

Addressing Broadband Worker Shortages

By Lexi West

Amid funding uncertainty, existing programs may offer starting points to build workforces. After several years of planning, states and territories are receiving final approval of their plans for the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program, a federal initiative that aims to connect all Americans to high-speed internet. For states to meet the goal of completing all infrastructure projects by 2030, expansion of the broadband workforce is critical. Analysis from The Pew Charitable Trusts finds that worker availability, wages and competition, and data limitations present barriers to growing the workforce. States and internet service providers (ISPs) should consider how labor availability will affect their ability to complete BEAD projects on time, particularly amid a historically shrinking workforce and competition with other industries for similarly skilled workers as data center expansion accelerates.

In 2025, the United States Department of Commerce reviewed the BEAD program, which

was enacted as part of the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and issued a restructuring policy notice. Among other changes, the policy notice rescinded funds previously allocated for nondeployment activities, or programs that are complementary to broadband network construction—including funds earmarked for broadband workforce development.

Many states had already begun using these funds to train prospective workers; after the policy notice was released, they canceled programming as they awaited further guidance. Availability of these funds is uncertain as the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) continues a delayed review of which activities will be eligible for support.

Regardless of the outcome of that review, workforce shortages require state policymakers, higher education partners, and ISPs to coordinate closely to fill gaps and meet BEAD milestones. Following are prominent examples of the varied approaches that are currently in use and that show the importance of cross-sector collaboration as states prepare for BEAD implementation.



State and Tribal Workforce Programs

Outside the BEAD program, states and tribal nations have used their own appropriations or other federal funding sources to create or expand existing workforce development programs to

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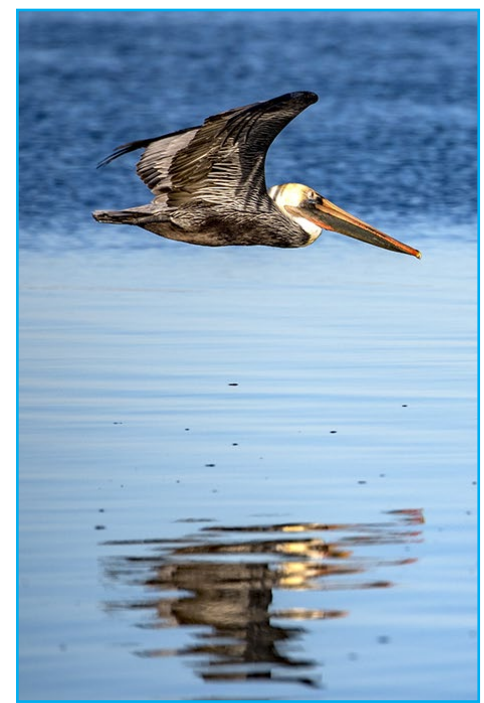
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Tuesday, July 14, 2026, 11:00 am–12:30 pm CDT Online
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration
Contact: Irene Gonzalez, 208-334-1673, irene.gonzalez@sba.gov
Fee: Free; registration required

Learn the essentials of federal contracting for small businesses. This event will cover the basics of navigating the federal contracting process, as well as the various certifications available to help your small business succeed in the government marketplace. Certifications include: 8(a) Business Development Program, HUBZone Certification, Woman Owned Small Business (WOSB/EDWOSB), and Veteran Owned Small Business (VOSB). Don't miss this opportunity to gain valuable insights and resources to help your small business. Register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/federal-contracting-basics-and-certifications-for-small-businesses-tickets-1977729664666>

SBA 101: Introduction to SBA Programs Webinar
Wednesday, July 15, 2026, 9:00 am–10:00 am CDT Online
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration, Rhode Island District Office
Contact: Brian Hopkins, 401-528-4575, brian.hopkins@sba.gov
Fee: Free; registration required

This free workshop, presented by the Rhode Island District Office, is designed to help entrepreneurs understand the various SBA programs and services available to help them as they start, expand, grow, and recover their businesses. This overview presentation covers: Introduction to the SBA; SBA Resource Partner Network—Business Training and One-on-One Counseling; Selling to the Federal Government—SBA Contracting Certification Programs; Access to Capital—Loan and Surety Bond Programs; International Trade Assistance; Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Assistance Loans. Register online for the free workshop webinar at <https://www.sba.gov/event/80672>

Federal Contracting: Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Certification Program Webinar
Tuesday, July 21, 2026, 1:00 pm–3:00 pm CDT Online
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration
Contact: Patrice Dozier, patrice.dozier@sba.gov
Fee: Free; registration required

SBA is creating a space for Woman-Owned Small Businesses, via WOSB certification! Are you a woman owner of a small business? The federal government's goal is to award at least five percent of all federal contracting dollars to woman-owned small businesses each year. Join us for training on how to register for SBA's Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB) program, which helps eligible small businesses to qualify for federal contracting opportunities. The monthly sessions include an overview of the self-certification process, and a discussion of the NAICS codes that qualify as WOSB or EDWOSB. Register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/woman-owned-small-business-wosb-certification-program-tickets-1986914400458>

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