it relates to the meeting purpose and agenda*
BEAD & Digital Equity Overview	➤ *Brief overview of the S/Ts planning and implementation phases, to include a high-level review of program timelines.*
Understanding LGE Perspective	➤ *Understand the attendees' experience in broadband infrastructure planning, through the lens of selected topics, and seek to understand priority concerns.*
Feedback & Next Steps	➤ *Provide a feedback mechanism to capture additional input following the meeting and establish future engagement.*

Discussion Guide

Below are sample questions to help guide conversations based on the sample agenda above. Questions aim to elicit understanding of the LGE perspective on certain topics.

Note: these questions are not considered a comprehensive guide to all topics for discussion and may be tailored by the S/T, as needed. S/Ts should remember to take the overall meeting timeframe into account when choosing the number of topics to cover as well as volume of questions to ask.

Welcome and Introductions	
Guidance:	**Discussion Questions:**
Discuss the meeting's purpose and ask all attendees to provide a personal introduction.	• *How do you define digital equity?* • *What is each individual/office's anticipated role in the planning and implementation process?* • *How familiar is the LGE with the S/T Broadband Office and its purpose?*
Review Meeting Goals	
Guidance:	**Discussion Questions:**
Set meeting expectations and desired outcomes as it relates to the meeting purpose and agenda.	• *Gather from the participants their expectations going into this meeting.* • *Address their expectations head on and lead with the S/T's own purpose and desired outcome for the meeting, being specific and transparent.*

BEAD & Digital Equity Overview	
Guidance:	**Discussion Questions:**
Provide overview of the S/T's planning and implementation phases for each program, to include a high-level review of program timelines. Can discuss Broadband Maps and the challenge process at a high-level.	• *How aware are the LGE participants of BEAD and Digital Equity objectives and timelines? What is the LGE's perspective on the current broadband environment?* • *What impacts are the LGE anticipating from Digital Equity activities across the community? What does success look like?* • *What impacts are the LGE anticipating from BEAD activities across the community? What does success look like?* • *What concerns are being raised about BEAD/Digital Equity efforts across the constituency?* *Information: BEAD Program, Digital Equity Program, Digital Inclusion Startup Guide, FCC Broadband Data Maps*
Understanding LGE Perspective on…	*NOTE: Questions may be tailored and the meeting timeframe should be taken into account when choosing the number of topics to cover and volume of questions.*
Guidance:	**Discussion Questions:**
Digital Equity	
Inquire if attendees have developed plans for the provision of equitable broadband services to middle and low-income communities.	• *What is the state of digital equity and digital inclusion efforts across the community? Are there strengths/weaknesses in the programming now available?* • *Does the LGE have an outreach plan for digital inclusion efforts? What is being done to gauge awareness and participation in BEAD and Digital Equity planning activities?* • *How will the LGE engage with middle and low-income communities? Will outreach take multiple languages/formats?* • *How can the SBO engage effectively with covered populations in your area?*
Collaborating with Internet Service Providers (ISPs)	
Gather information on what engagement is taking place, or planned to take place, with ISPs. Document relevant points of contact mentioned.	• *What offices/personnel are dialoguing with ISPs? Which ISPs are active in or plan to be active in the LGE?* • *What is the current state of the ISP relationships? What concerns or issues are being discussed?* • *Is there any known legislation complicating broadband implementation efforts across the LGE? If so, what are the impacts?*
Workforce	
Encourage conversations regarding workforce issues (e.g., Community Anchor Institutions and Industry).	• *What are some of the pressing workforce concerns?* • *What workforce planning initiatives are currently taking place across the LGE? How mature are they and how funded?* • *What opportunities does the LGE see for the S/T, BEAD and Digital Equity Programs to support advancing workforce initiatives?* • *How can workforce agencies better equip workers with skills to meet the demands of the digital economy?* • *What is the LGE's plan to hire a skilled and diverse workforce?*
Feedback & Next Steps	
Capture TA assistance concerns, ask for feedback, and plan next meeting	• *What resources or guidance is needed for the future?* • *Was this a successful mode for future collaborative efforts or is another medium needed for future meetings?* • *Are there any topics not touched on that should be discussed in future meetings?*

Best Practices for Successful Engagement

PREPARING FOR ENGAGEMENT

- Review the State Broadband Leaders Network (SBLN) and Digital Equity Leaders Network (DELN) materials and research the history of the LGEs broadband involvement.
- Review available BEAD/DE Technical Assistance materials prior to engaging with the LGEs.
- Research S/T government and political structure and understand the role of local politics across S/T landscape.
- Compile and tailor questions to broaden understanding of the LGEs current circumstance and address specific needs.
- Finalize and distribute agenda to participants with meeting invitation.

MEETING AND FOLLOW-UP

- Practice active listening during each meeting, accurately record the discussion and information that is being provided.
- Ensure fairness and equal time for discussions and information distribution during the meeting. Consider meeting with small groups.
- Remain conscious of time spent on each topic, allow for a question-and-answer period toward the end of each meeting.
- Conclude the meeting by summarizing key take-aways and potential action items discussed.
- Share meeting minutes to all attendees outlining all action items and their respective due dates as well as a feedback mechanism for additional input.