**Governor’s Task Force on Broadband**

**September 22, 2025**

**1:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.**

Virtual

**Task Force Members in Attendance Virtually**: Chair Teddy Bekele; Ini Augustine; Steve Fenske; Gail Hedstrom; Adam Hutchens; Marc Johnson; Daniel Lightfoot; Paul McDonald; Briana Mumme; Melissa Wolf; Dave Wolf.

**Task Force members Absent**: Bruce Crane; Brian Hood; Phil Stalboerger; John Twiest.

**Others in Attendance Virtually:**  Cameron Papazis; Irisa MacAulay; Bryan Stanfield; Jenifer Frost; Janina; Ann Treacy; Barbara Droher Kline; Bree Maki; Jake Varn; Carol Bossuyt; Michael Wimmer; Megan Messerole; Megan Moudry; Colby Humphrey; Roxanne K. Hacker; Sarah Ali; Vincent Fancera; Karrie Jansen; Samantha Ernst; Kristina Ruport; Todd Kruse; Anna Norcutt Preuss; Ilaya Hopkins; Nathan Zacharias.

**I. Welcome**

Chair Bekele called the meeting to order, roll call was taken, and an overview of the agenda provided.

**II. Approval of minutes from the June and August Task Force Meeting**

Meeting minutes were approved from the June and August Task Force meetings.

**III. Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD)**

Cameron Papazis (Business Development Manager), Irisa MacAulay (Business Development Associate) and team presented an overview of the history and work of the Communication Service for the Deaf. The organization’s work dates to 1975 and began with a focus in the telecommunications industry.

In Minnesota, there are 1.1 million deaf and hard of hearing community (DHH) members. And in this population, access and accommodations are across the board and span captions, interpreters, and other services. Today, Video Relay Service (VRS) is often used, which is when a call is routed from a Deaf caller through a VRS interpreter to a hearing customer service representative. This method can introduce challenges, like miscommunication adding a third party to conversations, as well as barriers like IRS tax scams and barriers of organizations not taking third party calls. CSD shared that when surveyed in 2024 by the National Association of the Deaf, 94% listed TTY is least preferred communication method, 0% of listed VRS as a preferred form of communication, and 74% say that “chat support” is not a suitable accommodation for direct customer support.

An alternative is Direct Video Calling (DVC) which is when an American Sign Language (ASL) fluent customer service representative takes a video call directly from a Deaf caller. DVC has other benefits, including being HIPAA compliant, and has been proven to be cost efficient and leading to savings, with Comcast noting direct spending on DVC saved 35% compared what they were spending through VRS and FCC Savings have surpassed $2.5 million. DVS also allows for more investment in the DHH community in employment efforts.

Questions from the Task Force included software advancements to translating ASL and other signed languages; the relationship between education supporting work and opportunities; and the impact of unreliable broadband on the deaf and hard of hearing population in Minnesota. CSD also shared on the grant lost from DEA funding being cut by NTIA, and how they had planned to use this money on critical equipment distribution and technical support for the DHH community.

**IV. Pew Charitable Trusts**

Jake Varn (Associate Manager, Broadband Access Initiative, Pew Charitable Trusts) provided an update on state broadband goals around speed, deployment, adoption, and affordability. This covered a history of state speed goals and definitions, federal policy changes, industry trends, and the current landscape of state goals.

Prior to 2020, there were 11 states that had state broadband goals established by legislative statues, utility commission rules, and executive orders. Federal policy changes that have impacted these goals and the current broadband landscape include the Infrastructure and Jobs Act, and subsequent Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) and Digital Equity Act (DEA) funding. Additionally, in 2024, the FCC raised its 2015 broadband definition from 25/3 Mbps to 100/20 Mbps, and 1G per 1,000 student standards for schools, and set long-term goal of 1G/500M. Currently the FCC has an open inquiry if the long-term goal is appropriate. Broadband has also seen an increasing demand across sectors, including agriculture, healthcare, and education. Noteworthy consumer trends, include increasing average speeds. Which in 2024 were 301/96 Mbps compared to 141/51 Mbps in 2015.

In the current landscape of state goals nationally, 31 states have increased their minimum speed standards to 100/20 Mbps, either for their deployment program (including to align with federal funding requirements) or for the state’s definition of broadband. Additionally, 9 states are also incorporating the cost of service available to customers and 18 states are prioritizing the scalability of funded networks. Important to note is the huge variability in what is considered affordable across regions and communities.

In 2020, Pew identified components for states to incorporate and continually evaluate as a part of their grant programs tied to broadband availability, quality, and affordability. Policy evaluation requires that states create frameworks to: (1) Develop well-defined goals for broadband deployment; (2) Establish baselines to measure progress; and (3) Assess both implementation and emerging needs tied to availability, quality, and affordability.

Questions from the Task Force included those on how the FCC change in 2024 impacts state goals, BEAD, and underserved locations; and how other states may be thinking about updating speed goals and symmetrical speeds goals.

**V. Office of Broadband Development Overview + Updates**

Bree Maki (Executive Director, OBD) provided updates on OBD. The state’s Border-to-Border programs (B2B) and Line Extension (LE) are in the process of closing out rounds 7 and 2 respectively, with 53 grants pending closed in those rounds. In total there are 82 active grants and 26 will be built by the end of this year. OBD is working in rounds 8-10 of B2B and rounds 2 and 3 of LE. OBD works with Connected Nation to do as-builts and speed tests for close outs to ensure locations being closed out are being served as grantees indicated they would. The bidding window for the fourth round of LE will be opening on 9/26, and OBD expects that to be $3.5M in Capital Projects Fund (CPF) dollars as they need to be spent by December 2026. OBD is trying to optimize where BEAD cannot get with LE, and OBD plans to do a LE round 5 with state funds from previous rounds that came in under the expected budget.

The closeout for the Digital Equity Act (DEA) Capacity Grant was due and OBD is finalizing that closeout through NIST and a final payment. That program has been terminated by NITA, and in Minnesota’s letter required by NTIA, OBD reserved the right for funding if made available.

For the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program, Minnesota submitted the draft of the Final Proposal on time without needing to request an extension past the September 4 deadline. The total grant application request from OBD was $568M, with the BEAD outlay cost at $391.6M. OBD has been in curing with NTIA, with NTIA requesting information or updated information on the Final Proposal. Today (9/22) OBD did receive notification that the excessive cost thresholds have been released, which was $20,000 and over per broadband serviceable location (BSL) and was informed that anything above $10,000 needs additional explanation to justify the cost. More work will have to go into explaining the drivers of higher costs in Minnesota, like tree canopy and that the locations left to get to are more difficult to serve. OBD will depend on grantees to help in justifying those costs. OBD has 72 hours to go back to applicants and ask if they can go lower in their bids, however, since the final best numbers have been put forward already, asking this of grantees is difficult to do. With NTIA, the curing turnaround times have been between 24 to 72 hours, so very tight deadlines for OBD. If NTIA does not accept the reasons costs are higher than their math indicates they should be, OBD will need to negotiate with other applicants. If no provider is interested, the locations could go unfunded. Resources on BEAD are available on the [OBD BEAD webpage](https://mn.gov/deed/programs-services/broadband/bead/), the [MN BEAD map](https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/920b770a657d453cbe854332ef8ff540/), and slides from the 9/22 BEAD update will be available on the [Broadband Task Force webpage](https://mn.gov/deed/programs-services/broadband/task-force/).

Questions from the Task Force included updates on the public comment tour; if BEAD builds in an accountability process for the grantees; how many locations are over the extremely high-cost threshold; what will happen to locations that did not get applications to get to 100% and non-deployment dollars; and what the timeline is after the curing process.

**VI. Other Business, Subgroup Updates, October’s Meeting Plans, Wrap-up**

Chair Bekele opened the floor to other business, questions, and comments from Task Force members and attendees. There were none.

Updates were provided on the new subgroups, which were refocused into 2 different topics to accommodate feedback from Task Force members last year and ensure greater participation. The topics of the subgroups will be (1) Affordability, Economic Opportunity, and Workforce Development and (2) Mapping, Policy, and Funding, with the leaders of the subgroups being Marc Johnson and Melissa Wolf, respectively. Subgroups will need to ensure any meetings outside of the Task Force wide monthly meetings are under 7 people to not have quorum, which shouldn’t be an issue as both subgroups have 7 members. Time will be provided at the October meeting for subgroup work.

Information on upcoming meetings was provided. The Task Force will plan to meet Wednesday October 15, in-person meeting at the TCC facility in Clearwater, MN. Since quorum (attendance of 8+ Task Force members) is needed for this meeting, an attendance form will go out to Task Force members to get an accurate count and expectation for lunch, which will be provided. The November meeting is planned to be hybrid, and at the DEED headquarters building in St. Paul, with time for subgroups. There is a planned meeting for December 18, and the Task Force will evaluate progress on the annual report at that meeting to see if any additional meetings need to be scheduled for December to work on or take a vote on the annual report.

Meeting adjourned around 2:40pm.