



Broadband

"The majority of infrastructure investments [in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law] do include labor standards; I also hope and expect that the Biden Administration and congressional leaders will continue to push for labor standards in all infrastructure investments, particularly in the critical area of broadband expansion, so that the new jobs created will be good union jobs."

*—International President
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IBEW POLICY BRIEF

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

Broadband

The IBEW supports policies to ensure all Americans have access to affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband, particularly those expanding access in rural, unserved, and underserved communities. High-speed broadband has become a modern necessity for vital services, including medical care and education.

Recent Developments

Broadband Funding in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) includes a historic investment of \$65 billion in broadband infrastructure funding to ensure that all Americans have access to high-speed broadband internet. The funding will be spread across several grant programs for states and communities.

BEAD Program - \$42.45 billion

The most extensive broadband grant program created under BIL is the \$42.5 billion Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program supplying grants to states to accelerate broadband deployment.

The Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) will administer the program. Each state will receive a minimum of \$100 million, with 10 percent set aside for underserved high-cost areas. States will also be required to certify that 100 percent of “unserved” areas have been met before funding deployment in “underserved” areas.

Other BIL Broadband Programs

NTIA will also provide broadband infrastructure funding for:

- Digital equity grants: \$2.75 billion to establish two new grant programs to promote digital inclusion and equity in historically underserved communities
- Tribal broadband connectivity fund: \$2 billion
- Middle-mile broadband infrastructure: \$1 billion
- Rural communities: \$2 billion
- Appalachian Regional Commission’s High-Speed Internet Initiative: \$100 million

Broadband Funding in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021

The Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds program, a part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, provided \$350 billion in emergency funding for water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure investments. The Biden administration included some labor standards on the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, including requiring that companies receiving funds through this program pay their workers at least prevailing wages or provide significant wage and hour information to the federal government.

ARPA also includes \$10 billion Coronavirus Capital Projects Funds, administered by the Department of Treasury, whose officials have stated that they prefer states to use these funds for broadband.

Broadband Funding in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 created the Broadband Infrastructure Program, designed to support broadband infrastructure deployment in unserved areas, especially rural areas. Grants from this program have been awarded in Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, West Virginia and Guam.

Pending Priorities

The IBEW supports policies that ensure federal taxpayer dollars encourage unions and collective bargaining.

The IBEW's primary objective is to ensure high-road unionized employers are first in line to receive federal and state grants for building out broadband service. This needs to include federal and state agencies responsible for disbursing broadband funding require a demonstrated record of compliance with labor and employment laws through pre-certification and mandated reporting of violations as well as attach standards that would ensure workers are paid at least the prevailing wage and exclude low-road contractors and subcontractors from receiving government contracts.

In the case of broadband infrastructure funded by the BIL, the IBEW is advocating for a requirement that states coordinate and consult with state telecommunications agencies to ensure that projects using taxpayer dollars are completed competently. Using a highly-skilled workforce, with agreements in place that ensure health and safety rules and benefits to the community, helps to ensure that projects are delivered on time, on or under budget, and that quality standards are maintained.

The IBEW supports incorporating labor standards and bid preferences for responsible contractors on broadband grant programs, encouraging highly skilled family-supporting job creation.

The BroadbandUSA Federal Funding Guide compiles federal funding opportunities to expand and improve broadband access: <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-07/FY21%20Federal%20Funding%20Guide%20Updated%2007-12-21-compressed.pdf>



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Policy Expertise

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