

Arkansas to receive over \$1B to expand broadband in state

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (June 26, 2023) – Today, the Arkansas Department of Commerce, along with Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders, announced that Arkansas will receive \$1,024,303,993.86 from the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The funds will be used to expand broadband access in Arkansas and address affordability and digital skills needs throughout the state.

“This announcement will be transformational for Arkansas,” said Governor Sanders. “With more than \$1 billion now at our state’s disposal to fund broadband access, we will finally be able to close the digital divide between rural and urban Arkansas. This puts every part of our state on an equal playing field and unlocks a world of potential for businesses, schools, and everyday Arkansans.”

The priority for Arkansas’ allocation of BEAD funding will be to address the lack of broadband access at an estimated 215,000 homes and businesses located throughout the state. Funds can also be used to improve high-speed internet at vital community anchor institutions such as hospitals, libraries, and schools. Arkansas’ workforce will also benefit from funding to improve digital skills.

“These funds are an economic game changer,” said Arkansas Secretary of Commerce Hugh McDonald. “As a small rural state, we have too many households and businesses that are not connected to broadband. This affects our bottom line – from education and skills development to entrepreneurship and opportunity. Broadband is no longer a luxury; it is an absolute necessity for individual upward mobility as well as to develop strong and vibrant communities that will attract business and industry to the state.”

The Arkansas State Broadband Office, housed within the Arkansas Department of Commerce, will administer the BEAD funding allocated to Arkansas. In accordance with BEAD program requirements, the Broadband Office must submit to NTIA a five-year action plan and other documentation by the end of 2023 before funding will be released to the state. The Broadband Office, working under the leadership of Governor Sanders, will ensure that plans for BEAD funds address the priorities of the state and include opportunities for feedback by local communities. Use of BEAD funds will also be subject to legislative review and appropriation.

About the Arkansas State Broadband Office

The Arkansas State Broadband Office, housed within the Arkansas Department of Commerce, was created in 2019 to coordinate the state’s broadband-related activities. The office’s Arkansas Rural Connect Grant Program provides funding to assist in the deployment and improvement of broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved communities. The state’s broadband goal, as articulated in its broadband plan, is to get universal access to broadband at speeds of 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload. For more information, visit www.broadband.arkansas.gov.

About the Arkansas Department of Commerce

The Arkansas Department of Commerce is the umbrella department for workforce and economic development drivers. Its divisions and regulatory boards include Division of Aeronautics, Waterways Commission, Wine Producers Council, Division of Workforce Services, Office of Skills Development, State Bank Department, Insurance Department, Securities Department, Economic Development Commission and Development Finance Authority.