Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG)
Joint Powers Authority Agenda

STAFF REPORT

To:	ESCOG Joint Powers Authority
From:	Elaine Kabala, ESCOG Executive Director
Subject:	Discussion Regarding the Obligations and Benefits of California Advanced Services Funding
Meeting date:	October 30, 2026
Prepared on:	October 14, 2026
Attachments:	None

BACKGROUND:

During the September Strategic Board Meeting discussion, the Board requested staff agendize a discussion to evaluate the benefits, administrative obligations, and organizational considerations associated with ESCOG continuing to host the Inyo-Mono Broadband Consortium (IMBC) under an already-secured California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) grant.

The grant was awarded on June 15, 2026 in the amount of $600,000 over three years. Staff is currently working with the California Public Utilities Commission on modifying the agreement to allow for contracted staff to implement the scope. Although the funding has already been secured, the grant does not represent unrestricted revenue. Its use is subject to applicable grant requirements, approved activities, deliverables, and reporting obligations

The IMBC “Connected Eastern Sierra” 2026-2029 Work Plan would focus on the following five objectives:

1) Collaborating with the Commission and other state agencies to engage regional consortia, local officials, ISPs, stakeholders, and consumers regarding priority areas and cost-effective strategies to achieve the broadband access goal;
2) Identifying potential CASF infrastructure projects or potential broadband deployment projects related to new programs created under SB 156 and AB 164, along with other opportunities, where ISPs can expand and improve their infrastructure and service offerings to achieve the goal of reaching 98% broadband deployment in each consortia region;

3) Assisting potential CASF infrastructure applicants or potential applicants for broadband deployment projects related to the new programs created under SB 156 and AB 164, or other state and federal programs deploying broadband in California, including Broadband Equity Access, and Deployment (BEAD) in the project development or grant application process;

4) Conducting activities that will lead to or that can be reasonably expected to lead to CASF infrastructure projects or broadband deployment projects related to new programs created under SB 156 and AB 164, or other state and federal programs deploying broadband in California, including BEAD, the Federal Funding Account, Middle-Mile, Broadband Loan Loss Reserve, and Local Agency Technical Assistance;

5) Assisting the Commission in publicizing requests for wireline testing volunteers in areas, as needed; and

6) Assisting the Commission in promoting broadband deployment in California, related to CASF Infrastructure Projects as defined in Section III, the Federal Funding Account, Middle-Mile Broadband Initiative, Broadband Loan Loss Reserve, and Local Agency Technical Assistance programs created under SB 156 and AB 164, or other state and federal programs deploying broadband in California, including BEAD.

ANALYSIS / DISCUSSION:

The Inyo-Mono Broadband Consortium receives $200,000 annually for three years through a California Advanced Services Fund grant, representing up to $600,000 in secured funding to support regional broadband coordination and project development.

The ESCOG Board has requested a discussion regarding whether ESCOG should continue hosting the Consortium and administering its associated activities.

Potential Benefits of Continued Administration of the Inyo Mono Broadband Coalition / California Advanced Services Funding include:

- Preserves up to $600,000 over three years to support regional broadband coordination and project development.
- Provides up to $30,000 per year for ESCOG administration.
- Maintains capacity to help local agencies pursue broadband infrastructure funding, coordinate with service providers, and address regional connectivity gaps.
- Retains regional broadband data, institutional knowledge, and established partnerships. A local point-of-contact is valuable for providing data and other support to internet service providers seeking grant funding for infrastructure expansion projects.
- Provides dedicated resources to advance broadband projects that individual jurisdictions may not have the capacity to pursue independently.
- Preserves access to California Public Utilities Commission relationships, including quarterly Statewide coalition meetings that provide important updates on State technology policies in a quickly evolving landscape (e.g. federal policies allowing for satellite-based internet rather than fiber-to-the-premises or new policies regarding AI or datacenters).

Administrative Obligations and Potential Disadvantages:

- Grant administration requires staff capacity for financial management, reporting, auditing, coordination, monitoring, and completion of required deliverables. These responsibilities must be assigned to staff or contractors and cannot be assumed to occur without an associated workload. This grant requires an annual audit. Nearly all administrative tasks were previously managed by full-time, dedicated IMBC staff.
- Hosting the Consortium means maintaining sufficient administrative and programmatic capacity for the duration of the grant. This commitment may constrain ESCOG's ability to redirect limited staff resources toward other organizational priorities.

Continued hosting offers a clear financial and operational opportunity: it preserves up to $600,000 in secured funding, provides funding for administration, and maintains an existing mechanism for regional broadband coordination. However, the award's value depends on the availability of sufficient administrative capacity and the ability to deliver meaningful outcomes within the grant's requirements. Previous discussions with Member Agencies indicates there is not capacity within those organizations to absorb the broadband scope. Additionally, maintaining a regional relationship with the California Public Utilities Commission is valuable to for communicating technology barriers in rural communities and provides a direct line of communication to participate in discussions regarding State IT policy.

However, as the Board is considering ESCOG's organizational structure, core services, and long-term role, continuing to host the IMBC should be evaluated in the context of that broader discussion. Broadband infrastructure is considered an economic development activity in other regions and CASF coalitions are typically housed in regional planning and economic development organizations such as ESCOG; however, the administration of the funding will require staff time and focus.

Additionally, The Board should distinguish between the decision to continue a funded regional service and the decision to make broadband coordination a permanent ESCOG function. Continuing under the existing grant could be a time-limited arrangement that preserves regional capacity while ESCOG evaluates its long-term structure or focus over the next three years.

BUDGET IMPACTS:

The IMBC will reimburse up to $200,000 per year for 3 consecutive years ($600,000 total) from the CASF Rural and Urban Regional Broadband Consortia Account fund. The grant provides for 15% indirect overhead reimbursement to ESCOG.

LEGAL REVIEW:

ESCOG Counsel has reviewed this item and found it is consistent with the law.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff request the Board discuss the benefits, obligations, and organizational implications of continued hosting and provide direction to staff regarding whether to:

1. Continue hosting the IMBC under the existing grant, explore discontinuing current IMBC/CASF funding, or revisit if the IMBC is consistent with ESCOG’s core scope at the conclusion of the current CASF grant in 2029.