

Connect Texas

Regional Working Groups Charter

Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts
Broadband Development Office

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Background

In 2021, Governor Abbott, Comptroller Hegar, and other State leaders have set broadband as a top State priority, and the 87th Legislature responded with House Bill 5 (HB5), establishing the Texas State Broadband Development Office (BDO). Since its inception, the BDO has delivered the Statewide Broadband Plan to the legislature, conducted a statewide community listening tour, held industry and local government roundtables, published a state broadband map, and more. The BDO is now preparing to administer two key programs from the federal 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA):

BEAD Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment

BEAD's objective is to close the availability gap, as Congress finds that "access to affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband is essential to full participation in modern life in the United States." The state will competitively award subgrants for:

- installing internet and wi-fi infrastructure for unserved, under-served, and other targeted areas and institutions
- data collection, mapping, and planning
- providing internet-capable devices

TDOP Texas Digital Opportunity Plan

Texas is developing the TDOP to respond to the NTIA's Digital Equity Planning Grant program. This program is fundamentally concerned with promoting full participation in the digital economy and society by all. Success requires strategic investments in human and community capacity and should include a clear description of the State's vision for digital equity in the context of its overarching strategy and goals.

The BDO is responsible for designing and executing the BEAD and TDOP programs, while ensuring compliance with rules set by the administering federal agency: the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). A critical component to program success is robust public engagement and coordination with local governments, community organizations, industry, and others to ensure full representation and inclusion of unserved, underserved, and underrepresented communities throughout the planning and deployment processes. The BDO has developed a public engagement model to help meet these objectives and mobilize working groups to coordinate, canvass, and consolidate public input.

Public Engagement Model

The Public Engagement Model facilitates the flow of communication, coordination, and collaboration between the BDO and its advisory bodies, including a *Statewide Working Group* (SWG), six outcome-focused *Task Forces*, and twelve *Regional Working Groups* (RWG), representative of Covered Populations and geography-spanning stakeholders. This model is responsive to NTIA requirements for a unified vision, including an assessment of how the programs may affect or be affected by other state and local plans and goals across Texas.

*This Charter describes the mission, organization, and functions of the **Regional Working Groups**.*

Charter

Purpose

The 12 Regional Working Groups (RWG) function as the primary conduit between the BDO and local communities across the state. They will provide key local insight and serve as trusted partners to coordinate events, meetings, listening sessions, and roundtables with local communities, in conjunction with the CTT. Each RWG will identify barriers to broadband adoption, access, and use for organizations and households.

Membership

Twelve Regional Working Groups will be established according to Texas Comptroller’s 12 economic regions. Each RWG will be chaired and co-chaired by members selected by the BDO and additional roles may be formalized per group preferences, including:

- Engagement Lead — ensuring optimal reach to wider member networks
- Planning Lead— for public meetings, events, logistics, toolkit promotion, etc.
- Data Lead — ensuring capture of critical data points through tools

Each group as a whole will consist of roughly 20 representatives from local organizations, whose mix varies according to local priorities, including:

Regional Councils of Government	Mayors and City Council Members	County Judges	Chambers of Commerce	Regional Broadband Coalitions
Regional Digital Opportunity Groups	Tribal Governments	Local Hospital, Clinic Staff, Health Care IT	Local Public Safety Officials	Minority-Serving Community Organizations
Faith-Based Organizations	Area Agency on Aging	Aging and Disability Resource Center	School Superintendents & School Board Members	Community-Based Organizations
Local Government Broadband Office Staff	Community and Technical Colleges	Local Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agent	Local Library Directors	Digital Inclusion Providers

Responsibilities

Generally, the RWGS are tasked to conduct stakeholder engagement at the regional level. This may include:

- Identifying and collecting local and regional broadband and Digital Opportunity plans and previously collected data sets, and integrate them into ongoing data efforts
- Determining appropriate schedule and structure for community events and facilitating in-person events tailored to their region
- Coordinating local events led by leaders from Covered Populations
- Leveraging local and regional networks and communications channels for household survey and asset mapping promotion and response

BDO

The BDO’s responsibilities include:

- Establishing the RWG’s purpose, objectives, and structure
- Identifying and inviting potential members and chairs
- Providing an agenda and materials for a kickoff meeting with all of the RWGs
- Providing the RWGs with toolkits for planning, coordinating, and collecting input

Chair

Each of the RWGs will have a Chair or a Co-Chair, who will be responsible for:

- Ensuring continued alignment to the SWG purpose
- Co-facilitating meetings with BDO support
- Capturing and sharing action items and key discussion points for each meeting

Members

Individual RWG member responsibilities include:

- Actively participating in scheduled meetings, including completion of any preliminary exercises and consultation with peers and other relevant subject matter experts
- Circulating and promoting data collection tools as developed by the BDO

Critical Input

Regional Working Groups have a key role to play in mobilizing grassroots participation in the BEAD and DO planning process, as well as the BEAD challenge process. They should also give consideration to how broadband coverage gaps can best be closed in their region and leverage that perspective to shed light on the best ways to set statewide policy to support robust and cost-effective solutions in their region. RWG focal points include:

- Coverage and quality of broadband service in each region
- Impact of inadequate broadband coverage
- Mobilizing people in each region to participate in the BEAD challenge process and identify coverage gaps
- Speed and other network characteristics needed to support telework, remote learning, telehealth, and other local broadband needs
- Defining affordability for each region
- Community preferences around broadband technology
- The role towns, local governments, and regional planning districts in reporting coverage gaps and facilitating broadband expansion
- Assessment of organizations, programs, projects, and initiatives in each region that may be eligible for funding through Texas’s upcoming Digital Opportunity Program
- Enhancing contributions from community anchor institutions

Timeline and Workflow

Beginning in April 2023, the RWG will meet for a discussion on regional broadband challenges and opportunities. The meeting will be no more than 90 minutes in duration. Additional meetings will be scheduled by the RWG Chair(s) based on member interest in discussing specific regional broadband topics. Within two days after each meeting, the RWG Chairs will provide a meeting summary to CTT to be shared with the SWG at their monthly convening. Between April and June 2023, the RWG will support planning and facilitation of at least 2 regional public meetings.

Note, the RWGs may continue to function beyond the timeline of this public engagement period, including to provide similar feedback on other planning activities.