

PBDA Technical Sub-Committee
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Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority
Technical Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes
Thursday, May 18, 2023
Virtual: Microsoft Teams

Sub-committee members in attendance:

- Todd Eachus, BCAP
- Frank Baier, PA Office of Administration
- Jim Gardler, Communications Workers of America
- Steve Samara, PA Telephone Association
- Terry Fitzpatrick, Energy Association of Pennsylvania

Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) staff in attendance:

- Pam Frontino
- Brandon Peters

I. Call to Order

Todd Eachus called the meeting to order at 1:03 PM.

II. Review of scoring criteria

Todd introduced Brandon Peters, the new Deputy Director to the Authority, and welcomed him to the sub-committee. Brandon introduced himself and shared his background and experience.

Todd reminded the group that CPF BIP applications will be reviewed and scored based on 15 criteria which are included in the BIP Guidelines. The weights for each of the scoring criteria will not be disclosed. He asked for any updates from the Authority on that front, to which there were none.

The 15 un-scored criteria were reviewed for committee members. Todd noted that within the program there are two project options: large-scale regional projects and line extension. He noted that these are different types of projects, and asked how the Authority will distinguish between the two and score them against one another.

Brandon Peters discussed the cost difference between the types of program, and noted that cost will be considered in the review, but both have importance. He shared that weights have not been developed at this point, but the differences will be taken into account.

Steve Samara echoed the concerns from his industry about this concern, particularly from member companies from rural parts of the commonwealth. Todd asked that if members of the committee have additional thoughts to share them with the PBDA.

III. Setting rates for prevailing wage

Todd expressed the importance of constructing accurate applications absent the presence of wage determinations. The only classification that resides in the state (published by Labor and Industry) is one certified to work in the electric space, which does not align with the work that will be conducted for BIP programs. To create a competitively neutral and fair process, it's necessary for the state to let provider communities know what those wage determinations are. Lacking the proper classifications, the wage rate for one certified to work in electric space, which is very high, the sub-committee should question if that's the most efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

Brandon Peters shared that the Authority is considering this issue and will continue to engage in discussions with Labor and Industry and will notify members of the sub-committee of updates.

Jim Gardler echoed Todd's concerns. He has a list of classifications that could be useful for the rest of the sub-committee. Brandon requested that members of the sub-committee share any guidance that could be useful to take to L&I related to this topic.

IV. Authority Updates

a. Staffing update

Pam Frontino re-introduced Brandon Peters.

b. CPF-BIP application open/FAQ info posted

Pam shared that the application is open and that the Authority is open to answering questions from prospective applicants.

Todd remarked that the 5,000-character limit for the application is not practical. Pam said she'd investigate whether this limit can be lifted or if any progress can be made.

c. Michael Baker International progress

The consultant group will join the next meeting to give updates on their progress and plans moving forward.

V. Sub-committee member updates/comments

Todd raised cost-estimator layer concerns about the Penn State Extension maps. There are also make-ready and pole attachment assumptions that are inaccurate. If there is a way we can help people understand that the mapping work that the Authority is doing internally is the reference point and not that product, it would be helpful to dissolve some of the confusion. Brandon Peters responded by saying the Authority is working with PSU Extension to alleviate some of the misconceptions and would continue those discussions to resolve the issue sooner rather than later.

VI. Public comments

Jennifer Cloonan asked if scoring criteria will be released and shared that it's surprising to providers that it is not available. Brandon shared that this is a DCED policy and will not change. Todd echoed Jennifer's concern.

VII. Adjournment

Todd called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Steve Samara made the motion to adjourn, and it was seconded by Jim Gardler. The meeting ended at 1:51pm.