

Eliminating Barriers to Rural Internet Development Grant Eligibility (E-BRIDGE) Act

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The *E-BRIDGE Act* clarifies that broadband projects undertaken by public-private partnerships and consortiums are eligible for funding through the U.S. Economic Development Administration's (EDA) authorities under the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965 (PWEDA).

Pursuant to its authorities under PWEDA, EDA provides funding to infrastructure projects and other activities that support employment in economically distressed areas of the country. While EDA currently funds broadband projects using these authorities, proposals cannot be considered if the recipient would be a public-private partnership or consortium.¹ This restriction inhibits communities' ability to partner with telecommunications companies and other entities that may contribute needed expertise, enhancing the viability of a project.

Providing EDA with this flexibility is critical given the importance of broadband to economic development, a fact underscored by the COVID-19 pandemic.² Furthermore, it will help ensure recent record funding provided to EDA is spent to support much-needed projects.³

WHAT THE ACT DOES:

- Clarifies public-private partnerships and consortiums formed for the purpose of providing or improving broadband service are eligible recipients for EDA funding under PWEDA.
- Requires EDA to solicit data from other agencies on the level and extent of broadband service in an area proposed to be served by a project.
- Requires that title to real or personal property acquired or improved with funds provided to a public-private partnership or consortium be vested in a public partner or nonprofit entity for the useful life of the project, protecting taxpayer funds.
- Allows recipients of funding to grant an option to a third party to acquire real or personal property associated with a project, provided that the federal government's interest in the property has been released.

¹ <https://eda.gov/news/press-releases/2021/03/18/south-boston-va.htm>

² https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/04/30/53-of-americans-say-the-internet-has-been-essential-during-the-covid-19-outbreak/pi_2020-04-30_covid-internet_00-5/

³ [https://www.eda.gov/news/blogs/2021/03/22/eda-marks-cares-act-milestone.htm#:~:text=March%2022%2C%202021&text=On%20Thursday%2C%20March%2011%2C%20President,Plan%20\(ARP\)%20into%20law.&text=The%20ARP%20allocates%20%243%20billion,coronavirus%20recovery%20and%20resiliency%20strategies.](https://www.eda.gov/news/blogs/2021/03/22/eda-marks-cares-act-milestone.htm#:~:text=March%2022%2C%202021&text=On%20Thursday%2C%20March%2011%2C%20President,Plan%20(ARP)%20into%20law.&text=The%20ARP%20allocates%20%243%20billion,coronavirus%20recovery%20and%20resiliency%20strategies.)