



ConnectLA

Louisiana Office of Broadband
Development & Connectivity

GUMBO 1.0

Capital Projects Fund

2023 Performance Report

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Executive Summary

The Louisiana Office of Broadband Development and Connectivity, also known as ConnectLA, has made considerable progress toward the program objective of funding eligible broadband infrastructure projects. These projects will deploy broadband internet service to unserved and underserved areas throughout the state through the Granting Unserved Municipalities Broadband Opportunities grant program. The legislature has passed numerous laws governing the administration of this program, including [Act 477](#), [GUMBO Grant Rules](#) and [Act 288](#). These laws are the framework for the program and outline how internet service providers were selected, the program rules ISPs must follow and how Capital Projects Funds will be disbursed through the GUMBO grant program.

The ConnectLA team has traveled throughout the state to meet with leaders and residents to give them the opportunity to learn and ask questions about the program. These informational sessions were done in person to address all comments and concerns and ensure stakeholder buy-in. To participate in the GUMBO program, ISPs were required to match at least 20% of the GUMBO award. While 20% was the minimum, ConnectLA has been able to select recipients with an average match of 40% from combined input of the ISPs and local governments. This demonstrates significant buy-in from the local leaders and parishes who were willing to provide the best value for the awards received.

The GUMBO grant process began with ISPs completing detailed applications in the ConnectLA's online portal. The office then selected projects through a detailed scoring process outlined in the GUMBO grant rules. This process was aimed at awarding providers with the best chance to successfully service residents and make the greatest impact at the best cost. After ISP applications were accepted, there was a 60-day protest period in which any interested party could submit comments concerning pending applications. ISPs were able to submit a protest of any application or project area in which broadband service already existed or where construction of broadband infrastructure would begin within 24 months. After the first round of protests, the prevailing ISPs were awarded grant funds. Once awards were announced, there was an additional protest period of seven days before awards were issued. Once all protests were resolved, grant agreements were executed with rules and regulations provided by the office with a promise to fulfill the contract agreement to supply infrastructure with the ability to serve all locations within their project area. More than \$135 million was awarded in the initial round of grants to parishes throughout the state, with more than 65,000 locations to be served. The project with the most locations impacted was in [Avoyelles Parish](#) and included more than 9,000 locations.

ConnectLA has also promoted the Federal Communication Commission's Affordable Connectivity Program, which gives eligible households a \$30 monthly discount on internet service (\$75 for eligible households on tribal lands) and a one-time \$100 discount on the purchase of a desktop computer, laptop or tablet.

According to EducationSuperHighway, Louisiana ranks first in the country for numbers of households enrolled in the Affordable Connectivity Program per capita. The National Digital Inclusion Alliance's Digital Equity Index ranked Louisiana sixth in the country for how well the state government and local governments are addressing digital equity. Louisiana also received a \$1.356 billion allocation of Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. This was the eighth largest allocation nationally and 10th largest allocation per capita.

Uses of Funds

ConnectLA has not used any CPF funds to date; however, it has used other available state funds to cover program costs such as community engagement efforts, program administration and other services required to carry out the execution phase of the GUMBO program. This allows the state to direct all CPF funds to broadband infrastructure projects in locations throughout Louisiana.

To date, ConnectLA has granted 77 GUMBO awards to ISPs for broadband infrastructure projects in Louisiana. Many of these projects are in progress, and a few are completed and under review for disbursement of funds.

Two external, independent vendors were hired to ensure projects are executed as planned and are in compliance with both state and federal regulatory requirements. These vendors have created standardized procedures and put controls in place to collect, review and confirm all necessary data for the projects prior to the disbursement of funds. As the vendors build out the administrative areas of the program, the ISPs work through the build phases of their projects.

In the next year, ConnectLA expects to accelerate progress significantly as the structure of the program is in place and construction on many projects across the state break ground. The office has been working with a sense of urgency to provide results while ensuring accuracy and comprehension of both CPF and state requirements. The office is working on a public-facing interactive dashboard to show progress and provide transparency to stakeholders.

The individuals benefitting from this program are unserved and underserved populations throughout the state. Unserved populations are defined as individuals, businesses or community anchor institutions receiving internet speeds of less than 25Mbps download and 3Mbps upload, while underserved populations have speeds between 25/3 and 100/20Mbps. ConnectLA worked with ISPs to determine the eligible project areas with unserved and underserved locations during the application phase. As the FCC's National Broadband Map continues to be updated to provide better insight into specific geolocations of broadband serviceable locations, ConnectLA will continue to focus on unserved and underserved areas of the state.

The greatest challenge for the GUMBO program has been the availability of location data demonstrating where broadband service is available. ISPs were required to provide location data and details on unserved and underserved locations they planned to serve, and ConnectLA relied on protests from other ISPs to determine accuracy of the data. The availability of the Federal Communication Commission's National Broadband Map is aimed at providing much more reliable data for ConnectLA to use into the future; however, there is a significant amount of reconciliation required to match the initial GUMBO location data that was approved in grant applications to newly reconciled geolocations with fabric IDs. The office is working with ISPs to reconcile the location data and ensure that the required information is available for CPF reporting and compliance with grant agreements.

Promoting Equitable Outcomes

[Digital equity](#) was considered in the design of the GUMBO program. Most GUMBO projects in Louisiana are in economically depressed areas, consisting of low-income residents with high digital illiteracy rates. ISPs were required to provide details on low-income household service offerings, digital equity or literacy support and programs or partnerships to provide these services in their applications. The scoring criteria for the GUMBO grant program includes metrics that award points based on how rural the

project area is, the number of unserved and underserved households and businesses, small business and veteran-owned business participation and consumer price.

ConnectLA also understands the importance of internet affordability in addition to expanding access. To that end, the office has encouraged Congress to vote to [reauthorize the Affordable Connectivity Program](#), which has helped more than 479,000 households afford internet service.

Labor

For all GUMBO projects more than \$5 million, ISPs must ensure strong labor practices in construction (e.g., Davis-Bacon, National Labor Relations Act, Prioritization of Local Hires and Community Benefit Agreement) and must supply additional information on their workforce practices. The ISPs were also encouraged to develop a strategy to prioritize local workers in their applications. To help ensure an educated workforce, the Caddo Correctional Center, in collaboration with Bossier Parish Community College, offers [two fiber optics certifications](#) to inmates participating in the Northwest Regional Re-entry program. GUMBO grant rules require ISPs to adhere to Civil Rights Compliance and other applicable federal laws and regulations.

Community Engagement

Community engagement continues to be an area of focus for ConnectLA. The office has been very active in holding informational sessions to understand stakeholder needs and address any comments and concerns. ConnectLA leaders meet regularly with elected officials to provide them with the status of projects in their areas, answer questions and discuss next steps. ConnectLA regularly publishes newsletters to keep the public informed of its activities, and correspondence with the office is accepted and encouraged via email at connect@la.gov.

[Summer 2023 Newsletter](#)

[Fall 2022 Newsletter](#)

[Summer 2022 Newsletter](#)