



Connect New Mexico Pilot Program will deliver largest broadband expansion in state history

SANTA FE – Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced the launch of a statewide broadband grant program that will leverage \$123 million in funding for the largest broadband expansion effort in the state’s history on Aug. 10.

The Connect New Mexico Pilot Program will award grants to cover up to 75% of total project costs for network expansion in unserved and underserved areas of the state. A wide array of applicants – including local governments, tribal communities, schools, nonprofits, cooperatives, and broadband service providers – are all eligible to apply for state grant support in pursuit of universal broadband access.

“Broadband is an essential element of a modern, efficient, and effective infrastructure system,” Lujan Grisham said. “The Connect New Mexico program opens an exciting new chapter in broadband infrastructure investment and digital equity collaboration throughout New Mexico, investing millions and millions of dollars to provide quality and affordable broadband service across the state.”

The Connect New Mexico Pilot Program is designed as a forerunner to the Connect New Mexico Broadband Grant Program, established in 2021 under the Connect New Mexico Act and currently subject to administrative rulemaking as required by law. At least \$70 million in additional state funding will be available for the next round of Connect New Mexico investment, expected in 2023.

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Together the Connect New Mexico programs will deliver nearly \$200 million in broadband expansion grants over the next few years, building on state investments in broadband development made throughout the Lujan Grisham administration.

The funding for the Connect New Mexico Pilot Program was part of legislation enacted by Lujan Grisham in late 2021, which appropriated federal American Rescue Plan Act funds for state use.

The New Mexico Office of Broadband Access and Expansion published a Notice of Funding Opportunity formally opening its Connect New Mexico Pilot Program on Aug. 10.

Applications for the Pilot Program will be accepted and reviewed on a rolling basis across three waves. This format recognizes that some entities are further prepared to submit a strong proposal in the near-term, whereas others may require more time. The closing dates for the three waves are: Wave One (Sept. 23); Wave Two (Dec. 9); Wave Three (Feb. 27).

All application content – including the NOFO, application template, interactive broadband map, and other helpful materials – are available on the Office of Broadband Access and Expansion website for the Pilot Program.

“The Office of Broadband Access and Expansion has been working hard to build capacity, invest in community engagement and technical assistance resources, and inspire meaningful cross-sector collaboration,” Office of Broadband Access and Expansion Director Kelly Schlegel said. “We’re eager to put historic state and federal investment in broadband expansion to work for New Mexicans desperate for better connectivity.”

“The pandemic exposed dire connectivity challenges for families and learners across the State,” Connect New Mexico Council Interim Chair Kimball Sekaquaptew said. “The Connect New Mexico Pilot Program will deploy available resources in a timely manner, while our Council prepares for the arrival of additional federal funding.”

“The first grant program of this kind sends a strong signal that we are serious about bringing

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broadband to rural New Mexico and realizing our goal of reaching all new Mexicans with high-speed broadband,” Senator Michael Padilla said.

“Every New Mexican deserves affordable access to quality high-speed internet. High-speed internet is essential for work, education, and modern-day life, but unfortunately many families in our rural areas still live without access at home or even nearby. The Connect New Mexico pilot project - providing broadband funding to underserved communities throughout our state - is the culmination of years of work to ensure that all New Mexicans have the tools they need to remain connected and competitive in today’s society,” House Bill 10 sponsors Rep. Natalie Figueroa, Rep. Joy Garratt, Rep. Susan K. Herrera, Rep. Candie G. Sweetser, and Rep. Christine Chandle said.

The matching grant program is the result of robust engagement with and input from the Connect New Mexico Council and is built upon well-established best practices from across the country.

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