

Connecting Oklahoma

Annual Report
2024



OKLAHOMA
Broadband Office



OKLAHOMA

Broadband Office

December 23, 2024

Governor of Oklahoma J. Kevin Stitt
Oklahoma Speaker of the House Kyle Hilbert
Oklahoma Senate President Pro Tempore Lonnie Paxton

Thank you for the privilege to present the 2024 Oklahoma Broadband Office Annual Report.

The office has made significant strides in the past year in advancing high-speed internet access to more areas of the state. When I was hired, there were only a handful of employees, and we did not have processes set up to deliver on grant administration. But our promise to Oklahomans was clear: get internet access to those communities that have never benefited before.

As we close out 2024, our office has shown a daily commitment to fulfilling this promise, having awarded more than \$500 million in grants to close the digital divide. Throughout the process, we are taking all appropriate steps to ensure the money is spent as intended.

The office has attended groundbreaking events to commemorate the awards made this year, highlighting those rural communities that will be improved most by our grants. We have worked tirelessly with the Office of Management and Enterprise Services (OMES) to ensure money is going out the door to those companies in a timely manner. We want minimal delays so Oklahomans can see the access they deserve ASAP.

But our work is far from over.

In the coming year, we will administer our largest program yet, BEAD. It will close the digital divide for any home or business not served by our first two programs. Online education, remote doctor visits and seamlessly communicating with family from out-of-town will be a reality for all Oklahomans very soon.

It is an honor to share this report and to serve our great state in this position. Our people are better off with the investments we are administering, and I look forward to sharing our progress as we continue connecting Oklahoma.

Thank you and please find the following annual report in accordance with our statutory obligation found at 74 O.S. § 9204(F).

Sincerely,

Mike Sanders
Executive Director

Since its inception in legislation, the Oklahoma Broadband Office (OBO) has experienced rapid growth and productivity. After a year of traveling the state and listening to stakeholders, the OBO was able to deliver on the promise of getting high-speed internet to rural Oklahoma.

In 2024, more than \$500 million in grants were awarded to expand the infrastructure necessary to connect homes and businesses to fast and reliable internet.



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Organization of the Office

The Oklahoma Broadband Office is governed by the Broadband Governing Board and advised by the Broadband Expansion Council. (74 O.S. § 9204), see also 74 O.S. § 9202 and § 9203.

Oklahoma Broadband Governing Board

The OBGB is composed of nine members; the lieutenant governor, state treasurer, three appointees by the governor, two by the Speaker of the House and two by the Senate President Pro Tempore. The board oversees the Oklahoma Broadband Office and its executive director, who, with the approval of the board, creates and implements an annual budget and implements grant incentive programs. Additionally, the board oversees the development of the State Broadband Plan, which describes how the state will achieve 95 percent high-speed internet coverage by June 2028.

Members of the board include:

- Jim Meek, Chair, District 9 Director and Treasurer, Oklahoma Farm Bureau, Inc. – Okmulgee. Appointed by Speaker of the House
- Amanda Mullins, Vice Chair, Managing Attorney, Amanda Mullins, PLLC – Chickasha. Appointed by Governor
- The Honorable Matt Pinnell, Lieutenant Governor – Oklahoma City. Ex Officio
- The Honorable Todd Russ, State Treasurer – Cordell. Ex Officio
- Mike Erhart, Managing Partner, Erhart & Associates LLC – Oklahoma City. Appointed by Senate President Pro Tempore
- Dwight R. Hughes, Superintendent/CEO, Autry Technology Center – Enid. Appointed by Governor
- Fob Jones, Attorney, Fob F. Jones Law – Sulphur. Appointed by Speaker of the House
- Russ Teubner, Distinguished Engineer, Broadcom – Stillwater. Appointed by Governor
- Micah White, Chief Engineer, Veri Watt. Appointed by Senate President Pro Tempore

Oklahoma Broadband Expansion Council

The OBEC acts in an advisory capacity to the OBO. The council is composed of community leaders, tribal leaders, and industry professionals to provide a well-rounded and forward-thinking viewpoint. Specifically, the OBEC advises the OBO on the State Broadband Plan to ensure industry and community perspectives are considered.

Members of the council include:

- Dr. Brian Whitacre, Chair, Professor of Agricultural Economics, Oklahoma State University – Stillwater. Appointed by Senate President Pro Tempore
- Mark Argenbright, Vice Chair, Director, Public Utility Division & Consumer Services, Oklahoma Corporation Commission - Oklahoma City. Appointed by Corporation Commission

- Darlene Brugnoli, Vice President Governmental Affairs, Verizon. Appointed by Speaker of the House
- Jason Constable, Director, Regulatory Affairs, AT&T Corp. - Oklahoma City. Appointed by Speaker of the House
- Sachin Gupta, Director of Government Business and Economic Development, Centranet, LLC – Stillwater. Appointed by Senate President Pro Tempore
- Mike Hilliary, Chief Administrative Officer, Hilliary Communications – Lawton. Appointed by Governor
- Ernie Martens, Mayor, City of Sallisaw – Sallisaw. Appointed by Governor
- Stacie Pace, Associate Director, Canopy HealthTech – Owasso. Appointed by Speaker of the House
- Mike Sanders, Executive Director, Oklahoma Broadband Office – Kingfisher
- Josh Snow, President, Trace Fiber Networks, LLC. Appointed by Senate President Pro Tempore
- Robbie Squires, Director of Government & Regulatory Affairs, Cox Oklahoma Telecom, LLC. Appointed by Speaker of the House
- Billy Frank Staggs, President, Chickasaw Holding Company – Sulphur. Appointed by Speaker of the House
- Daniel Webster, CEO, Northeast Oklahoma Electric Cooperative – Vinita. Appointed by Senate President Pro Tempore
- Jerry Whisenhunt, General Manager, Pine Telephone Company, Inc. - Broken Bow. Appointed by Senate President Pro Tempore

Delivering on our promise to rural Oklahoma



Legislators, OBGB members, OBO staff and officials with ecoLINK break ground for fiber optic broadband expansion in Slick in rural Creek County.

The OBO started off the year awarding \$375 million in infrastructure grants and ended the year awarding an additional \$159 million in infrastructure grants. Last year, the office traveled more than 6,000 miles, listening to communities across the state explain how high-speed internet would transform their lives. This year, with the help of participating internet service providers (ISPs), we were able to award over \$500 million going towards 160 projects planned for 57 of our 77 counties.

Thanks to the foresight from leadership at the Capitol, Oklahoma was one of the only states to use ARPA State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) for broadband expansion. In January, the OBGB announced

their approval of 142 projects totaling \$375 million. Companies are getting straight to work, with groundbreaking events being hosted in communities across the state.



OBO Executive Director Mike Sanders, Governor J. Kevin Stitt, and Broadband Governing Board Chair Jim Meek attend a broadband expansion project launch in Bray in Stephens County.

Another branch of ARPA funds was the Capital Projects Fund (CPF). Those monies helped build on the success of the ARPA SLFRF program. In September, the Governing Board approved an additional \$159 million from CPF to continue broadband expansion in areas without high-speed internet.

As we head into next year, the OBO is preparing for two more infrastructure programs. The results of Broadband, Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) is anticipated to be announced by the late Summer of 2025. That program is administered through National Telecommunication and Information Administration (NTIA) and has several phases before awards can ultimately be announced. BEAD will be our

largest program with over \$750 million dedicated for last-mile connections to homes and businesses.

To provide more last-mile connections across the state, Middle Mile infrastructure -- analogous to the highways or interstates of the internet, carrying data from regional hubs to local areas -- needs to be enhanced. The OBO is working with around \$35 million to expand Middle Mile infrastructure to assist ISPs with the goal of connecting more unserved and underserved Oklahomans.

OBO leadership appreciates the trust and support from the Legislature and Governor's office. The OBO is dedicated to improving the lives of Oklahomans, and the best is yet to come.

Staffing

Administering over \$500 million in grants required hiring additional grant analysts, along with financial and reporting analysts. Once grants are awarded, the top priority is compliance with state and federal laws and ensuring money is spent properly.



Director Mike Sanders with, l-r, House Speaker Kyle Hilbert and Rep. Scott Fetgatter at a groundbreaking event in Creek County.

With still over \$750 million left to award over the next year, the office expects to increase capacity in its grants and legal departments.

Ensuring compliance

Systems have been established and personnel trained to ensure the integrity of the grant funds administered by the office.

All staff, along with members of the OBG and the OBEC, have undergone training on state ethics laws and rules.

Staff added during the year includes two financial and reporting analysts, as well as a deputy general counsel, who work to ensure the subrecipients are compliant with state and federal rules and regulations. The OBO continues to use its strong relationships with the US Treasury and NTIA and meets regularly with their representatives to maintain good standing with the programmatic requirements from each entity.



OBO officials join with FiberLink executives and local legislators to launch fiber optic service near Sapulpa.



The OBO and 360 Broadband launched the first official groundbreaking for high-speed internet at an event along the banks of Lake Texhoma in Marshall County.

Finances

The annual budget for Fiscal Year 2025 was approved by the Oklahoma Broadband Governing Board in June 2024 and is attached as Appendix 1.

Broadband Grant Programs

The Oklahoma Broadband Office (OBO) made significant progress in 2024 to help bring reliable, affordable high-speed internet service to unserved and underserved Oklahomans.

Armed with transformative state legislation establishing an effective oversight framework, strong leadership and a well-qualified staff, the vision is becoming reality.

Grant Program Administration

Four major federal grant programs are being administered by the OBO. These programs will require

oversight beyond the OBO’s scheduled sunset date of June 30, 2028. The programs, their status and expected funding amounts are as follows.

American Rescue Plan Act — State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (ARPA-SLFRF)

With \$382 million in funding appropriated by the Legislature from ARPA funds received during the pandemic, ARPA-SLFRF will provide grant funds for ISPs to build broadband infrastructure to homes and businesses that are classified on the FCC National Broadband Map as unserved or underserved. Unserved is defined as available broadband service of less than 25 Mbps download/3 Mbps upload. Underserved is defined as available broadband service between 25/3 Mbps and 100/20 Mbps.

In January, the Oklahoma Broadband Governing Board awarded 142 projects to 31 different companies.

Groundbreaking events have taken place across the state and will continue into 2025.

As of November 6, 2024, the OBO has distributed \$21,794,579.71 to ISP’s for the broadband investment projects. The OBO has executed all grant agreements for the awarded ISP’s.



The BEAD program will provide the single largest amount of federal grant funding for broadband expansion in Oklahoma.”

The office continues to work with the Office of Management and Enterprise Services (OMES) to execute purchase orders to ensure awarded companies are receiving money on time.

American Rescue Plan Act — Capital Projects Fund (ARPA-CPF)

In June, applications were submitted to the office for proposed last-mile broadband expansion projects. Over 150 applications were received from nearly 40 Internet service providers.

On September 26, the Oklahoma Broadband Governing Board tentatively awarded 50 projects to 12 ISPs, spanning 28 counties.

Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD)

At more than \$750 million, the BEAD program, administered through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce, will provide the single largest amount of federal grant funding for broadband expansion in Oklahoma.

In late July, NTIA approved the OBO’s Initial Proposal Volume II, giving the office 365 days to complete the subgrantee selection process and award eligible ISPs.

From September 23 to October 23, the OBO administered the BEAD Challenge Process submission phase. Eligible entities including, ISPs, local/Tribal governments, Community Anchor Institutions (e.g.: schools, libraries, community support organizations, etc.) and nonprofit organizations had the opportunity to challenge locations across the state on broadband availability, technology, and data capacity, among other reasons.

A rebuttal period was opened for another 30 days starting on October 30, allowing certain challenged entities an opportunity to provide counter evidence.

The challenges will be reviewed by the OBO and submitted to NTIA by the end of December. Once finalized, the OBO will have the tools necessary to determine where service is most needed across the state.

Beginning in 2025, the OBO will publicize specific proposed service areas and receive feedback from ISPs about how to most efficiently serve Oklahomans. When those service areas are determined, ISPs will submit applications and compete for those locations.

BEAD grants will be used to fund the construction of new broadband access to the last remaining unserved and underserved homes and businesses. Fiber-optic technology will be prioritized.

Digital Opportunity

The Digital Opportunity program is the office’s sole non-infrastructure related program. It is designed to ensure that all people and communities have the skills, technology, and capacity needed to reap the full benefits of our digital economy. With the deployment of statewide broadband infrastructure, it will be vital for Oklahomans to have the digital tools and education to improve their quality of life.

In November, the OBO was awarded \$11 million to implement its plan to enhance those services across the state.

Further information about applying for grants will be made available in the coming months.

Outreach

With the roll out of groundbreaking events for SLFRF, community and media outreach has become an important component of our mission. For areas that have never had high-speed internet, it is incumbent on the OBO and partnering ISPs to inform residents of new opportunities to connect to the web.

The OBO has remained in contact with local media outlets and visited with local chambers of commerce and other community groups to make sure the public is up to date on the progress happening with our grants.

As projects across the state are completed, monthly updates will be provided to local newspapers and community organization newsletters.



The Oklahoma Broadband Map tracks the success of our mission to ensure high-speed internet service is available to everyone.”

Another key component of the OBO’s outreach efforts involves consultation and cooperation with the 39 Tribal Nations located with Oklahoma. The OBO’s Tribal and Programs Outreach Manager, MJ Barton, has covered thousands of miles for in-person meetings and she continues to coordinate with the Tribes and NTIA to foster ongoing cooperation.

Oklahoma Broadband Map

The OBO hosts an interactive online map detailing availability of high-speed

internet service throughout the state. The [Oklahoma Broadband Map](#) offers Oklahomans a way to track improvements in broadband infrastructure as federal grant funds are deployed statewide.

The map serves as a guide to track the success of our mission to ensure high-speed internet service is available to everyone. Currently, it tracks the SLFRF and CPF projects awarded by our office, as well as projects awarded by federal entities outside the office’s authority.

Among the unique features of the Oklahoma map is the ability to view service availability within congressional and state legislative districts.

The state map empowers users to:

- Search addresses
- View unserved/underserved/served locations
- Distinguish between different technologies in use
- See reported internet service providers and speeds by location
- View areas receiving upgrades through federal grant funds

Links to the FCC’s National Broadband and Broadband Funding maps are provided on the [OBO website](#). All three maps are included to provide as much information as possible to the public. State law and federal regulations require all grant funding decisions be based on the FCC National Broadband Map.

Looking ahead

The vision of state policymakers to seize the once-in-a-generation opportunity to provide reliable and affordable high-speed internet service throughout Oklahoma is coming to fruition. The overarching structure of Oklahoma’s broadband expansion efforts combines practical, impartial, and independent oversight with an effective implementation structure.

The OBO has the right people, policies and procedures in place to fulfill its mission to bridge the digital divide and help ensure a bright, healthy and prosperous future of the people of Oklahoma.



Appendix 1

Annual Budget 2025

Personnel	Amount
Salaries	2,651,000.00
Benefits	1,060,400.00
Travel	
Local Travel	31,540.00
Out of State Travel	65,320.00
General Operating Expenses	
Tech Connectivity	14,000.00
Printing	6,000.00
Office Supplies	25,000.00
Software	129,639.18
Grants Management Software	750,000.00
Rent	
Office	200,000.00
Copier	3,200.00
Tech Leases	64,043.52
Office Furniture	
Furniture/Office Chairs	15,000.00
Legal	
Litigation Expenses	425,000.00
Legal Expenses	35,000.00
Contracts	
Adobe	15,000.00
Consulting Services (BEAD)	2,000,000.00
Professional Services	
Auditing Fees	325,000.00
Interagency Mail	3,000.00
ABS	33,960.00
Payroll Shared Services	33,280.00
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Total Budget	7,885,382.70
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