Assessment of Blandin Community Broadband Program (BCBP) using the Mountain of Accountability framework

January 2017 – June 2018

Compiled by Blandin Foundation staff and consultants based on written reports submitted by program partners, Blandin on Broadband blog posts, and media reports
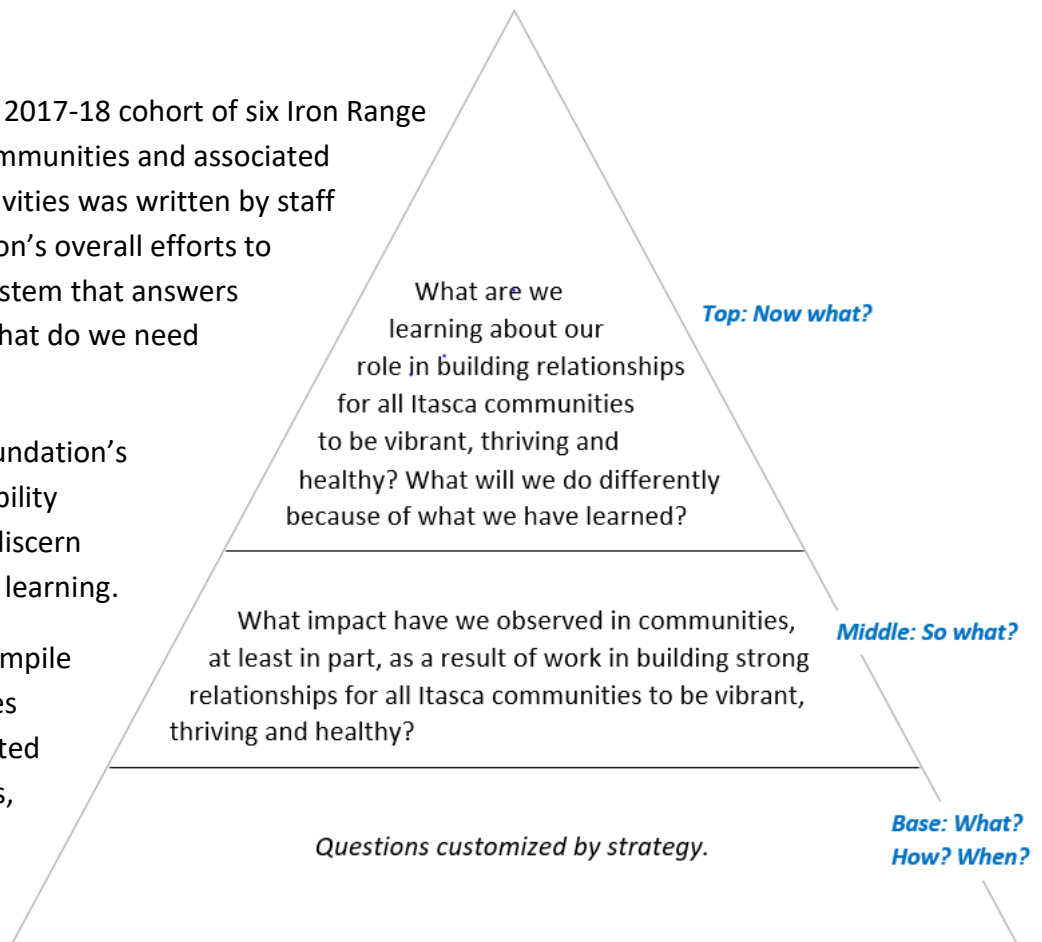
Contents

Introduction

This assessment of the 2017-18 cohort of six Iron Range Blandin Broadband Communities and associated broadband-related activities was written by staff as part of the foundation's overall efforts to build an assessment system that answers the basic question: "What do we need to know to do better?"

The report uses the foundation's Mountain of Accountability framework to help us discern and apply what we are learning.

Information used to compile the assessment includes written reports submitted by community partners, reporting on the Blandin on Broadband blog, and in-person site visits and convenings.

Top: Now what?
What are we learning about our role in building relationships for all Itasca communities to be vibrant, thriving and healthy? What will we do differently because of what we have learned?

Middle: So what?
What impact have we observed in communities, at least in part, as a result of work in building strong relationships for all Itasca communities to be vibrant, thriving and healthy?

Base: What? How? When?
Questions customized by strategy.

The reporting period for this assessment covers January 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018, roughly the active period of that cohort.

Program Overview and Context

Blandin Foundation's investment in the Blandin Community Broadband Program (BCBP) is based on the premise that affordable access to the Internet -- and the digital literacy skills needed to take full advantage of this access -- are essential for healthy communities. The program's objectives are to increase and improve community economic vitality and quality of life through increased broadband adoption and sophistication of use.

BCBP advances the foundation's mission through three of the foundation's strategies:

Commitment to Home	Invest in Leadership	Expand Opportunity

BCBP matches community resources and vision with technical support, grants, information and educational resources, webinars, convening and conferences. Program components include:

- Community Broadband Resources (technical assistance)
- Blandin Broadband Community (BBC) partnerships
- Annual *Border to Border Broadband* conferences
- Webinar series
- Convenings
- Broadband grants
- Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition policy work
- Blandin on Broadband blog

Partnership with Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation

In response to a significant downturn during 2015-2016 in the region's iron mining industry, the Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation (IRRR) launched a broad community engagement process to map opportunities to advance economic development and quality of life on Minnesota's Iron Range. Broadband access and adoption emerged as a key priority across numerous working groups. In response, Foundation and IRRR staff worked together to explore what it might look like to offer Blandin Foundation's Community Broadband Program on the Iron Range.

An agreement was reached whereby IRRR fully funded grant and consultant costs for the Foundation to deliver the Blandin Broadband Communities (BBC) program in four Iron Range communities in the period July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2018.

In response to the Foundation's recruitment efforts, a total of six communities stepped forward with qualifying applications. Determined to find a way to respond to this need, St. Louis County was recruited as an additional program partner-funder. County staff agreed to fund program costs for the two additional communities. The Foundation agreed to contribute grant funds for the two communities.

Foot of the Mountain: Basic Accountability for Management Processes
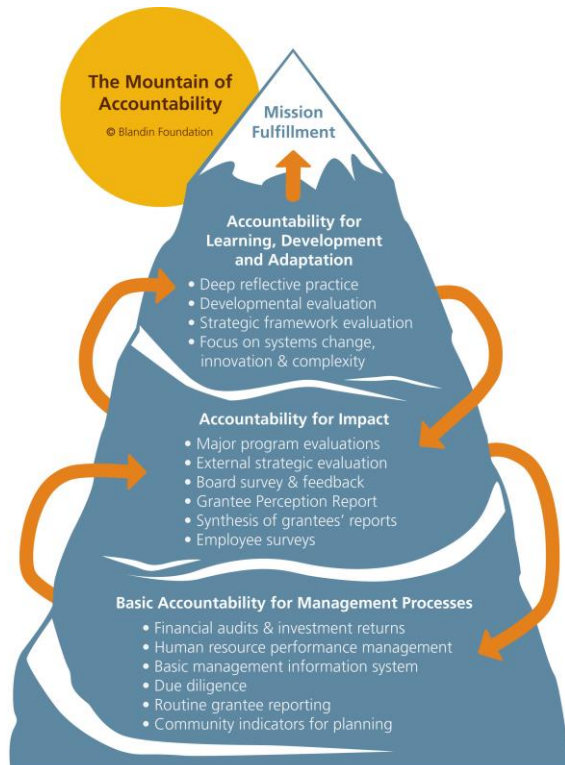
Inputs

Human Resources: 1.40 FTEs (Mary Magnuson .9; Bernadine Joselyn .4; Christy Hoskins .05; Linda Gibeau .05); Consultants: 2,240 hours 2017 - $201,600; 1,247 hours 2018 (Jan-June) - $112,230 ($90/hr) plus travel.

Strategy Board: advice and guidance - including deliberation on grant applications - on the part of 14 stakeholders[1] representing a range of experiences and perspectives from business, internet service providers, local government, state government, education and healthcare. The Strategy Board meets quarterly.

Grant funds: $450,000 per year dedicated grant dollars allocated by Blandin Trustees for 2017 and 2018. In addition, staff opted to make a one-time allocation of $69,615 for additional grants in 2017 to help facilitate community participation in the program utilizing available resources resulting from the IRRR grant.

$370,000 dedicated grant funds from IRRR for Iron Range Broadband Communities through June 30, 2018.

Leveraged funding and other in-kind match: At least $891,908 over two years in match contributed by Iron Range Broadband Communities and community project grantees.

BCBP-dedicated program funds: $63,732 over two years (excluding staff salaries, consultant fees, and including conference expenses)

$130,000 from IRRR and $39,500 from St. Louis County dedicated program costs for six IRBCs.

$26,500 from 14 organizations for 2017 Border to Border Broadband conference sponsorships.

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[1] *Broadband Strategy Board members:* Joe Buttweiler, Consolidated Telecommunications Company – CTC; Stacy Cluff, Mille Lacs Energy; Nancy Hoffman, Chisago County HRA EDA; Steve Kelley, U of MN Humphrey School Public Affairs; Jon Linnell, North Region Health Alliance; Scott Marquardt, Southwest Initiative Foundation; Dan Pecarina, Hiawatha Broadband Communications; Erik Simonson, MN State Senate; Rich Sve, Lake County; Fred Underwood, Fond du Lac Reservation; Madonna Yawakie, Turtle Island Communications
Advisory members: Jacki Anderson, Office of Representative Collin Peterson; Danna MacKenzie, Office of Broadband, MN DEED; Bree Maki, Office of Senator Smith

<u>2017-18 Iron Range Broadband Community Partners</u>: Aitkin County, Chisholm, Ely, Grizzlies (Bois Forte, Cook, Orr), Hibbing, and Mt. Iron-Buhl.

Iron Range Broadband Communities Kick-Off Gathering; November 30, 2016

Outputs

<u>Iron Range Broadband Communities</u>: The six communities achieved the following milestones.

- Each community formed a steering team that received program orientation and leadership training.

- Using the Intelligent Community model as an organizing framework, Vision and Project Development meetings were held in each community where a community assessment, vision development and project development tasks were completed.

- Each community received approximately $75,000 in funding to implement projects to improve broadband access and technology use in their area.

- Each community received and distributed a minimum of 50 refurbished computers to families with low incomes, and/or to organizations to provide public access to students, seniors, or low-income people.

- Two feasibility studies for improved broadband infrastructure and services were conducted – one study covers the Ely School District; the other is a collaborative effort covering the Hibbing, Chisholm, Mountain Iron-Buhl school districts and Cherry Township. Discussions with private sector providers are underway in each area to develop partnerships to deploy additional broadband services.

- The program spurred collaboration within and between the six Iron Range Broadband Communities and facilitated the active participation in locally-driven projects on the part of regional economic development resources like the Entrepreneur Fund, workforce centers, colleges and others.

<u>Grants:</u> 37 grants approved for a total of $962,315 (See the Appendix for a complete grant list.)

- $529,455 to fund 15 grants to Iron Range **Blandin Broadband Communities** for 41 projects
  - $429,455 for community adoption projects
  - $100,000 for Robust Network Feasibility Fund grants

- $49,000 to fund a grant to PCs for People to distribute 500 computers in ten communities, including the six Iron Range BBCs.

- $273,800 to fund seven **Robust Network Feasibility Fund** grants.

  - Six $25,000 grants were awarded to rural communities throughout Minnesota: four studies were county-wide in focus, one focused on a single Indian reservation, and one studied an electric cooperative's service area.

  - A six-county coalition received a $123,800 grant.

- $110,060 to fund eight **Broadband Innovation** grants in support of projects that advance community-defined technology goals, and six donations of $1,000 or under. Examples of funded projects include: smart technology demonstration classrooms, technology and social media training programs for individuals and businesses, support for the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition, and support for the pilot of Boreal Corps, a program that trains youth in digital civic journalism.

<u>Technical Assistance</u>: When seeking to map a path to a technologically vital future, communities often lack quality, tech-neutral, vendor-neutral advice. The *Community Broadband Resources* (CBR) component of the Blandin Community Broadband Program offers consultants to provide information and assistance to communities as they seek to meet their broadband needs.
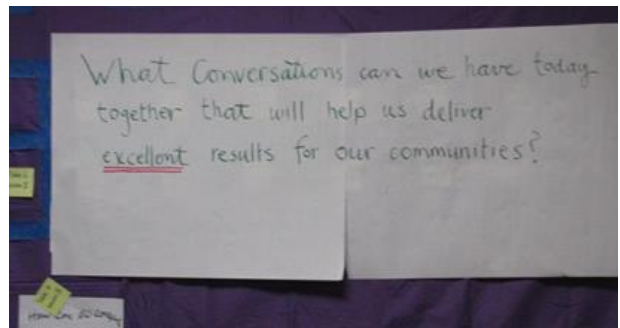
Through this program component, participating communities are eligible to receive up to 32 hours of consultation and staff assistance. During this reporting period program consultant Bill Coleman delivered a total of 474 hours of assistance to 22 communities. The foundation was able to respond to every request received.

<u>Information/Education Support</u>: Throughout 2017-18 reporting period the *Blandin on Broadband* (BoB) Blog and related monthly e-News continued to serve as the state's key information resource on policy and practice related to broadband access and utilization. In addition, blog content frequently was cited and amplified by other state-wide and national media. House DFL Research Coordinator, David Sullivan, an e-News recipient says, "I want to let you know how much I appreciate getting the broadband e-news each month from Blandin. There is always information in there that is interesting to me."

The blog gets on average 119 views per day. Events such as legislative action or funding opportunities increase traffic as do links from other news sources, especially national news sources. Traffic to the site is just one measure of exposure. We also saw an increase in subscribers to the site – or readers who get BoB posts via Twitter, email or WordPress. At the end of June 2018, we had 1,864 subscribers to BoB, and 2,370 subscribers to e-News. Subscribers get daily or weekly updates from the blog and include legislators, journalists, national broadband figures and community members.

Visitors to BoB are able to share posts with their colleagues through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other social media channels. BoB articles have been shared 10,154 times since its inception in January 2007; sharing has doubled in the last two years, probably because of the greater prevalence of people using various social media channels.

In addition, throughout 2017-18 Foundation staff coordinated the delivery of 11 webinars[2]. Topics were generated by staff in response to stakeholder perceived needs and interests. Participation in the webinars ranged from 3 to 34, for a total of 182, with an average participation rate of nearly 17. All webinar content is archived on the Blandin on Broadband blog, the videos have been viewed 267 time and the accompanying PowerPoint presentations have been accessed (via SlideShare) 6,991 times.

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[2]   BCBP webinars offered between January 2017 and June 2018:

March 15, 2018	Is the BBC Program Right for You?
February 22, 2018	Digital Literacy and Older Adults
December 14, 2017	Emerging Trends in Minnesota Tele-Health
November 9, 2017	The Homework Gap: How Lack of Broadband Hinders K-12 Education
September 14, 2017	Assessments, Training and Certifications: A Path Forward for the Digitally Excluded
August 10, 2017	Low Income Devices and Connectivity
July 11, 2017	Digital Inclusion Basics
April 27, 2017	Broadband Finance Strategies
March 9, 2017	Broadband at the County Level
February 9, 2017	How to be Effective at the Capitol
January 12, 2017	2017 Legislative Preview

<u>Convenings</u>: In October 2017, Blandin Foundation hosted ***Border to Border Broadband: Bridging the Gaps – Expanding the Impact***, with support of the MN Office of Broadband Development, MN Department of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation, and 12 additional sponsors. The two-day event, hosted annually, was attended by nearly 130 participants, and featured:
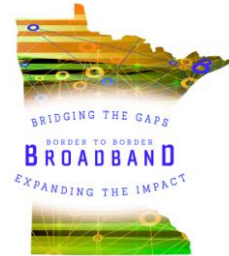
- *Digital Inclusion Showcase* featuring nine Minnesota presenters using innovative strategies for redressing the state's digital divide.

- Panel about how cooperation between communities and provider partners is a winning strategy in addressing Minnesota's broadband gaps, featuring Kevin Edberg of Cooperative Development Solutions and Laura Withers of NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association.

- Keynote presentation by Roberto Gallardo of the Purdue Center for Regional Development at Purdue University on how rural communities can transition to, plan for, and prosper in the digital age; and the latest research on broadband's impact on the digital divide in the state of Minnesota.

- Presentation of original Blandin Foundation field research documenting the return on investment of high-speed broadband networks in five rural Minnesota communities.

- Learning Stations featuring projects funded through DEED's Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program.

Blandin staff raised $26,500 from 14 partners to make up for a gap in funds available from the foundation's own operations budget for the conference.

Cooperative Convenings: Minnesota is blessed with a vibrant eco-system of locally-owned telephone co-ops who already for decades have invested in advanced fiber networks for their members, making Minnesota a leader in national rural fiber connectivity. For years, Blandin Foundation staff had been pondering the question, "What would it look like if more different (additional?) co-ops stepped in to partner with communities to bring broadband to hard-to-serve areas? How can we facilitate that?"

In 2017 BCBP continued to help further an increased role by electric co-ops in meeting Minnesota's broadband needs. Assistance was provided through CBR to Roseau Electric, which also was awarded a Robust Network Feasibility Fund grant in support of its efforts to understand and meet the broadband needs of the co-op's members. Through Community Broadband Resources, Bill Coleman promoted the co-op idea with community clients, including East Central Electric Co-op, as part of an unsuccessful request to the Post Road Foundation to

be included in their national project. Bill also facilitated a tour of the RS Fiber Co-op by a broadband team from Isanti County.

In February 2018, Foundation staff co-hosted a meeting with Great River Energy to promote the opportunity for electric and telephone co-ops to sponsor a Blandin Broadband Communities project in their service areas and make them aware of the Robust Network Feasibility Fund and invite their participation in the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition. Unfortunately, this meeting did not result in expressions of interest on the part of any co-op in sponsoring the BBC program within their service area.

Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition: During the annual broadband conference hosted by Blandin Foundation and the Office of Broadband Development back in 2015, participants crafted a broadband vision for the state:

> *Everyone in Minnesota will be able to use convenient, affordable world-class broadband networks that enable us to survive and thrive in our communities and across the globe.*

In the wake of the conference and the vision's creation, Blandin Foundation staff worked to help support rural broadband stakeholders' efforts to organize themselves to advocate for this broad policy vision with relevant audiences.

As a result of these convenings, an informal alliance of rural-focused advocacy organizations representing cities, townships, counties, economic development and others, coordinated their rural broadband legislative advocacy efforts throughout the 2017 legislative session. The capstone of these efforts was Minnesota's first ever "Broadband Day on the Hill," a full day of education and advocacy on behalf of rural communities' broadband needs that attracted over 70 participants from across rural Minnesota, including representatives from many of the current and former Blandin Broadband Communities. Participants met with then Lt. Governor Tina Smith, heard from a panel of legislators, and met in teams with their representatives, supported by briefing materials created by the Blandin team regarding the case for expanded rural access. For nearly 40 percent of the participants, "Broadband Day on the Hill" was the first they had participated in an advocacy day at the Capitol.

In September 2017, the Blandin team again convened coalition members to strategize about how to sustain a rural broadband voice at the Capitol into the future with Blandin Foundation playing less of a role. The goal was to figure out a structure and process for the coalition itself to carry the work forward more independently from Blandin support.

Encouraged and inspired by their experience during the Day on the Hill, coalition members renewed their commitment to working together to create and promote a shared advocacy

message on behalf of the broadband needs of rural Minnesota. They decided to pool funds to hire a professional public policy consultant; Blandin Foundation provided a $15,000 seed grant (via the City of Winthrop's Economic Development Authority) to fund only non-lobbying work, and 23 participating organizations contributed a total of $13,800 to fund the advocacy effort. Coalition members issued an RFP and selected a public policy consultant to work at the Capitol on behalf of the coalition's goals. They formed a "leadership team," which met with the consultant weekly during the session to set priorities and coordinate messaging. The leadership team, supported by the consultant--+, organized a second "Broadband Day on the Hill" in April 2018 that again was attended by broadband champions from across Minnesota.

Middle of the Mountain: Accountability for Impact

The Blandin Community Broadband Program has impacts at multiple levels:

- Individual persons
- Individual grants/projects/events
- Individual businesses/organizations/institutions (schools, health care facilities, local governments, etc.)
- Communities
- Regions
- Statewide
- National

Given the foundation's focus on communities as a unit of impact, this assessment discusses primarily what we are learning about BCBP's community-level impacts.

Blandin Broadband Communities

The following summary of IRBC community-level impacts is informed by *Blandin on Broadband* blog reporting, and staff site visits with Iron Range Broadband Community teams.

Aitkin County
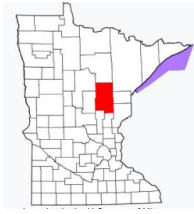
Aitkin County has continually been one of the lowest ranked (if not the lowest) Minnesota counties when it comes to broadband access. Not surprisingly, access to broadband is one of their main focuses as an IRBC. They've provided Wi-Fi to the main street and Berglund Park in Palisade and are working on doing the same in Hill City. The Palisade project has led to an unexpected outcome. After learning of their Wi-Fi project, SCI Broadband announced plans to bring a fiber optic line into town, connecting 110 homes and businesses with fiber by summer of 2018.

Long Lake Conservation Center is another site that received Internet upgrades for staff and public use. With a modest $2,496 in grant dollars, they were able to install satellite Internet that has increased bandwidth considerably while eliminating Wi-Fi dead spots throughout the campus. It has turned around a trend of people not wanting to be there because the Internet was so poor.
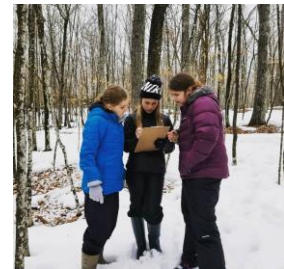
> *"Our new and improved connectivity has enhanced our productivity immensely. We see it in our everyday tasks, as well as larger projects we have been able to tackle with higher internet speeds. Reaching out to learners and guests via the web and social media is a major need for our organization, and having reliable internet has greatly improved our ability to do that."*
> ~ Wendie Carlson, Long Lake Conservation Center Business Manager

One other way the Aitkin BBC group addressed residential internet access was to provide funds to East Central Regional Library to purchase 14 mobile Wi-Fi hotspots that patrons can check out for 3 weeks at a time for no charge.

Another priority was setting up conference/meeting centers for public use in Aitkin, McGregor and Hill city, complete with a mobile computer bank, smart boards, technology information centers and Wi-Fi hotspots. They plan on using those sites for community technology training opportunities, including a series of webinars targeted to business owners, and to provide opportunities for non-traditional students to receive their GEDs and continue their education.

Rounding out Aitkin County's projects were launching a new community landing page[3]; delivering 82 PCs for People computers to various organizations as well as families with school age children; and acquiring four portable school bus Wi-Fi units that can be placed on activity buses or buses with the longest routes.

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[3] https://aitkincounty.events/

Although not a direct result of IRBC activities, the County continues to work on Internet access, and has set aside $450,000 over three years for broadband projects that meet state speed requirements. Mille Lacs Energy has stepped in, and through a partnership with CTC received a state grant to deploy fiber in Aitkin. SCI also received a grant to build out a portion of Shamrock Township near Big Sandy Lake. The County remains committed to working with existing and new providers to expand access to everyone.

Chisholm

The City of Chisholm partnered with the Hibbing and Mt. Iron-Buhl IRBCs on a joint feasibility study grant to determine options for bringing broadband to the communities of Chisholm, Balkan Township, Hibbing, French Township, Cherry Township, Mountain Iron, Buhl, Kinney, and Great Scott Township. The study was completed, and they are working with the consultant to share the results with the individual local units of government. They are also having discussions with local providers to determine options for serving more people in the study area. The most exciting thing about this project was seeing the communities work together toward a common goal.

In addition to serving as the grantee for the shared feasibility study, Chisholm received grant funding for Wi-Fi on two school buses; a community website/portal[4]; Wi-Fi hotspots at the Chisholm Public Library, Balkan Community Center, and the Lake Street Pocket Park – a new gathering area in downtown Chisholm; ten mobile hot spots available for check-out at the public library; and training programs where high school students learn how to build and rebuild computers, and provide device training to older adults.

The Minnesota Discovery Center is an important attraction in Chisholm, and the premiere meeting venue in the area. However, the building was proving to be less than ideal for meetings in the 21st century. The Internet connection was poor, and staff and guests struggled with slow and unreliable Wi-Fi. Fortunately, a mere $4,300 in IRBC funds allocated by the committee provided the impetus for the Discovery Center to

switch providers and get a fiber connection; expand Wi-Fi throughout the building, pavilion and park; and update their POS system. It ended up being a much larger project than first expected,

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[4] https://chisholm55719.com/

but it has already been a huge improvement for the staff and has given visitors to the facility the kind of connectivity they've come to expect from modern venues.

The "Business Perks" project sought to create rental space for part-time, temporary or startup business with access to technology including high-speed Internet, and webinar and other office equipment. UMD's Center for Economic Development had pledged to house a worker in the space part-time to act as facilitator. The space would also serve as an incubator/business development tool, training center, and brain hub for the community. One important criteria in site selection was that it be an existing building in the downtown so that it benefits community vitality; several such sites were being considered but securing space has been challenging. The steering team is now considering how they might accomplish the project's objectives using temporary spaces.

Ely

At one Blandin site visit in Ely, a participant commented that Ely is known for being divisive, but broadband is an issue everyone can agree on – they need it, and they need it now. It's nice to see people who don't always agree with each other working together on broadband.

One of Ely's priorities was to complete a feasibility study to determine the possibilities of better connectivity in the study area, which is the school district. One element of the study was a community survey. Of the 400 residents and 60 businesses that completed the survey, only 9 percent currently have connections that meet Minnesota's definition of broadband – 25 Megabits per second (Mbps) download and 3 Mbps upload – and 94 percent of residents and 98 percent of businesses want improved broadband.

Based on the results of the study, community leaders are considering a phased approach when it comes to infrastructure improvements, starting with a fiber loop in downtown. The next phase is likely to be a public-private partnership to offer fixed wireless to residential areas within the city and select areas outside of town.

Ten Below coworking space (named for the weather in Ely and the fact it's ten steps below street level) is proving to be a nice community asset. There is room for 12 people to work comfortably with some office amenities and a private room for phone calls. The space was chosen in part because there was already a fiber line into the building, and they were able to get a 250 Mbps down/100 Mbps up

connection. After one month they had eleven members; some full-time, and others range from all-summer to more temporary. One member, a programmer from the Twin Cities who spends time at Burntside Lake, commented that the Internet was better there than at his corporate headquarters.

An "Elyite" (EE-lee-ite) is a person whose passion for Ely and the surrounding community compels them to call it home, whether they reside there year-round or not! Elyite.com is website launched by IRBC steering team members that promotes Ely as a vibrant place to live, work and visit. The site was designed by community members, and uses video to tell Ely's story, including its history, culture, and provides resources for visitors and residents. The site is meant to complement other Ely-focused websites.

Other projects implemented by the Ely IRBC focus on improving use of technology and social media by businesses through one-on-one consulting, training classes and Social Media Breakfasts; and a broadband use and business development survey, which will provide information on gaps and needs, and is serving as a starting place to create Ely's first ever business directory. After participating in the one-on-one consulting, Arrowhead Outdoors reported, "Significant increase in our Facebook page and website traffic," and increased profits.
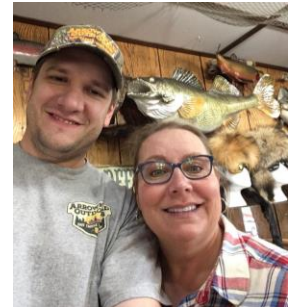
Grizzlies (Bois Forte, Cook, Orr)

The Grizzlies is the mascot for North Woods School, which was opened in 2012 when the schools in Cook, Orr and Bois Forte were consolidated; and now the name for the IRBC effort within the school district's boundaries. It's the first time this "new" community has worked together on something outside of the school.

Access and use are key concerns for the area. The population density is sparse, and many people are without access to the Internet at home. The region is working with existing providers and making the most of increased access via CenturyLink with CAF II funding, improved cellular service, and fiber access on Bois Forte Reservation.
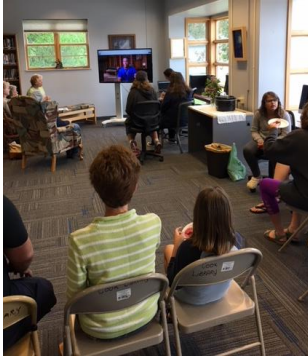
To address both access and use, the Grizzlies increased public access to Wi-Fi by adding public hotspots to the Cook Library and the Orr Center. They also upgraded the computer labs in Nett Lake, the Orr Center, and at the Cook Library by increasing the number of computers and upgrading equipment, adding mobile TVs, carts and laptops. This was important because there was previously there was no suitable venue for technology training in the City of Cook. The Cook Library also added five mobile hotspots available for seven-day check-out by library patrons. The hotspots have been checked out 96 times in the first seven months. The Cook Public Library Board wrote in a letter to Blandin Foundation, "Partnerships between Orr, Nett Lake, and Cook will continue to grow and serve as a result of this project… We're pleased our library can now offer educational classes and Internet access as a direct result of the Broadband Community project… Imagine families, homeschooled students, and a remote workforce able to connect to the Internet at useable speeds for the first time. This service is possible because of the Broadband Initiative."

Finally, the Grizzlies focused heavily on training residents to use technology tools. First, they surveyed residents in all three communities to find out what they wanted to learn. They heard from both residents and businesses, and the rate of return was about 50%. Over 60 classes were held on a wide range of topics such as email, social media, basic web design, online employment, QuickBooks, Windows, iPad/iPhone, buying and selling, and computer protection; but the most popular training was bring-your-own-device. A local volunteer led a well-attended coding for kids program, which was significant because no technology classes are currently offered by Northwoods School. Tracey Dagen of Harvest Nation, a local business that participated in the QuickBooks training said, "Through the love and enthusiasm [the trainer] shared with us for building community, we left not just with technical skills, but with feelings of connection and fulfillment… Harvest Nation received more than it had bargained for and we are forever grateful for this opportunity, knowledge, and overall experience with this training."

Hibbing

The Hibbing IRBC, led by the Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce, was largely focused on helping local businesses make better use of Internet marketing and social media. Their premier project was Digital Marketing for Small Businesses. They began by selecting seven businesses through an application process. Those businesses worked with a private consultant who led them through an assessment of their current marketing practices, co-created a personalized work plan designed to grow their revenues and brand awareness through online strategies, and assisted each business owner through completion. The program was very successful. A Hibbing-based branding design business has incorporated what they learned about social media and brand awareness and is using it to help their own clients. Another participant, Andy's Auto Sales began with 30 Facebook fans and ended up with more than 600, is looking to purchase a larger location, and has seen a definate bump in sales. The business owner, Andy Koschak remarked, "This changed my business completely, it brought me out of the stone age with digital media advertising, I wish nothing more than to spend more time with [the consultant]."

The digital marketing consulting was so successful that they elected to continue the work with an additional 16 businesses, and offer a digital marketing workshop series to provide Hibbing area business owners with practical tools and ideas to propel their digital marketing efforts to new heights. The workshops were well-received. One attendee stated, "This spurred some personal and professional goals for me - would love to attend any other sessions..."

Other projects implemented by Hibbing included offering 20 mobile Internet hotspots for check-out at the library; increasing the number of public Wi-Fi hotspots in the community; distributing a total of 100 refurbished computers to families, seniors and the disabled through PCs for People; and hosting a Technology Career Fair for students in grades 9-12.

The Technology Career Fair was an ambitious project led by Hibbing Community College. About 100 high school students from five area schools learned about how IT interfaces with everyday life and career options. Topics included technology and digital media, manufacturing, healthcare, and IT networking and security. The goal was to provide students with information about how technology is changing the workplace and shed light on the importance of high-speed Internet in everyday life.

Mt. Iron-Buhl

The IRBC group in Mountain Iron-Buhl (MIB) was led by the school district, so understandably, several of the projects were driven by students' needs. School-based projects included installing Wi-Fi on seven of nine of the district buses; purchasing equipment for a new journalism class and Makerspace classroom; and bringing technology to outdoor classroom opportunities, such as Wi-Fi at the school forest, GPS mapping, geocaching and trail cameras. Forestry students and their teachers received training on the forest equipment from staff at Laurentian Environmental Center, and had the opportunity to train other students in the use of the equipment, which they will be using to measure trees and monitor wildlife, among other things. Finally, quite a few of the PCs for People computers went to families with children.

Another key theme among the MIB projects was improving Internet and technology at municipal and public locations. One of the first projects undertaken by the group was creating websites for Great Scott Township and the Town of Kinney. There was some question about whether the 160-person Kinney needed a website, so they are looking at other options, like a Facebook page. Great Scott Township did set up a website[5] and use it to its full advantage with a calendar of community events and meetings, and to publish minutes and other community information. Traffic to the website has been slow, but the feedback is good.

They also purchased new meeting equipment and upgraded the Internet access at the government buildings in Great Scott and Kinney; upgraded the Wi-Fi at Mt. Iron City Hall, the Library, and other public spaces around town. Kinney Town Hall received three refurbished PCs for People Computers for public use, and plans to hire a student to staff the building a few days per week after school to allow building access and assist with the computers.

Finally, they are supporting the business community with technology breakfasts; and technology training classes on topics such as marketing, Facebook live, and social media; and marketing audits for area businesses that includes an audit tool that businesses can use to self-evaluate and learn about areas where they can improve.

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[5] http://greatscotttownship.com/

<u>Strut Your Stuff Tours</u>

A consistent highlight of previous BBC cohorts has been the "Strut Your Stuff" tours, a single staff site visit held toward the end of each cohorts' second year of the program. Upon reflection and examination of best practices, and to help the Iron Range Broadband Communities (IRBCs) reflect on and learn from their experiences throughout the duration of the program, staff decided to discontinue the BBC program's quarterly written reporting requirements and instead organize semi-annual Strut Your Stuff (SYS) tours over the program period. The first two SYS opportunities give community teams a chance to come together and share their successes and learnings, and let Blandin Foundation staff know how they could help them be even more successful. The final SYS is designed to create an opportunity for each IRBC team to bring community awareness and attention to the results of their work. The community meetings recognized and celebrated progress and spotlighted the learning from the project activities undertaken in each community. IRBC Steering Committees used the occasion to recount the community goals that informed their activities, report on progress achieved against those goals, and recommit to continued efforts.

At all three SYS tour meetings, community teams responded to staff questions including:

- What need or purpose brought your group together?
- What community technology goals did you set?
- What community-wide impacts are you observing or expecting?
- What was most fun?
- If you knew then what you know now…
- How could Blandin Foundation have been more helpful to you in this work?

Results of these meetings were used to inform adaptations in program implementation for upcoming cohorts.

Technical Assistance: Meeting Communities Where They Are At

The *Community Broadband Resources* component of BCBP is designed to meet communities "where they are at;" the kinds of assistance requested ranged from technical, educational, or informational to convening/facilitation support. In general, communities are not seeking highly technical advice. Rather, they want to know: 1) where they stand with broadband compared to other communities, and 2) what are their options for moving forward. In particular, providing an online survey tool that generates a data report – and help interpreting the data – is appreciated by the communities. The need to promote and distribute the survey within the community helps to build the local team and provides some fairly immediate feedback on the

local broadband situation. The 32 hours of available assistance per community seems to be a good parameter for helping communities properly scope the services they are requesting from Blandin Foundation.

Below is a summary of the 474 hours of assistance delivered to 22 participating communities and entities during this reporting period.

Impact from Community Broadband Resources Technical Assistance Delivery

Community	Assistance Description	Highlights
Becker County	Work with Becker County EDA to review existing services and to interview existing providers to understand their future deployment plans and to investigate prospective partnerships.	County focused on areas unlikely to be served without special focus. Developed stronger relationships with several providers.
Bigfork	Meet with local leaders to discuss broadband options.	Based on this conversation, Bigfork officials convinced Paul Bunyan Communications to expand broadband services to the community.
Braham	Assist City to develop RFP to bring fiber-based services to their new industrial park on behalf of specific tenant.	City was able to reach agreement with local wireless Internet service provider to bring fiber to the industrial park.
Chippewa/ Yellow Medicine Counties	Prepare and present to a joint working group of county officials.	Outcome was an expanded coalition to six counties to share and collaborate in a Robust Feasibility Fund application and through the study process.
Coalition of Greater MN Cities	Prepare and deliver presentation on broadband at their annual conference.	More informed community leaders.
GPS 45:93 East Central MN regional economic development group	Provide a variety of services, including regional broadband assessment, a regional broadband policy white paper, an assessment of the impacts of CAF II investment in two exchanges, wrote 1st draft of grant application to Post Road Foundation.	Regional work continues.
Hermantown	Prepare and present broadband information to city staff. Share broadband survey tools and strategies for maximizing impact of survey.	City moving forward with community survey.

Community	Assistance Description	Highlights
Isanti County	Assist the county EDA to form a broadband task force and move through community broadband planning process, including provider interviews and resident survey. County received Robust Network Feasibility Fund grant.	County has issued RFP for provider partners for fiber-wireless hybrid network. County representatives took tour of RS Fiber cooperative as part of discovery process.
Lake of the Woods County	Meet with Lake of the Woods County EDA and share current broadband assessment. Provide business broadband survey instrument and reporting services.	Significant shortcomings in broadband services for businesses along Rainy River and Lake of the Woods. Continuing discussions with area broadband providers.
Lake Shore	Prepare and present city broadband assessment. Facilitate provider interviews. Develop two prospective solutions – one with existing cable provider to extend services into unserved area and one with a new competitive provider.	City considering next steps for project financing.
Le Sueur County	Prepare and present broadband assessment for county board. Beginning broadband planning process.	Strong county community team.
LeRoy	Prepare and present broadband assessment to LeRoy EDA and city council. Help to facilitate discussion with existing and prospective providers. Provide survey instrument to community.	City of LeRoy was able to convince Jaguar Communications to overbuild the community with Fiber to the Home network, happening summer 2018.
North Star Electric Cooperative	Prepare and deliver broadband presentation to key staff and board of directors.	More informed decision-makers.
Otter Tail County	Prepare and present broadband assessment for county task force. Assist county implement community broadband survey. Assist county interview existing and broadband providers.	County received Robust Network Feasibility Fund grant and the study was completed. Will focus on areas unlikely to receive quality broadband without special focus.
Pequot Lakes	Worked with the Pequot Lakes EDA to understand its broadband options. Facilitate broadband provider discussion. Help city implement business broadband survey.	Business broadband requirements were revealed and those results were shared with existing providers to give them the opportunity to meet the needs of the local businesses.

Community	Assistance Description	Highlights
Roseau Electric Cooperative	Work with cooperative leadership and consultant on current broadband assessment and community survey. Present information at community meeting and at annual co-op membership luncheon.	Co-op is in the midst of broadband feasibility study and considering collaborative relationships with a variety of area providers.
Saint Louis County	Upon request of citizen advocate, provide sample broadband language for St. Louis County to include in their comprehensive plan.	Information submitted to St. Louis County as input into their planning process.
Scandia	Prepare and present broadband assessment. Provide tools for community to discuss options with providers. Facilitate discussion with a competitive provider.	Scandia received a Robust Network Feasibility Fund grant for pre-engineering work in partnership with a competitive provider.
Sherburne County	Assist the community promote the availability of fiber conduit assets within the community by writing RFP.	Contract with competitive broadband provider for use of the conduit pending with county board.
Stearns County	Work with county administrator to complete current broadband assessment, broadband provider survey and interviews, presentation to the county board.	Enhanced relationship with existing providers. Successful application for DEED Border-to-Border grant by Albany Telephone. CAF II improvements by CenturyLink and Frontier.
Western Mesabi Mine Planning Board	Prepare and deliver a "Intro to Broadband" presentation.	New topic for this multi-community planning board.

The City of Pequot Lakes has been working for quite some time to find ways to improve their broadband services, both inside the town and in the surrounding area. There is work yet to be done, but with the help of CBR, they were able to work with a provider to extend fiber to their business park. Mark Jurchen, Chair or the Pequot Lakes Economic Development Commission writes, "[The consultant's] expertise and insight was valuable as he assisted us in surveying our core business district and business park to determine the effectiveness of our current carriers. We were able to evaluate speed, service, and pricing as part of the survey." As a result of the survey, the group was also able to refer individual businesses who were experiencing difficulty to providers to see if they could reach solutions.

 GPS 45:93 is a regional economic development partnership made up of four rural communities within a four-county area of East Central Minnesota, a region that has been working on finding solutions to their broadband infrastructure needs for years. Nancy Hoffman is the 2018 President of GPS 45:93, "The CBR work allows us to work together to find a solution to our region's lack of high speed reliable broadband."

The City of Scandia is another community thankful for CBR assistance. They set a goal to provide reliable and cost effective broadband services to all of their residents and businesses and used CBR as a gateway to a Blandin Foundation Robust Broadband Networks Feasibility grant to determine actual cost. City Council Member, Steve Kronmiller stated, "I look forward to a continued partnership with the Blandin Foundation as seek out ways to pay for the construction costs and finally give our residents the broadband service they deserve!"

Organizational-level Impacts

 Boreal Community Media: While a significant portion of Blandin Foundation's broadband grant awards in 2017 and 2018 were made to new and alumni Blandin Broadband Communities, meaningful outcomes were achieved through Broadband Innovation grants. One example is the work of Boreal Community Media.

Boreal Community Media (BCM) was formed when the nonprofit regional Internet Service Provider, Boreal Access, became obsolete with the formation of the fiber-based True North Broadband, a service of Arrowhead Electric Cooperative. BCM is a nonprofit corporation designed to provide local news, information about community activities and connections to residents and visitors of Cook County and the Arrowhead Region of Northern Minnesota through the website www.boreal.org. BCM received a Broadband Innovation grant to create BorealCorps[6], an innovative broadband-based, kids' civic digital news service published on their website, and to do some work to shore up some technical issues with their legacy servers.

BCM succeeded in forming a sustainable, reliable and well-recognized youth group of able civic connectors and communicators. Enrollment has been steady, and participants have been recruited to work on messaging by a variety of community organizations including the Sawtooth Clinic, Lions Club, YMCA, Great Expectations Charter School, and Oshki Ogimaag Community School. Additionally, in December of 2017 BorealCorps was hired by the American Lung Association in Minnesota to provide 15 weeks of social media health messaging on Facebook targeted to other schools on the dangers of e-cigarettes and nicotine addiction. They did such

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[6] https://www.borealcorps.org/

an impressive job that eight students were invited to St. Paul in March of 2018 to present an artistic interpretation of lung cancer.

They state in their final report:

> *BorealCorps is an unqualified success. It is a rural broadband-based asset that connects community, educates and enriches lives. For the first staff cohort of BorealCorps, it appears to have been a transformational identity-forming experience. They succeeded in creating a new digital service. They have power—and they want to be good stewards of that power. We could not have started and prototyped BorealCorps and achieved the stable, thriving state it is now in without financial support from the Blandin Broadband Innovation Grant—and your belief in children to rise to the challenges of this century, and indeed, lead. Thank you so very much!*

> ~ Anne Brataas, Editor and Publisher for Boreal Corps, the Youth Digital Media Project of Boreal Community Media

Regional Impacts

The foundation's broadband work continues to have impact at a regional scale.

Blandin Foundation staff and consultants assisted Region Nine Development Corporation[7] in south central Minnesota plan and convene the *Rural Connect Broadband Summit*. The April 2018 event was attended by 95 people, and had three main goals:

1. Shared understanding of broadband and how it currently looks in the nine counties: The day started out with a "Broadband 101" presentation that covered terminology, technology options, emerging trends, maps and data, and introduced the concepts of Net Neutrality and the Digital Divide Index. Panelists discussed specific broadband technologies, community/provider partnerships, economic development, and what state and federal resources are available to communities.

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[7] Region Nine Development Corporation serves Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, LeSueur, Martin, Nicollet, Sibley, Waseca, and Watonwan Counties.

2. Participants excited, engaged and ready to act: Participants heard from four communities about how they successfully deployed high-speed broadband infrastructure, and what it's mean to their community; and how two other communities have tracked the economic impact of broadband.

3. Beginning framework and leadership to move forward: Meeting facilitators led a discussion and identified champions and a shared commitment for actions going forward.

As a result of this meeting, Le Sueur County stepped forward to apply for the Blandin Broadband Communities program and are currently receiving Community Broadband Resources assistance. Region Nine Development Corporation is freshly committed to supporting communities in the region as they explore pathways to better broadband.

In an effort to spur regional broadband collaboration and to empower rural broadband advocacy, Blandin Foundation worked with regional partners to host and deliver a series of *regional broadband workshops*. Regional leaders worked to attract attendees, including town, city and county officials as well as their area legislators. Blandin provided a speaker who highlighted the regional broadband situation, technology trends and policy options for spurring broadband investment. Meetings were held in Mora, Bemidji, Fergus Falls, Litchfield, Carlton and Mankato. In addition, a Blandin speaker addressed a legislative policy group in southwestern Minnesota and presented to the MN Association of Professional County Economic Developers (MAPCED).

In 2017 six counties in the southwest Minnesota (Chippewa, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Pipestone and Yellow Medicine) partnered to form a *Coalition for Better Broadband* and received a grant from Blandin Foundation to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of robust broadband networks in the region. It was the first time multiple counties applied for a single Robust Network Feasibility Fund grant. They chose to collaborate in order to save money, and because they recognized that any resulting broadband projects should not be constrained by county lines.

Based on the results of the multi-county study, each county is now working independently to address its unique broadband issues. Pipestone and Lyon Counties received DEED Border-to-Border Broadband grants that will provide a partial solution for this region.

Statewide Impact

During this reporting period Bernadine Joselyn continued to serve on the *Governor's Broadband Task Force*, representing rural community perspectives. Bernadine chaired the Task Force sub-committee on economic impact and with research and drafting support from Blandin consultants authored the report's content dealing with the impact of broadband on community vitality and economic prosperity.

The *Blandin on Broadband blog* (BoB) continued to be a powerful tool for informing the statewide conversation and policy making decisions impacting broadband access and adoption. One of services BoB provides is covering Minnesota Broadband Task Force meetings. BoB provides the most comprehensive notes on the meetings available, and makes them easily accessible by the public.

BBC projects spotlighted on the blog continue to inspire other communities to try something similar. Examples of projects that have "self-replicated" include Wi-Fi on buses, mobile hotspot check-out programs, technology fairs, and technology consulting for businesses, among others.

Another contribution Blandin's broadband work made during this reporting period to the statewide conversation about rural community needs for better broadband was an original research study commissioned by the foundation and conducted by program consultant Bill Coleman. The study, *"Impact of CAF II-funded Networks, Two Rural Minnesota Exchanges Left Underserved,"* grew out of efforts to help local broadband champions advance their community broadband goals when Federal Connect America Fund Phase II[8] (CAF II) funds are in-play. It found that the networks studied don't meet state goals of better broadband speeds for everyone: the CAF II-funded improvements are inadequate to support broadband-based economic and community investment, while discouraging investments by competitive providers.

Other findings include:

- Greater transparency from CAF II recipient-Internet service providers would enable more effective collaboration with state elected officials, the Office of Broadband Development, and communities to maximize the value of federal dollars.

- Minnesota can boast of examples where communities, the state's Border to Border Broadband grant program and CAF II recipients have worked together to finance and build networks that offer better service than CAF II-funded networks alone.

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[8] https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/connect-america-fund-phase-ii-faqs]

- Maximizing the public benefit from public investments is good for everyone.

- Better broadband through better transparency and collaboration is possible.

Study results were presented to the Governor's Broadband Task Force, via webinar, and on a special website built by the Foundation for that purpose.[9]

Finally, the work of the *Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition* had a statewide impact during this reporting period. As a result of the coalition's efforts, bipartisan bills in support of broadband grant funding were introduced in each chamber, and the final Omnibus Supplemental Budget bill included $15 million for broadband grants. (The coalition had hoped to reach $20 million, but that goal fell by the way-side amid the larger issues and negotiations around the bill.) In the end, Governor Dayton delivered on his promise to veto the Omnibus Supplemental Budget Bill, which included the broadband spending.

In post-session communications with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, the Governor's Office, the Governor's Broadband Task Force and its members, coalition leadership announced that it will be seeking stable, biennial funding for the broadband program as part of the 2019 legislative session.

National Impact

In 2016, Bernadine Joselyn and consultant Ann Treacy worked with partner organizations to support an application to host the *National Digital Inclusion Alliance's (NDIA) annual conference* in St. Paul, Minnesota. NDIA's purpose is to develop and empower a community of practice of on-the-ground digital inclusion providers. Together they successfully made the case that the Twin Cities -- and Minnesota as a whole -- was a rich learning environment with lots of innovative and successful efforts to showcase. Bernadine and Ann then joined the planning team for NDIA's 2017 Net Inclusion Summit, which in May of that year brought to Minnesota nearly two hundred digital inclusion community practitioners, advocates, academics, Internet service providers, policymakers and entities reliant upon online access and digital skills of their clients/users. Blandin's input significantly shaped the summit's agenda. Many of the organizations and communities invited to share best practices with this national audience were Blandin partners, and Blandin's work itself was the topic of a session devoted to approaches for funding digital inclusion.

In 2017 Blandin Foundation contributed to the national conversation about the importance of broadband to rural vitality by commissioning original field research on the economic impact

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[9] https://blandinfoundation.org/learn/research-rural/broadband-resources/broadband-initiative/impact-of-caf-ii-funded-networks/

broadband has on communities in, *"Measuring Impact of Broadband in Five Rural Minnesota Communities"*.[10] Based on one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and statistical analysis of census and other data, Blandin consultants Treacy and Coleman examined the return on broadband investments from the community perspective.

They found that in three of the counties studied, the annual collective economic benefit for residents would surpass the public/community investment in one year. In one county that benefit would surpass investment in slightly more than a year, and in the last county, where investments involved federal loans that needed to be repaid, it would take six years to surpass the investment.

In sum, the research documented that when economic developers and community leaders are able to devote their time and attention to implementing innovative, tech-based economic development strategies, rather than on improving broadband access, it gives them a distinct advantage over unserved counties where local teams spend countless hours pursuing broadband deployment and struggling with limited bandwidth and unhappy residents and businesses.

Study results have been shared via a dedicated website[11] as well with national audiences attending the Broadband Communities Summit in Austin, TX, and the 2018 Fiber Connect Conference in Nashville, TN, as well as – closer to home, the Governor's Broadband Task Force. National media coverage of the study included NBC News, which ran a story on "big returns with broadband access" based on the study[12], as well as several stories by Daily Yonder[13], a daily online source of news, commentary, research and features concerning rural America.

Mountain Summit: Accountability for Learning, Development & Adaptation

In 2016, following a decision by Blandin's Board of Trustees to continue the foundation's broadband work beyond the then current cohort, our broadband team conducted a reflective learning exercise organized around the question: Based on our experiences and learning, what are the biggest opportunities for our work going forward, and how should the program be adapted to take advantage of those opportunities?

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[10] Beltrami, Crow Wing, Goodhue, Lake and Sibley counties.
[11] https://blandinfoundation.org/programs/expanding-opportunity/broadband/report-measuring-impact-broadband-5-rural-mn-communities/
[12] https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/rural-communities-see-big-returns-broadband-access-roadblocks-persist-n881731
[13] http://www.dailyyonder.com/measuring-broadbands-public-return-investment/2018/06/05/25828/

We reaffirmed the following opportunity statement which guided our design and delivery of the BCBP program described in this report:

Building upon proven practices, leveraging our reputation and relationships and attracting additional passionate partners, Blandin Foundation will drive collaborative approaches to investment and adoption while continuing to influence and inform statewide policy and messaging.

Some lessons learned from bringing the lens of this Opportunity Statement to our work:

Building upon proven practices: Based on positive community feedback we continue to use an intense community engagement process that brings communities from goal setting to action within about 90 days, and likewise have retained the Intelligent Community Framework[14] as a model for helping community leaders think holistically about technology-based economic and community development.

Leveraging Our Reputation and Relationships: We continue to recognize reputation and relationships as two of our program's most valuable assets. Reputation for attracting additional resources (human, financial) and relationships as the force field that keeps people engaged.

Attracting Additional Passionate Partners: In adding these words to our statement, electric co-ops were top of mind. However, staff has had only modest success inspiring and supporting electric co-ops to play a bigger role in addressing Minnesota's broadband needs. In looking ahead to 2019 we will revisit whether further investments in building relationships with electric co-ops is advisable, given limited progress made to date. One factor that argues against standing down, especially in light of the magnitude of the opportunity, is the simple notion of "if not us, who?"

Drive Collaborative Approaches: Where possible, Blandin staff seeks to fill a supporting rather than leading role in the work, understanding that everything we do is one more thing the community is not doing for itself (as in the regional policy meetings, where partners were conveners and hosts, and Blandin provided content expertise and gravitas).

Continue to influence and Inform Statewide Policy and Messaging: This element of the Opportunity Statement is key to Minnesota's long-term success in meeting its broadband goals. Foundation staff are optimistic that the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition will step ever more competently into this role, so that Blandin can be part of the choir, rather than the leading voice.

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[14] https://www.intelligentcommunity.org/intelligent_community_indicators

Appendix: Grants Awarded through Blandin Community Broadband Program from January 2017 - June 2018

Program	Grantee	Project Name	Description	Amount
BBC: Aitkin County	Aitkin County	Wi-Fi at Berglund Park	Provide Wi-Fi at the Palisade city park campground - a main entry point for the Northwoods ATV Trail and important source of economic activity. Park usage is anticipated to increase with Wi-Fi availability.	$17,615
		Mobile Wi-Fi Hotspots	East Central Regional Library will obtain 14 mobile hotspots and make them available to ECRL patrons at the Aitkin Library and other outreach locations in Aitkin County, providing internet access to county residents who don't have broadband.	
		Wi-Fi Enabled Buses	ISD 1 Aitkin Public Schools will install Wi-Fi on four school buses so students will be able to work on homework while traveling to and from home, and on longer trips.	
		Wi-Fi and Increased Bandwidth at Long Lake Conservation Center	Long Lake Conservation Center will increase the Internet bandwidth to the LLCC campus, and improve the Wi-Fi network. This will improve working conditions for the staff, increase the effectiveness of programming offered, and make the center a more desirable event venue.	
BBC: Aitkin County	Aitkin County	Aitkin County Community Calendar	Create a county-wide landing page for events sponsored by Aitkin County Chambers, Schools and other organizations.	$54,090
		Community Conference Centers	Provide three small communities with conference/meeting suites, including a mobile computer lab, smart boards, other digital equipment, and Wi-Fi hotspots for use by residents, community education and others.	
		Wi-Fi Network for Small Cities	Provide Wi-Fi for the central hub of Palisade to attract commercial growth, promote connectivity, enhance education, and promote telehealth. This project will serve as a pilot for Wi-Fi networks in other small cities.	
BBC: Chisholm	City of Chisholm / Chisholm EDA	Community Training Sessions	Chisholm Community Education will conduct training sessions on internet use, social media, security, Facebook…to be offered free of charge to the community. CHS students will be on hand to help class participants as they utilize the training.	$43,500
		Minnesota Discovery Center Broadband Connection	Minnesota Discovery Center will upgrade Wi-Fi throughout the Minnesota Discovery Center, allowing for better access during meetings, for events, and for patron/staff use.	
		The "Business Perks" Building	Develop a technology center with rental space/incubator space available for businesses. Broadband/Internet/website/social media training opportunities for businesses will be offered.	

Program	Grantee	Project Name	Description	Amount
BBC: Chisholm	City of Chisholm / Chisholm EDA	Community Website/Portal	Develop a community portal and calendar for community information and events, including marketing, tourism, school events, city and chamber.	$31,500
		Community Hot Spots	Provide Wi-Fi hotspots at the Chisholm Public Library, Lake Street Pocket Park, Balkan Community Center, and HRA Apartment Complex.	
		Hot Spot Check-Out System	Chisholm Public Library will provide fifteen hotspots with mobile data plans for check out at the Chisholm Public Library.	
		Wi-Fi on Buses	ISD 695 Chisholm Public Schools will install Wi-Fi on two school buses, allowing students taking longer bus trips to have access to the internet. Bus Wi-Fi may be used for community events as well.	
Robust Network Feasibility Fund: Chisholm, Hibbing, Mt. Iron-Buhl	City of Chisholm / Chisholm EDA	Central Range Area Feasibility Study	Hire a consultant to conduct a feasibility study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services within the designated area, present the resulting plan and funding options to city councils, townships, school boards and the St. Louis County Board, and assist with grant writing as requested.	$75,000
BBC: Ely	City of Ely	Homegrown Ely Website	City of Ely and the Ely EDA will create a website to showcase Ely to prospective residents, businesses, and visitors. The site, www.Elyite.com, will include information on the cost of living, the arts, restaurants, churches, business opportunities, infrastructure, etc.	$21,000
BBC: Ely	City of Ely	Digital Marketing for Small Businesses	The Entrepreneur Fund will engage seven small business owners in hands-on consulting to build brand awareness and increase revenue by developing and implementing affordable website and social media strategies.	$31,300
		Ely Technology Center	Incredible Ely will utilize current space in the downtown business district to provide a shared office space with high-speed Internet for local telecommuters, entrepreneurs, and visitors.	
BBC: Ely	City of Ely	Ely Small Business Workshop Series	Entrepreneur Fund will provide three structured workshops on timely topics for small business owners. Local facilitators will share practical tools and ideas on topics such as digital marketing, employee recruitment, and QuickBooks.	$22,700
		Business Development / Broadband Survey	Incredible Ely will conduct a survey on business development and internet usage data as well as projected broadband usage information, with the goal of bringing broadband to Ely and making it an economic success.	

Program	Grantee	Project Name	Description	Amount
Robust Network Feasibility Fund: Ely	City of Ely	Ely Area Broadband Feasibility Study	To conduct a feasibility study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services within the City of Ely, and extending throughout the entire school district area, and to use the data generated to develop a plan for service delivery.	$25,000
BBC: Grizzlies (Bois Forte/Cook/ Orr)	Bois Forte Band of Chippewa Indians	Business Training and Community Education	Design and provide community technology education programs at Bois Forte, Orr Center, Cook Library and Community Center, and North Woods High School. Topics will be determined based on community feedback.	$50,000
		Wi-Fi Access Points	Provide Wi-Fi Access Points throughout the Orr Center, and Cook Library and Community Center.	
		Wi-Fi Hot Spot Check Out Program	Purchase five mobile hotspots that can be checked out from the Cook Library to provide home access for un- and underserved residents of the Grizzlies community.	
BBC: Grizzlies (Bois Forte/Cook/ Orr)	Bois Forte Band of Chippewa Indians	Business Training and Community Education	Design and provide community technology education programs at Bois Forte, Orr Center, Cook Library and Community Center, and North Woods High School. Topics will be determined based on community feedback.	$21,000
		Cook Library Expansion	Expand the capacity of the computer lab at Cook Library by adding electrical outlets and cleaning up the cabling. This will greatly enhance training opportunities in the City of Cook.	
		Orr Center Web Page Redevelopment	Redesign the Orr Center's webpage, making it more user-friendly for customers, and allowing Orr Center staff to maintain it without consulting assistance.	
BBC: Hibbing	Entrepreneur Fund, Inc.	Increase Public Wi-Fi Availability	Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce will promote the use of Wi-Fi by providing hotspots at public and municipal locations including schools, colleges, and libraries; implementing a mobile hot spot check-out program through the public library; and creating a Wi-Fi map of the city.	$33,000
		Digital Marketing Consultations for Small Businesses Growth	Entrepreneur Fund and Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce will provide seven Hibbing business owners with professional digital marketing consulting to implement affordable strategies to strengthen brand awareness and increase business success.	
		IT Knowledge & Career Fair	Hibbing Community College will host an Information Technology Fair for high school and college students that will focus on the many ways IT interfaces with everyday life, careers options, and education pathways to those careers.	

Program	Grantee	Project Name	Description	Amount
BBC: Hibbing	Entrepreneur Fund, Inc.	Digital Marketing Consultations for Small Businesses Growth	Entrepreneur Fund and Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce will provide 16 Hibbing business owners with professional digital marketing consulting to implement affordable strategies to strengthen brand awareness and increase business success.	$34,050
		Digital Marketing Workshops for Small Businesses	Entrepreneur Fund and Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce will conduct a series of three workshops for are business owners that will deliver practical tools and ideas for their marketing efforts.	
		PC Distribution and Computer Skills Training	Access North will distribute 50 PCs for People computers to seniors and people with disabilities, along with technical assistance and service, and provide 10 training sessions for recipients on basic computer literacy skills to increase knowledge and confidence in use.	
BBC: Mt. Iron-Buhl	ISD 712 Mountain Iron Buhl	Wi-Fi on School Buses	Install and maintain Wi-Fi on MIB's fleet of seven buses used to transport students to and from school and home, and to athletic and academic activities, allowing students to complete homework and participate in classes while traveling	$19,700
		Community and Business Technology Breakfasts	UMD Center for Economic Development will provide 15 trainings for community members and businesses on safe, efficient, and effective use of technology, and host six business breakfasts, on topics such as cyber security, social media tips, smartphone basics, FaceTime, etc.	
		Township Websites	Develop websites for Kinney and Great Scott Township so residents will be able to access meeting minutes, pay bills, learn about community events, and interact with elected officials online.	
BBC: Mt. Iron-Buhl	ISD 712 Mountain Iron Buhl	Small Business Marketing and Technology Audits	UMD Center for Economic Development will conduct marketing and technology audits for area businesses. Business owners will work with a consultant to complete the audit of current technology platforms, and may apply to be one of ten businesses to receive $1,500 worth of digital marketing training.	$50,000
		Internet Access at Public Buildings	City of Mt. Iron will improve Internet access for public use, and expand technology capabilities at the Senior Center, City Hall and other public buildings.	
		Township Technology Upgrades	Improve Internet access and technology equipment, including video projectors and Wi-Fi network capacity, in government buildings in Kinney and Great Scott Townships.	
		Technology Classroom Upgrades	Purchase equipment for the Mt. Iron-Buhl School District to improve technology offerings, including a journalism technology class for students and adult learners, and to create a Makerspace classroom.	
		Technology for Environmental Learning	Introduce technology to the environmental learning classes at MIB Schools and community education, & City of Mt Iron School Forest, including GPS mapping, geocaching, trail cameras and lab equipment.	

Program	Grantee	Project Name	Description	Amount
BBC Support	PCs for People	Distribute 500 computers to 10 Minnesota Communities	To coordinate the distribution of 500 computers to eligible recipients in each Blandin Broadband Community. Communities may decide to distribute the computers to eligible individual recipients and/or create a "computer lab" for the public.	$49,000
Broadband Innovation	City of Moose Lake	Smart Technologies for Everyone	To create two training/demonstration classrooms at the Moose Lake Public Library where patrons can learn about and use Smart technologies for the home and other settings, in a participatory, low-pressure manner.	$10,000
Broadband Innovation	Red Wing Ignite	Creation of an Innovative Ecosystem	This project has two components. The first is the "Startup Challenge" to develop, promote and implement a competition to help accelerate a new business ventures. The second is to create a Maker Space for the region.	$10,000
Broadband Innovation	Sibley County	GROW Sibley - Digital Skills Growth & Training Program	To offer community technology and digital inclusion/enrichment classes, offering 1:1 consulting assistance for small business owners on digital marketing, and classes for residents, including the Hispanic population and senior citizens.	$9,500
Broadband Innovation	Sibley County	Access Sibley – Community Mobile Device Project	To purchase mobile devices that could be utilized in a variety of settings for training and general use by the Sibley County citizenry.	$ 4,750
Broadband Innovation	Boreal Community Media	Kids' Online Civic News Service	To launch Boreal Corps, a community media service where Cook County youth serve as digital civic journalists on the new www.boreal.org web platform (made possible by the new county-wide fiber network.) The program trains students in grades 4-12 to create innovative content in words, pictures, video, sound and data graphics through hands-on learning and mastering of digital communication skills.	$25,000
Broadband Innovation	City of Spicer	Cyber Seniors Mentoring Project of Kandiyohi County	To improve senior citizens' use of technology and social media to reduce isolation, and use of the Internet to further enhance their lives; and to connect senior citizens with high school students in a one-on-one mentoring relationship through Cyber Seniors curriculum.	$4,910
Broadband Innovation	Entrepreneur Fund, Inc.	Small Business Technology Consulting	To increase small business use of social media and technology through 1:1 free digital marketing training leading to revenue growth and increased brand awareness through online strategies.	$25,000
Broadband Innovation	Winthrop EDA	Broadband Day at the Capitol	To hire a consultant to carry the MN Rural Broadband Coalition's voice at the Capitol during the legislative session, especially critical in the last days and hours of the session, including planning a Broadband Day at the Capitol where the rural voice will be amplified.	$15,000
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	Isanti County	Isanti County Robust Network Feasibility Study	To conduct a feasibility study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services within Isanti county, and to identify potential partners to provide these services.	$25,000

Program	Grantee	Project Name	Description	Amount
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	Meeker County	Meeker County Broadband and Advance Technology Feasibility Study	To conduct a feasibility study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services across Meeker county, and to identify potential partners to provide these services.	$25,000
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	Northwest Community Action, Inc.	Roseau Electric Co-op Robust Network Feasibility Study	To conduct a feasibility study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services within Roseau Electric Co-op's service area, and to identify potential partners to provide these services.	$25,000
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	Otter Tail County	Otter Tail County Robust Network Feasibility Study	To conduct a feasibility study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services within Otter Tail county, and to identify potential partners to provide these services.	$25,000
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	Pope County	Pope County Broadband Development Feasibility Study	To conduct a feasibility study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services within Pope county, and to identify potential partners to provide these services.	$25,000
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	Southwest Regional Dev. Commission	Coalition for Better Broadband	To conduct a feasibility study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services within the 6-county region (Chippewa, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Pipestone and Yellow Medicine), and to identify potential partners to provide these services.	$123,800
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	White Earth Tribal Council	White Earth Broadband Initiative	To conduct a feasibility study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services on White Earth reservation, and to identify potential partners to provide these services.	$25,000
Donation	Sand Lake Township	Broadband Access at Sand Lake Community Center	Install Wi-Fi Internet access for users of the Sand Lake Township Community Center, to improve meetings and events, and allow for remote viewing of township meetings for seasonal residents.	$900
Donation	Brainerd Lakes Area Dev. Corp.	Assessment Support	To support assessment efforts in the Brainerd Lakes area, specifically with regards to documenting the return on investment from high-speed broadband infrastructure investment.	$1,000
Donation	Dodge County	Assessment Support	To support assessment efforts in Dodge County, specifically with regards to documenting the return on investment from high-speed broadband infrastructure investment.	$1,000
Donation	Greater Bemidji, Inc.	Assessment Support	To support assessment efforts in the Bemidji area, specifically with regards to documenting the return on investment from high-speed broadband infrastructure investment.	$1,000
Donation	Red Wing Ignite	Assessment Support	To support assessment efforts in Red Wing, specifically with regards to documenting the return on investment from high-speed broadband infrastructure investment.	$1,000
Donation	Winthrop EDA	Assessment Support	To support assessment efforts in the RS Fiber Service Area, specifically with regards to documenting the return on investment from high-speed broadband infrastructure investment.	$1,000
			Total:	$962,315

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