



OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET

# **BROADBAND EQUITY, ACCESS, AND DEPLOYMENT (BEAD) PROGRAM**

**Committee on Housing, Transportation & Telecommunication**  
36th Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands

April 23, 2025

Julio Rhymer  
Director

Good day Honorable Marvin A. Blyden, Chairman of the Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications, other Members of the 36th Legislature, and the viewing and listening audience of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

I am Somere Webber, BEAD Director with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). On behalf of Director Julio Rhymer, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the status of the territory's plans for the utilization of the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Grant. I am pleased to share with you updates on the program timeline, proposed funding allocations, technical workshops, and new initiatives that aim to increase digital literacy and workforce development in the territory.

At our last appearance before this committee in August 2024, the Virgin Islands Broadband Office (VIBO), housed within OMB, announced that we made meaningful progress in the implementation of the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. We reported that the Territory successfully secured the full \$27.1 million allocated under the BEAD initiative. Since then, VIBO has continued its work to complete all prerequisites necessary to fully implement the initiatives outlined in the Initial Proposal Volume II. Such prerequisites include successfully completing the challenge process and releasing notice of funding opportunities (NOFOs) to begin the subgrantee selection process. The April 4<sup>th</sup> release of the NOFOs marked the opening of the application process for eligible subgrantees. These eligible subgrantees include government agencies, private organizations, non-profit organizations, educational institutions and workforce development agencies. To announce the NOFOs, VIBO distributed press releases to all major media networks, on social media and sent it to all GVI agencies and employees. VIBO followed the NOFO release with an informative webinar on April 10. This webinar was open to all and is available for viewing at [omb.vi.gov](https://omb.vi.gov).

Once the subgrantee selection process is completed, the projected start date for all projects associated with the BEAD grant is set for October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025. The projected date is based on VIBO's ability to complete all remaining prerequisites. The remaining prerequisites are the subgrantee selection process, subgrantee certification and the submission of the Final Proposal. Full funding will be available for project implementation upon the approval of the Final Proposal due July 17, 2025.

It is important to note that the use of BEAD funding for infrastructure deployment purposes within the Territory would be considered duplicative, due to the award of the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Connect USVI grant. As such, the US Virgin Islands will not utilize BEAD funds to deploy or sustain broadband infrastructure projects. Instead, our focus is on leveraging BEAD funds for non-deployment initiatives that empower Virgin Islanders to thrive in an increasingly digital world and help bridge the digital divide. By prioritizing digital equity-centric programs, the BEAD Program aims to unlock the potential of the Territory and its residents by building a digitally inclusive society where all Virgin Islanders have the tools, skills, and opportunities to participate in the digital economy. This funding presents an opportunity to develop and implement programs for:

- User training with respect to cybersecurity, privacy, and other digital safety matters.
- Remote learning or telehealth services/facilities.

- Digital literacy/upskilling (from beginner-level to advanced).
- Computer science, coding and cybersecurity education programs.
- Implementation of Eligible Entity digital equity plans (to supplement, but not to duplicate or supplant, Planning Grant funds received by the Eligible Entity in connection with the Digital Equity Act of 2021).
- Broadband sign-up assistance and programs that provide technology support.
- Multi-lingual outreach to support adoption and digital literacy.
- Prisoner education to promote pre-release digital literacy, job skills, online job acquisition skills, etc.
- Digital navigators.
- Direct subsidies for use towards broadband subscription, where the Eligible Entity shows the subsidies will improve affordability for the end user population (and to supplement, but not to duplicate or supplant, the subsidies provided by the Affordable Connectivity Program).

Additionally, VIBO intends to develop various Internet Access Affordability Programs as incentives for participation and completion of digital literacy and workforce development programs. One promising concept includes offering 12 to 36 months of free internet service to individuals who complete approved digital literacy or workforce development programs. Another concept sees newly established e-commerce businesses becoming eligible for free internet service once they are operational and in good standing with the GVI.

These initiatives are designed to ensure that all Virgin Islanders—regardless of income, education level, or geography—have access to the tools needed to participate fully in the digital economy. We are excited at the possibilities of the program and look forward to the funding proposals from all potential subgrantees.

We remain committed to creating a more connected, equitable, and prosperous future for the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I remain on standby to answer any questions.