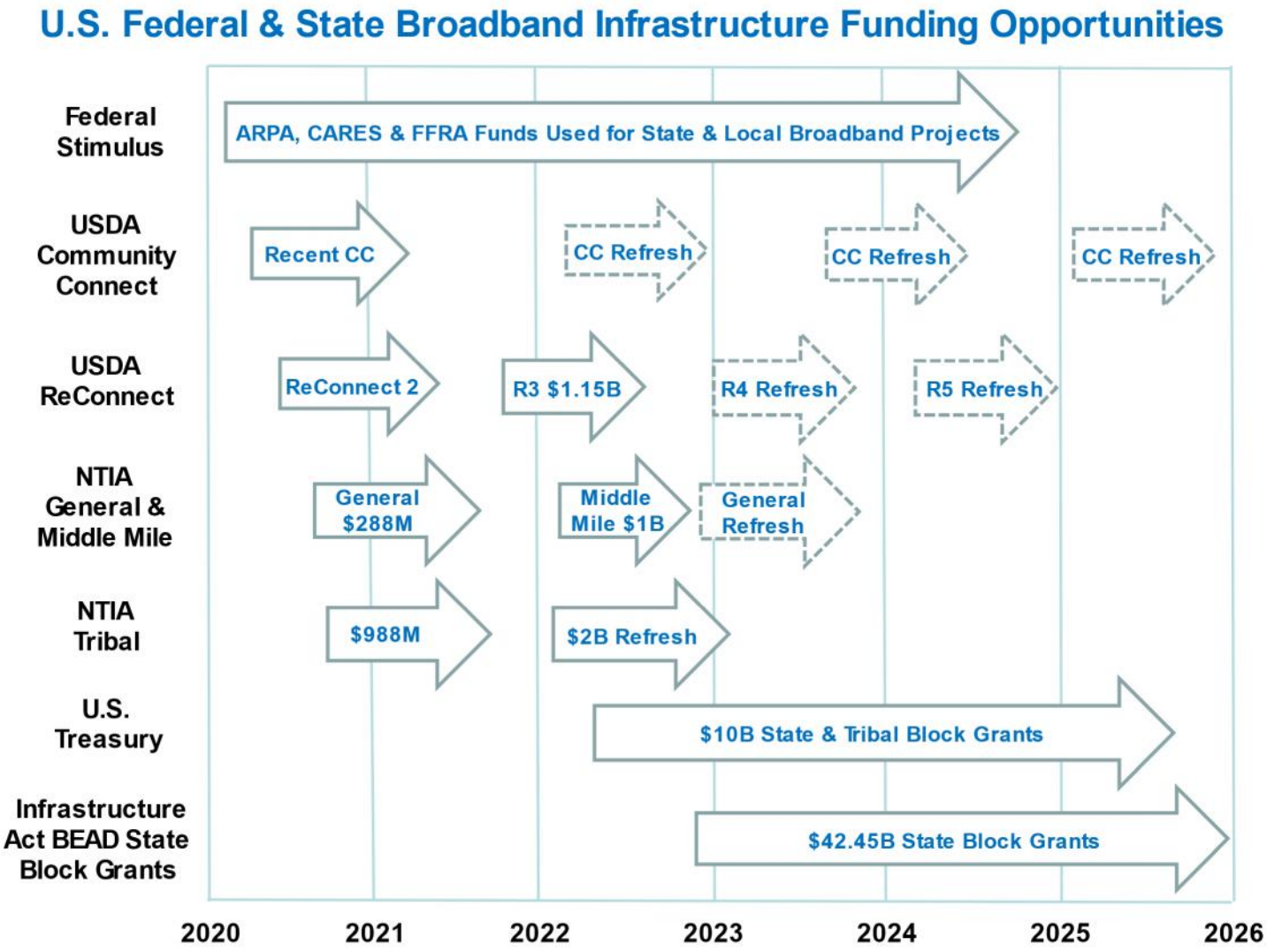

U.S. Federal Broadband Infrastructure Funding Opportunities Summary

The pandemic has brought with it a historic wave of federal recovery funding for economic stimulus and infrastructure investment, with a tsunami of new broadband funding in the pipeline to the States, territories, and Tribes as well as directly to community and provider projects. These current and emerging broadband infrastructure grant funding opportunities (complemented by digital equity program funding) include:

- In March 2020, the **Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act** was signed into law, the third major legislative initiative to address COVID-19 following the **Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act** and the **Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA)** and providing $2 trillion in funds for state use to address the pandemic including the $150B Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) for state, local, and tribal government use. Though targeted to a variety of specific purposes, there is significant discretion in program development and funding with many having committed substantial amounts to broadband projects and purposes funding specific designated projects as well as establish broadband infrastructure and digital equity grant programs. Leftover CARES funds may be used by states to offset matching requirements under some of the new broadband funding programs.

- The $1.9 trillion **American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA)** includes hundreds of billions of dollars that may be used for broadband initiatives by state, local, and tribal governments including initiatives for communities, schools, and public libraries. Most states had allocated portions of their ARPA funds for specific designated broadband projects and infrastructure grants. The U.S. Treasury stipulates that state broadband investments must be made in areas that are currently unserved or underserved funding

broadband infrastructure that deliver high performance, scalable, reliable services at 100 Mbps download and 100 Mbps upload (100/100 Mbps) speeds or greater, unless impracticable due to topography, geography or financial cost. Brookings Institute's Local Government ARPA Investment Tracker (https://www.brookings.edu/interactives/arpa-investment-tracker/) & Community Networks (https://muninetworks.org/) maintains online information on **ARPA** funded state and community broadband initiatives and projects.

- The **USDA ReConnect Grant Program** currently in Round 3 provides funds for the costs of construction, improvement, or acquisition of facilities and equipment needed to provide broadband service to rural areas without sufficient broadband access. ReConnect can accommodate larger, multi community deployment opportunities, though with significant matching obligations. $1.15B is available for grants, loans, and combo funding with applications due by March 9, 2022. Sources indicate a ReConnect Round 4 will launch in late 2022. See https://www.usda.gov/reconnect

- The **USDA Community Connect Grant Program** is anticipated to reinitiate an additional funding round in April 2022. Grants are for up to $3M requiring ≥15% matching and are limited to a single contiguous area thus good for smaller, single community projects. See https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-connect-grants

- The **NTIA Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (TBCP)** recently closed a $980M application window on September 1, 2021, but the recently enacted Infrastructure Bill has allocated an additional $2B likely to roll out quite soon due to being an established program and protocols. TBCP provides up to $50M funding to eligible tribal entities for broadband infrastructure deployment projects, including construction of middle mile and last mile networks and interconnection, as well as up to $2.5M for broadband affordability programs, digital inclusion and adoption efforts. Cost sharing or matching funds are not required and a provider subgrantee may own and operate the resultant infrastructure. See https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/resources/grant-programs/tribal-broadband-connectivity-program

- The **U.S. Treasury's Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund (CCPF)** provides $10 billion of Covid-19 Economic Relief allocating $106-540M to each state, Puerto Rico, and DC, as well as $100M to each territory and up to $167,524 to each Tribe to carry out critical capital projects that directly enable work, education, and health monitoring, including remote options for Broadband Infrastructure (prioritizing investment in ≥100/100 Mbps fiber projects), Digital Connectivity Technology, and Multi-Purpose Community Facilities. States, territories, and Tribes need submit their requests for their allocations then their plans and will roll out grant programs and projects starting in 2022. See https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/capital-projects-fund

- The recently enacted **Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act** includes some $65B in direct broadband allocations in its **Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program** including $42.45B to state block grants likely to roll out through NTIA starting 2H 2022 primarily as state designated projects or competitively awarded subgrants to projects in priority unserved areas (≥ 80% of households lacking 25/3 Mbps service) followed by underserved areas (≥ 80% of households lacking 100/20 Mbps service) broadband availability. See https://www.ntia.doc.gov/category/grants

- BEAD also funds a new **NTIA Middle Mile Program** with $1B for projects providing high-speed backbone for communities, businesses, and anchor institutions with a focus on increasing redundancy/reliability and improving affordability starting 2H 2022 and requiring 30% matching funds. NCTA & ACA Connects will maintain a BEAD Implementation Tracker as regional programs roll out.

- The **U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA)** has current funding opportunities with $3B provided the agency in ARPA. Funds are available through six distinct challenges, with separate goals and application processes/deadlines for each, several of which are appropriate for broadband purposes as one form of supported community infrastructure and programs investment. See https://eda.gov/programs/eda-programs/

Credit: Authored by Mark Goldstein, International Research Center (http://researchedge.com/) on behalf of Tarana Wireless (https://www.taranawireless.com/) (V01G)