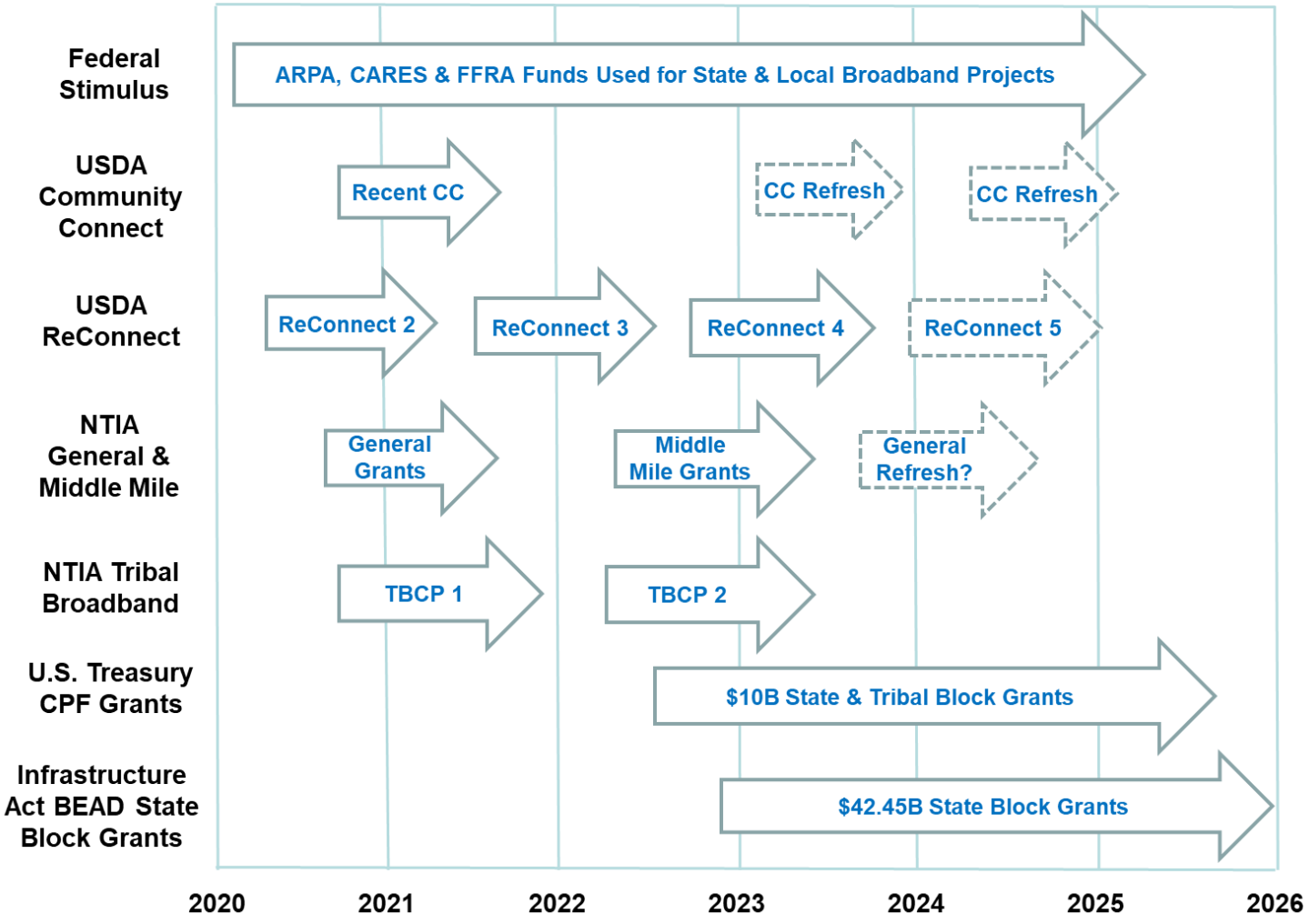
U.S. Federal Broadband Infrastructure Funding Opportunities Summary



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 generational broadband infrastructure grant funding opportunities complemented by both substantial affordability and 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 in infrastructure spending 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.

Tracking of **ARPA** funded state and community broadband initiatives and projects can be found in several online sources including .Brookings Institute's Local Government ARPA Investment Tracker (https://www.brookings.edu/interactives/arpa-investment-tracker/) & Community Networks (https://muninetworks.org/).

- The **USDA ReConnect Grant Program** closed **Round 4** on 11/2/22 with **Round 5** expected late 2023-2024. The program 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 with up to $150 million for loans, up to $300 million for loan/grant combinations, and up to $700 million in grants including several improvements in community eligibility & matching requirements over previous rounds and applications. See https://www.usda.gov/reconnect
- The **USDA Community Connect Grant Program** is expected to continue with additional funding rounds in 2023 and on. Grants have previously been for up to $3M requiring ≥15% matching and limited to a single contiguous area thus good for smaller, single community projects. Expect some evolution in the programs particulars. See https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-connect-grants
- The **NTIA Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (TBCP)** closed a $980M application window on 9/1/21, then the **Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA)** allocated an additional $2B which has been split between existing Round 1 applicants not initially awarded and with a fresh **Round 2** expected sometime in 2023 likely with similar program particulars and protocols to **Round 1**. TBCP provides up to $50M funding to eligible tribal and other 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 needed to have submitted their requests for their allocations then their plans with awarded grantees rolling out their grant programs and projects from 2023 on. See https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/capital-projects-fund
- The **Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)** included some $65B in direct broadband allocations in its **Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program** including $42.45B to state block grants following the FCC and NTIA setting the allocation from the new **Broadband Data Collection (BDC) Serviceable Location Fabric** maps in mid-2023 with state designated initiatives and competitive broadband grant programs rolling out to follow. Grants would be competitively awarded to last mile 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. The program favors fiber with some flexibility in high-cost areas. See https://www.ntia.doc.gov/category/grants
- **BEAD** also funded a single instance of the **NTIA Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program** with $1B available for projects providing high-speed backbone for communities, businesses, and anchor institutions with a focus on increasing redundancy/reliability and improving affordability, requiring at least 30% matching funds. Applications were due by 9/30/22 with several weather disaster areas receiving brief extensions. NTIA is in the **Programmatic Review** phase and is expected to make awards in Q1-Q2 2023. See https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/resources/grant-programs/enabling-middle-mile-broadband-infrastructure-program
- The **U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA)** has current funding opportunities with $3B provided the agency in ARPA. Funds have been made 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. Other EDA infrastructure programs are ongoing. See https://eda.gov/programs/eda-programs/

Credit: Authored by Mark Goldstein, International Research Center (http://researchedge.com/) (V02B)