



**Department of Finance and Administration Office of
Broadband Expansion and Accessibility of Mississippi (BEAM)
Annual Report: December 15, 2022**

The Department of Finance and Administration Office of Broadband Expansion and Accessibility of Mississippi (BEAM) serves as the state broadband office. BEAM is responsible for coordinating all broadband expansion and accessibility efforts and grant funding for the State of Mississippi. BEAM was created by HB 1029 in the 2022 Legislative Session and is allowed 6 state employees. BEAM has one additional grant-funded contractual employee.

BEAM received an initial appropriation of \$150,000 and retained \$186,000 in special funds remaining from the grant application fee required under the Covid-19 Broadband Grant Program. All grant funds administered by BEAM provide funding for administrative expenses that include appropriate audit/accounting expenses for monitoring compliance with federal grant requirements. BEAM is engaged in administering the following grant funds and projects:

CAPITAL PROJECTS FUND

The Mississippi plan for the 162 million Capital Projects Fund from ARPA was submitted prior to the September 24, 2022, deadline and is pending approval by the United States Dept. of Treasury. The plan provides 117 million for large scale infrastructure projects, 15 million for large scale projects with a community partner using ARPA funds, 20 million for line extension projects, and 3 million for public wifi. Once approved (anticipated in Q1 of 2023), BEAM will administer a competitive grant program (including a challenge process) to distribute funds. All projects require matching funds of at least 20% or more.

Administrative rules for the CPF fund were filed, comments accepted, and a hearing held during November. The final rules with minimal changes became effective in December. On advice of DFA and outside counsel, the rules mainly track HB 1029 and more detailed grant requirements will be posted on the BEAM website prior to the opening of the grant application portal.



A significant portion of BEAM salaries and expenses will be reclaimed from the 5% administrative portion of CPF. These administrative funds are also available to pay for mapping, engineering, legal and accounting services, and community engagement events. These funds will be used throughout the life of the CPF projects for the significant compliance and monitoring costs required by the program.

MAPPING

The most recent FCC map released on November 18, 2022, shows Mississippi with 100% broadband service due to the inclusion of satellite providers. BEAM will file the appropriate challenge to the map as allowed under FCC rules with the first challenge deadline being January 13, 2023.

The BEAM office has worked with numerous other entities (e-911 coordinators, GIS Council, utilities, ISP's) to verify broadband serviceable locations and service areas. BEAM has already filed one bulk challenge to the FCC Map for approximately 5,500 missing addresses in Desoto County. BEAM will file another challenge based on a rather large error that resulted from provider reporting requirements. An accurate map is exceptionally important for Mississippi because federal funding under the federal BEAD program will be dependent on the number of served and unserved locations within the State.

BEAM procured an outside contractor, Ready.net to develop the Mississippi Broadband Map to accurately reflect locations and service within the State. This map is available at www.broadbandms.com and is publicly available. The website/map shows historical data and will continue to evolve through the grant process to reflect awards and completed projects. Currently, the website is focused on collecting observational data from individuals.

The website uses three separate methods to evaluate internet speeds and includes a short survey about internet usage. The location and service data populates the map, and the survey data is compiled for review. If a location has no service at all, users can indicate that on the website when accessed through cell service or while at a location that does have service. Or those without service may call **601-439-2535** or



text their address to that number to provide their information. The website does not gather or disclose any personal information.

The BEAM office is working with schools, community and faith-based organizations, media, and governmental entities to publicize the website and create an accurate Mississippi Map. The immediate goal is to direct 100,000 unique Mississippi users to the www.broadbandms.com website by the **end of 2022**. We need your help to reach that goal. Please share this information on social media, at community meetings, or with local press.

BROADBAND EQUITY, ACCESS, AND DEPLOYMENT (BEAD)

The Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program under IIJA provides \$42.45 billion to expand broadband access across the nation. Allocation of funding will be based on the number of unserved and underserved locations within a state and will be announced on **June 30, 2023**. Depending on the number of unserved and underserved locations, Mississippi is projected to receive at least 500 million and perhaps over a billion dollars in federal funding under BEAD.

Once the BEAD funding allocation is made on June 30, 2023, the BEAM office will develop and submit a 5-year plan to reach unserved and underserved locations (given the amount of funding) to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) for approval. The development of the five-year plan will include a competitive grant program and a challenge process. Once the final plan is submitted and approved by NTIA, final awards will be made, and funding released in accordance with state and federal law. BEAD funding is unlikely to be released by NTIA prior to 2024.

BEAD PLANNING GRANT

BEAM applied for and was awarded a 5-million-dollar planning grant for the BEAD program. These funds are designated for salary support, mapping, accounting/auditing, engineering, legal,



community engagement events, and technical expertise required to develop the 5-year plan. The grant also allows BEAM to recoup up to \$100,000 in pre-award costs such as salaries and travel.

DIGITAL SKILLS & ACCESSIBILITY PLANNING GRANT

BEAM applied for and received an \$875,000 planning grant for salaries, data collection and analysis, and stakeholder engagement meetings to support the Digital Equity Grant Fund (1.44 billion to be allocated among states) that will be awarded in late 2023. The planning grant requires Mississippi to develop a “Digital Skills & Accessibility Plan” to catalogue existing programs and identify needed skills and training for the aging, veterans, disabled, minorities, incarcerated, individuals with language barriers or low literacy, and those who reside in rural areas.

BEAM has convened a core planning team with advocates from each of the covered groups to develop the State plan. BEAM is working closely with the Mississippi Library Commission, MDE, IHL, MCCB, MDOC, Accelerate MS, among others. The plan is due November 2023. Mississippi will then participate in a funding opportunity with the goal of closing the digital divide. Specifics for the competitive grant have not been released. Preliminary information indicates Mississippi will receive around 3-4 million yearly for a period of 5 years.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM (BIP)

BIP is a 32 million Broadband Infrastructure Program (BIP) awarded to the Mississippi Public Utilities Staff in February 2022 and formally transferred to BEAM in October of 2022. All applicants for the grant were awarded funding. The program funds 10 projects around the state that will reach approximately 12,000 unserved households. Projects are in final states of environmental and cultural resource review and should begin construction after the first of the year. Expected completion for all BIP projects is Q4 of 2023. BIP projects are as follows:



Project Name	County	Amount Awarded
Bay Springs Smith County	Smith County	\$ 5,507,845.20
Bruce Telephone	Calhoun County	\$ 7,625,075.16
C Spire Issaquena (Mayersville)	Issaquena County	\$ 894,780.00
C Spire Madison County (Livingston Road)	Madison County	\$ 625,500.00
CableSouth Media 3 Collins	Covington County	\$ 1,755,000.00
Franklin Telephone	Lincoln County	\$ 4,614,243.30
MaxxSouth New Albany	Benton County	\$ 3,076,849.57
MaxxSouth Pontotoc	Pontotoc County	\$ 1,695,617.05
Uplink Coahoma	Coahoma County	\$ 4,811,132.75
We Connect Calhoun County	Calhoun County	\$ 1,336,900.23
State of Mississippi Administration Funds		\$753,379.29
Total		\$32,696,322.55

CARES ACT FUNDING

Construction on all CARES Act projects funded by appropriation from the legislature in 2020 are completed (75 million leveraged to 150 million through match requirement). Over 1,000 miles of new fiber installed with customer counts increasing daily.