

BLANDIN BROADBAND INITIATIVE

# CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



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

July 2018 – December 2019 (Updated November 2020)



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

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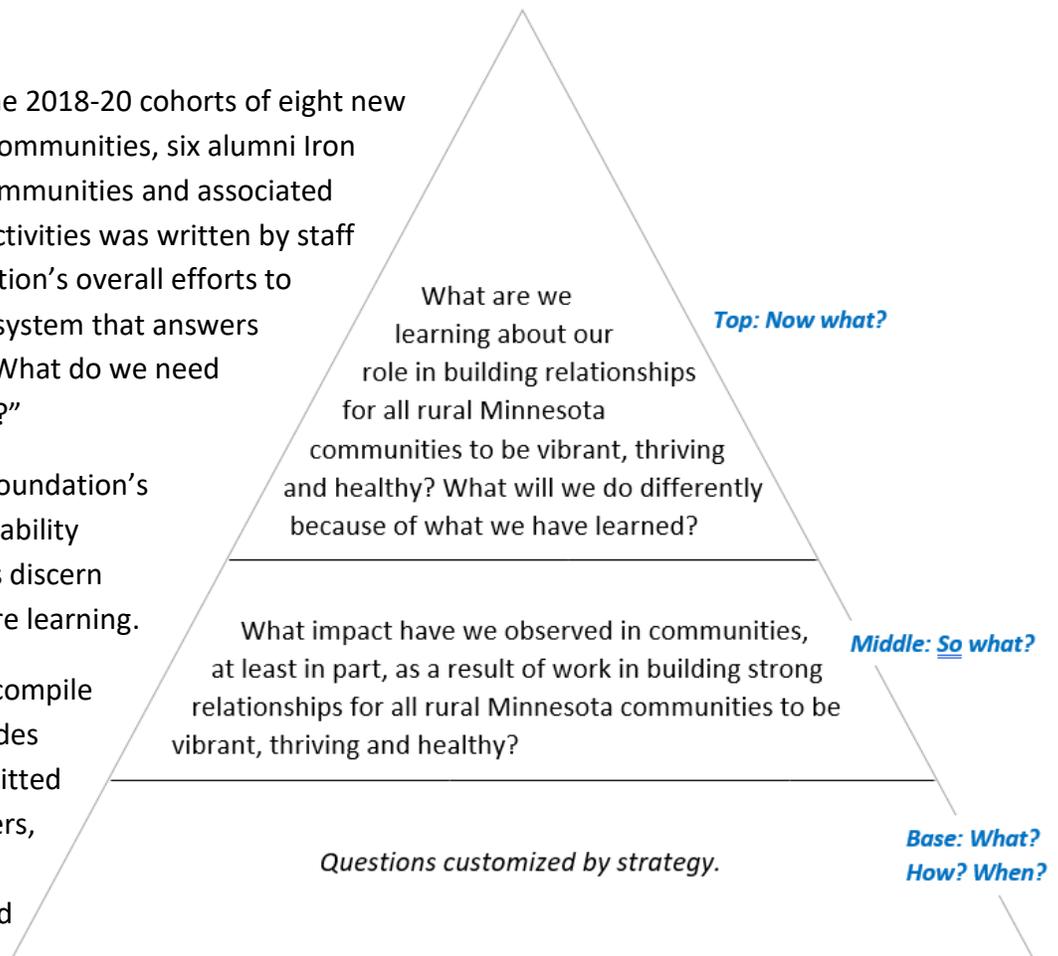
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## Introduction

This assessment of the 2018-20 cohorts of eight new Blandin Broadband Communities, six alumni Iron Range 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.



The reporting period for this assessment covers July 1, 2018 through December 31, 2019, roughly the planned active period of the cohorts.

Due to the impact of COVID 19 on community priorities, the Blandin Broadband Community section reflects updated projects through the end of November 2020.

## 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 use it -- are essential for healthy communities. The program’s objectives are to improve quality of life and economic prosperity for *all* 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, convening and conferences. Program components include:

- Community Broadband Resources (technical assistance)
- Blandin Broadband Community (BBC) partnerships
- Annual broadband conferences
- Convenings
- Broadband grants
- Policy work and Advocacy
- 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 in 2016, 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.

The partnership between the Foundation, IRRR, and St. Louis County was renewed in 2018 with a second agreement to fund four communities, plus a second round of projects for the six alumni communities, for the period July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2020, and extended through December 31, 2020.

## Foot of the Mountain: Basic Accountability for Management Processes



### Inputs

- Staff Resources
- Strategy Board
- Grant Funds
- Leveraged Funds and Other Match
- BCBP-dedicated Program Funds and Consultants
- Earned Program Income
- Community Partners

Staff Resources: 1.40 FTEs (Mary Magnuson .9; Bernadine Joselyn .4; Christy Hoskins .05; Linda Gibeau .05)

Strategy Board: advice and guidance - including deliberation on grant applications - from seventeen stakeholders<sup>1</sup> representing a range of experiences and perspectives from business, internet service providers,

local and state government, tribes, education and healthcare. The Strategy Board meets quarterly.

Grant funds: totaling \$1,404,800

- \$450,000 dedicated grant dollars per year allocated by Blandin Trustees for 2018 and 2019, which represents approximately 3.5% of total Blandin grantmaking during this reporting period; \$827,300 of which was awarded during the specified reporting period of July 1 2018 through December 31, 2019.
- \$577,500 dedicated grant funds from IRRR

Leveraged funding and other match: A minimum of \$1 million in match was contributed by Iron Range Broadband Communities and community project grantees. This figure is likely low, as most grantees reported match that exceeded the program's minimum requirements of 25% for community projects and 50% for feasibility studies.

<sup>1</sup> *Broadband Strategy Board members:* Joe Buttweiler, Consolidated Telecommunications Company – CTC; Stacy Cluff, Mille Lacs Energy; Mark Erickson, RS Fiber Cooperative Board; Nancy Hoffman, Chisago County HRA EDA; Jon Linnell, North Region Health Alliance; Marc Johnson, ECMECC – East Central MN Educational Cable Cooperative; Scott Marquardt, Southwest Initiative Foundation; Betsy Olivanti, NE MN Small Business Development Center; Dan Pecarina, Hiawatha Broadband Communications; Lisa Peterson-de la Cueva, St. Paul Neighborhood Network; Erik Simonson, MN State Senate; Rich Sve, Lake County; Jim Weikum, City of Biwabik, Arrowhead Library System; Madonna Yawakie, Turtle Island Communications; *Advisory members:* Jacki Anderson, Office of Representative Collin Peterson; Angie Dickison, Office of Broadband, MN DEED; Bree Maki, Office of Senator Smith

BCBP-dedicated program funds and consultants: \$293,636 over two years; excluding staff salaries, and including conference expenses (\$29,116 for 2018, \$22,600 for 2019) and consultants: 2,688 hours; \$241,920 (\$90/hr) plus travel.

Earned Program Income: totaling \$222,000

- \$136,500 from IRRR and \$39,500 from St. Louis County dedicated program costs for ten IRBCs.
- \$18,500 from nine organizations for 2018 *Border to Border Broadband* conference sponsorships.
- \$27,500 from 15 organizations for 2019 *Innovation: Putting Broadband to Work* conference sponsorships.

2018-20 Blandin Broadband Community Partners: Cannon Falls (School District), Rock County, and Swift County.



*Blandin Broadband Communities Kick-Off Gathering; August 2, 2018*

2018-20 Iron Range Broadband Community Partners: East Range Joint Powers, Laurentian Chamber of Commerce, Tower Economic Development Authority, Iron Range Tourism Bureau, and Koochiching Technology Initiative (KTI, a Blandin-funded BBC joined the Iron Range cohort)



*Iron Range Broadband Communities Kick-Off Gathering; December 5, 2018*

Iron Range Broadband Community Alumni: 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

Blandin Broadband Communities: Each of the eight new communities achieved the following milestones.

- Formed a steering team that received program orientation and leadership training.
- Utilized the Intelligent Community model as an organizing framework.

## Intelligent Community Indicators

### The Virtuous Cycle

[www.intelligentcommunity.org](http://www.intelligentcommunity.org)

Since 2009, Blandin Foundation has been using the Intelligent Community Framework as a tool to help community members see the role broadband infrastructure and the skills to use it play in overall community health.



Broadband is a critical component upon which a community can build its workforce, support innovation and address digital equity through efforts sustainable over time. From those assets, a community can build an effective advocacy message to both internal and external markets with the goal of retaining and attracting talent and investment.

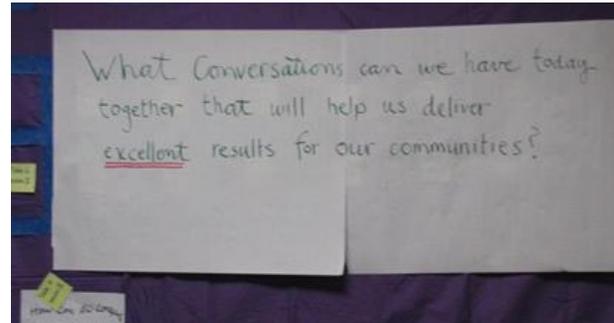
- Held local Vision and Project Development meetings where a community assessment, vision development, and project development tasks were completed.
- Received \$75,000 in funding to implement projects to improve broadband access and technology use in their area.
- Received and distributed a minimum of 50 refurbished computers to families with low incomes, and/or to organizations to provide access to students, seniors, or low-income people.
- Spurred collaboration within and between the eight new and six alumni communities and facilitated the implementation of locally-driven projects on the part of regional economic development organizations, workforce centers, local businesses, libraries, and others.
- A number of communities achieved significant process toward bringing world-class broadband to previously unserved residents:
  - One feasibility study for improved broadband infrastructure and services is being conducted through a collaboration between the Iron Range Broadband Communities of East Range Joint Powers, Laurentian Chamber of Commerce, and Tower EDA. The study will support applications for public funding to build the new networks.
  - Koochiching Technology Initiative participated in a “Feasibility Charrette” at the 2018 *Border to Border Broadband* conference, which resulted in a partnership with Paul Bunyan Communications to apply for, and receive (in January 2020), an award from the State’s Border-to-Border Broadband Grand Fund (*details on page 42*).
  - The feasibility study conducted by the alumni communities Hibbing, Chisholm, Mountain Iron-Buhl school districts and Cherry Township continues to gain momentum with discussions with private sector providers to develop partnerships to deploy additional broadband services. CTC and Cherry Township applied for a USDA Reconnect Grant, which was awarded in January 2020 (*details on page 47*).

**Grants:** Thirty-eight grants approved for a total of \$1,407,800 (See the Appendix for a complete grant list.)

- \$1,041,500 was awarded to fourteen **Blandin Broadband Communities**
  - \$966,500 to fund 109 community adoption projects
  - \$75,000 grant to fund a Robust Network Feasibility study for the Laurentian Chamber of Commerce, Tower, and East Range Joint Powers areas.

- \$68,290 to fund two grants to **PCs for People** to distribute a total of 700 computers to BBCs in 2019 and 2020.
- \$105,550 to fund eight **Robust Network Feasibility Fund** grants. Three \$25,000 grants were awarded for rural county-wide studies: and five smaller grants went to rural cities or townships looking to improve internet access.
- \$192,460 to fund nine **Broadband Innovation** grants in support of projects that advance community-defined technology goals. Examples of funded projects include upgrading virtual career training opportunities in NE Minnesota, online engagement of older adults, documenting the benefits of public sector broadband network improvements, support for the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition, and support for a pilot project for tele-mental health delivery in southern Minnesota.

**Technical Assistance:** 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.



Communities can receive up to 32 hours of consultation and staff assistance. During this reporting period program consultant Bill Coleman delivered a total of 444 hours of assistance to nineteen communities (average of 23 hours/community). The foundation was able to respond to every request received.

**Information/Education Support:** Throughout 2018-2019 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. Ben Winchester at the University of Minnesota is using the County Broadband Profiles in



his research, various providers and the Office of Broadband Development have shared news to post, and blog author Ann Treacy was invited to contribute to three panels at the inaugural Tribal Broadband Conference in Washington DC.

The blog gets on average 201 views per day (up from 119 at last reporting). Events such as legislative action or funding

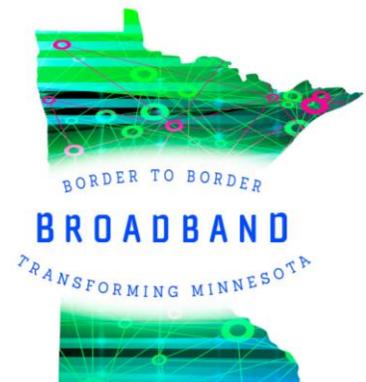
opportunities increase traffic as do links from other news sources, especially national news sources. Traffic to the site is just one measure of exposure. We also saw an increase in subscribers to the site – or readers who get BoB posts via Twitter, email or WordPress. During the reporting period, BoB subscribership has increased to 2,070 from 1,864, and e-News to 2,487 from 2,370. Subscribers can choose to 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. Posts have been shared almost 2,500 times since July 2018.

**Convenings:** Blandin Foundation hosted two, annual statewide broadband conferences during the reporting period; both with support from the MN Office of Broadband Development, MN Department of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation, and other sponsors.

October 23-24, 2018 was ***Border to Border Broadband: Transforming Minnesota***. The two-day event was attended by nearly 130 participants, and featured:

- *Community Broadband Feasibility Charrette*, a participatory exercise that provided community teams from Koochiching, Le Sueur, and Waseca counties with hands-on experience working through a compressed feasibility study process alongside a team of highly skilled and experienced technical consultants. [In January 2020, two of the three Charrette communities were awarded State Border-to-Border Broadband Development Fund grants as a result of participating in this process.]
- *Climbing the Digital Use Ladder: Digital Inclusion, Adoption and Innovation* featured eleven Minnesota presenters using innovative strategies for redressing the state’s digital divide.
- Keynote presentation by Alison Grant of Purdue University on the *Net Benefits of Broadband Adoption*.
- Plenary presentation on *Prioritizing Digital Equity* by Lisa Peterson-de la Cueva of St. Paul Neighborhood Network’s Community Technology Empowerment Project, on achieving digital equity in an increasingly fragile democracy and using technology as a tool for equal participation.
- Presentation of the results of Blandin Foundation research on *Measuring the Impact of Broadband in Five Rural Minnesota Communities*<sup>2</sup>. The study shows that the benefits to



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<sup>2</sup> <https://blandinfoundation.org/learn/research-rural/broadband-resources/broadband-initiative/measuring-impact-broadband-5-rural-mn-communities/>

communities surpasses the public/community infrastructure investment within just a few years.

- Workshop on *creating a broadband advocacy message* for your community to use with local community leaders, policymakers and the general public.

Blandin staff raised \$18,500 from eight partners to make up for a gap in funds available from the foundation's own operations budget for the conference.

Conference sessions are livestreamed and posted to the Blandin on Broadband blog<sup>3</sup>.

***Innovation: Putting Broadband to Work*** was held October 8-10, 2019. This three-day conference was attended by over 140 people, and featured:



- Multiple opportunities to learn about the *Intelligent Community Framework* and how it can benefit Minnesota from Intelligent Community Forum Co-Founder John Jung.
- Four break-out section tracks:
  - *Getting Connected* – Information to help communities understand technology options, work better with providers, conducting a successful feasibility study, and broadband project development.
  - *Community Vitality* – Sessions on how broadband can enhance education, agriculture, and healthcare.
  - *Economic Development* – Presentations on creating a technologically vibrant environment that is accessible to all and supports business and entrepreneurs.
  - *Digital Inclusion* – Participants heard about strategies to close the digital divide in community, how to incorporate cultural awareness into tech training, and how to use technology to engage older people to mitigate social isolation.
- Entertainment and presentations by Kairos Alive!, a nationally recognized organization that uses dance, music and creative involvement to hold both online and in-person events to combat social isolation and promote health among people of all ages but mainly older adults.
- An international panel featuring *young leaders* who are utilizing a digital workforce, working to increase the adoption and adaption of technology in business and community, and promoting broadband as an essential piece to any economic development strategy.



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<sup>3</sup> <https://blandinonbroadband.org/category/blandin-broadband-summit/mn-broadband-summit-2018/>

- Keynote presentation on *Local Solutions for Globally Competitive Connectivity*, featuring rural Minnesota communities with some of the best internet access in the world, and how we can bring that connectivity to the rest of the state.
- Plenary Presentation by Foundation partner *PCs for People* on their approach to digital equity, and digital skills and device training.

One particular highlight of the event was the presentation of a series of 12 *Courageous Leadership Awards*<sup>4</sup> to individuals and organizations who have made a positive impact on broadband in their communities and across the state.

Blandin Foundation’s **Courageous Leadership Awards** were created to recognize and celebrate acts of leadership that have significantly contributed to the vibrancy of rural Minnesota communities. Twelve Courageous Leadership Awards were presented during the 15th annual broadband conference to recognize community vision and perseverance on broadband access and use. In a series of online profiles, award recipients reflected on their leadership and offered advice and encouragement to other community leaders:



- If you can’t figure out what each partner gets out of the deal, it won’t work. So figure that out first.
- If the county had not stepped up to move in the direction of putting broadband throughout the county, it wouldn’t have happened.
- Make sure you have exhausted all your resources before you give up.
- Never give up — there’s always a way. Some broadband models, like municipals, get a bad rap. We’ve ignored the critics and overcome all the obstacles in our way. We keep doing what we do and have been successful in the communities we serve. Find what works for your community and keep pushing. There’s going to be a way to get it done.
- It seems just a few years ago, cities in Minnesota were struggling for fast, reliable internet. Today, for the most part, cities are being served. Now our legislators, local officials, and residents have an understanding of the importance for broadband from border to border in Minnesota. Great strides have been made and the momentum is there to finish the job.
- Vision always trumps money.
- Expanding internet access in many Greater Minnesota communities is more of a 30-year problem than a 3 year one. Taking an easy solution today, especially committing to working with a partner that is not committed to the future of the community, is a risky proposition. Just don’t rush into something for the sake of getting it over with – your communities will live (or leave) with these decisions for many years.

A customized news release was written for each award recipient and was distributed to the media of their choosing. Fourteen rural newspapers and two television stations ran stories about the awards.

<sup>4</sup> <https://blandinfoundation.org/news-room/events/innovation-putting-broadband-to-work/>

Blandin staff raised \$27,500 from fifteen partners to make up for a gap in funds available from the foundation's own operations budget for the conference.

Conference sessions are livestreamed and archived on the Blandin on Broadband Blog<sup>5</sup>.

Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition: First convened by the Foundation in 2015, today the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition is a fully established, financially stable advocacy coalition with the leadership, governance, membership, dues, and communication functions necessary to be an effective voice for rural perspectives in state policy deliberations.



The coalition now contracts with the Minnesota Association of Counties for administrative and communications support. It has an Executive Committee and a governance structure that values all rural input, but limits decision-making powers to its financial supporters which includes cities, counties and townships, health and education organizations, economic development organizations, banks, social justice organizations, electric utilities and rural telecommunications providers. Between July 2019 and December 2019, the coalition raised \$38,725 from 87 contributors in addition to a \$20,000 grant from Blandin Foundation.

Contracted staff helps to maintain a coordinating role of all rural stakeholder groups at the Capitol, members or not. Coalition leadership informs legislators about rural broadband issues and testifies regularly at the Capitol in support of broadband deployment. The coalition's membership now tops over one hundred organizations, associations, and units of government, and continues to grow.

The coalition meets regularly to plan its advocacy mission to achieve the broadband speed goals established in statute, 25 Mb/3 Mb by 2022 and 100 Mb/20 Mb by 2026, as well as the more sweeping and timeless vision first established at the 2015 Border to Border Broadband Conference:

*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.*

During the 2019 session, the coalition celebrated the allocation of \$40 million over the two-year biennium, the first ever multi-year appropriation for the broadband fund. As the Governor's Broadband Task Force had advocated for \$70 million for the biennium and the demand for broadband grants far outstripped the available funding in the fall 2018 grant process, the coalition will be asking the legislature for an additional \$30 million during the 2020 legislative session.

The Coalition's 4<sup>th</sup> annual Broadband Day on the Hill is scheduled for March 12, 2020.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://blandinonbroadband.org/category/blandin-broadband-summit-2018/blandin-broadband-summit-2019/>



## Middle of the Mountain: Accountability for Impact

The Blandin Community Broadband Program has impacts at multiple levels:

- Individuals
- Grants/projects/events
- Businesses/organizations/institutions
- Communities
- Regions
- Statewide
- National

### Blandin Broadband Communities



The Foundation is currently working with three cohorts of Blandin Broadband Communities.

Selected in summer of 2018, the Blandin Broadband Community (BBC) cohort of four communities is funded entirely by Blandin Foundation, though BBCs are required to meet grant match requirements. This cohort includes Cannon Falls, Koochiching Technology Initiative<sup>6</sup>, Rock County, and Swift County.

In the fall of 2018, a second cohort of four Iron Range Broadband Communities (IRBCs)<sup>7</sup> was selected. This cohort is funded through a partnership between Blandin Foundation, MN Dept of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation (IRRR), and St. Louis County. They are East Range Joint Powers, Iron Range Tourism Bureau, Laurentian Chamber of Commerce, and Tower Economic Development Authority.

The first cohort of six IRBCs was selected in 2016, and each received a \$50,000 award per the 2018 agreement with IRRR. This Alumni Cohort includes Aitkin County, Chisholm, Ely, Grizzlies (Bois Forte, Cook, and Orr), Hibbing, and Mt. Iron-Buhl School District.



BCBP's definition of "community" is flexible and defined by the community. Since BCBP began working with communities in this way in 2009, the most popular geography has been the

<sup>6</sup> Koochiching Technology Initiative chose to join the Iron Range Broadband Communities cohort, as they have more in common geographically, economically, and culturally.

<sup>7</sup> While the Foundation uses the words, "Iron Range Broadband Communities" to describe the IRRR-funded communities, the Iron Range communities still participate in the "BBC - Blandin Broadband Community" program. This report will refer to the 14 active communities collectively as "BBCs" or "Blandin Broadband Communities."

county, and indeed three of the four non-Iron Range communities are county-wide efforts, the fourth being an ex-urban school district.

One particular challenge of the Iron Range BBCs is that a county-wide effort in St. Louis county is impractical, given its size, large territories of uninhabited swamps and woods, and sparse population. Thus, most of the lead partner organizations are either school districts or cities trying to include the surrounding townships where their students' families live. Exceptions include Aitkin County, on the geographically separated Cuyuna Range; Iron Range Tourism Bureau, a community of interest that overlays several other Iron Range BBCs; and Laurentian Chamber of Commerce, which also overlays other communities and whose service area is the quad cities of Eveleth, Gilbert, Mountain Iron, and Virginia. The largest and most populous of the IRBCs, the Laurentian Chamber was granted twice the level of grant funding than more standard Iron Range communities.

A total of \$1,041,500 in grants was awarded to fund 141 community projects in the fourteen BBCs over this reporting period, plus one \$75,000 grant for a feasibility study on the East Range (Laurentian Chamber, Tower, and East Range Joint Powers area).

The number of projects implemented by each BBC varies from two to twenty-two, with an average of ten. BBC projects require local match of 25% of the total project cost, or 1:3. Project staff has observed over time that most BBCs greatly surpass minimum required match; in fact, among the three current BBC cohorts are two particularly over-achieving communities with match of just over \$100,000 and \$200,000 on their \$75,000 grants.



Finally, as part of the BBC program, the Foundation has awarded grants directly to PCs for People<sup>8</sup> to supply each community with fifty refurbished computers to be distributed to income-qualified residents or nonprofit institutions. The computers come loaded with basic software, including educational resources. Recipients attend brief orientation on the software installed on the computer, learn where they can find discounted internet service, and what they can do if the computer has any problems.

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

Many of the BBCs were scheduled to conclude activities the first half of 2020, however the COVID-19 pandemic slowed activity considerably and prompted some changes in priorities and project implementation. This report was updated in to reflect BBC activity through November 2020.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.pcsforpeople.org/>

## Cannon Falls



Recognizing the need to adapt, evolve and take advantage of opportunities to modernize and grow, Cannon Falls Economic Development authority (EDA) applied to the BBC program and chose the school district as its physical boundary. The city is located just over thirty miles south of Minneapolis/St. Paul, making it a desirable place to visit, conduct business and reside.

One of the team's objectives was to address the problem that not all families in the school district have access to the same level of broadband service: the city of Cannon Falls is served by a fiber-to-the-home network, while those in more rural parts of the district struggle with poor service. BBC Steering Team members are using broadband surveys to talk with local internet providers about the need to improve internet access. The pandemic of 2020 compounded this issue, with all students needing equitable access to learning-from-home. The district responded with a project that allowed them to purchase mobile internet hotspots for at least 28 families lacking access and additional iPads for teachers to use to teach in-school and at-home learners simultaneously.

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*My hope is that the State of MN recognizes that broadband is a utility, like electricity was a utility for my great-grandparents and grandparents. That there is an investment that needs to happen here from the state - because [the pandemic] is even exacerbating a much bigger equity issue than we ever knew we had. We have the technology at school to support students, but [at home, families] may not have what they need to be able to educate their students in the way that is going to keep them on track.*

- Amy Dombeck, Cannon Falls Area Schools

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The BBC team also has successfully distributed fifty refurbished computers from PCs for People to income-qualifying families with school-age children and nonprofits in need in the area.

Working in partnership with many organizations across the community the EDA has built a local foods infrastructure that includes a farmer's market, restaurants, meat processing, event space, and more. Cannon Falls used the Blandin Broadband Community program as an opportunity to build on and amplify this success by creating and implementing a 21<sup>st</sup> century marketing and promotion plan for the initiative and brand. Additional marketing support was included in 2020 to assist local food and beverage purveyors struggling due to the pandemic.



Recognizing that every business in the community would benefit from an increased level of digital literacy and sophistication of internet use, the project included a digital marketing deferred loan program where any local business can apply for funds to use technology and social media to promote and grow their businesses.



Another focus for the community is senior engagement. The BBC group helped purchase Virtual Reality (VR) headsets and software subscriptions for two senior care centers in the area, enabling residents to take virtual field trips around the world. VR systems are being used for wellness, stress reduction, and for the calming effect that guided imagery and ambient sound can have on improving quality of life. There is growing research to show virtual reality helps the elderly cope with depression and anxiety. To that end, the

Cannon Valley Senior Center received project funding to update their website in 2020, improving staff's ability to keep it up-to-date, and more useful and interactive for members unable to gather due to the pandemic.

Other projects funded for implementation in the Cannon Falls area include upgraded technology at the Cannon Falls Area Chamber of Commerce to increase efficiency and competitiveness, and increased participation with Explore Minnesota to generate more area tourism.

### Koochiching Technology Initiative



The Koochiching Technology Initiative (KTI) coalesced in 2018 out of a longstanding and growing recognition of the importance of internet access and skills throughout the community, which includes both Koochiching County and neighboring Kabetogama region of St. Louis County.

Infrastructure is a major concern for the Koochiching County area. With a small and sparse population, affordable internet service in the region is scarce. The situation became more dire, when a major employer in International Falls decided to close their office and transition their employees to work remotely. Many of the employees did not have adequate broadband connections to work effectively at home. The community responded.

One idea that sparked enthusiasm right away was to open a co-working space for use by the town's displaced employees, as well as by the many local tourists who increasingly want to stay connected while on vacation.

This conversation led to the creation of Ballan's iSpace, a converted furniture store downtown. This family-run business, a long-time fixture on main street, had been up for sale for years. When the family heard about the BBC team's interest in developing a co-working space in International Falls, they decided to convert the building themselves –



without financial assistance from the BBC. The tastefully appointed converted space today is available 24/7 to members. Amenities include Wi-Fi, printing services, dining and event space, and a variety of office space options. As a component of the BBC program, the town's Borderland Young Professionals group is offering scholarships to income-qualifying Ballan's iSpace patrons.

The iSpace location proved its importance when the pandemic forced school closures in spring of 2020. Some students with no internet access need a safe place to study, so BBC funds were reallocated to the iSpace scholarship fund to allow those students a safe place to participate remotely in online school.

KTI funded a total of 20-21-2 projects during the two-year project period, many addressing public internet access, training, opportunities for education and networking around technology and marketing, and promoting the area as a technologically vibrant place to live, work and visit.

Community exposure to cutting edge technology was another key focus. KTI funded projects through the library that included mobile internet device check-out, expanded its reference service to texting and live chat, Adobe Creative Cloud software for use in its new recording studio, and STEM classes and kits. They also funded the purchase of ten virtual reality headsets for checkout and use at the library for healthcare applications, including patient and family education, student use, elder wellness and stress reduction. Adjusting for the 2020 pandemic, a Cleanbox sanitizing system was purchased to disinfect the units between uses.

In fall of 2018 KTI was invited to participate in the Feasibility Charrette activity at the Border to Border Broadband conference. They were paired with Cooperative Network Services (CNS), and together over the course of two days the community team and CNS staff went through a mini-feasibility study process. Conversations continued through the fall and winter. Based on this work, Paul Bunyan Communications approached the team, and with Blandin support, the community surveyed potential internet subscribers in the region. Based on this work Paul Bunyan applied for, and was awarded, grant funding to expand services key areas of Koochiching County and also the Kabetogama region of St. Louis County (*details on page 42*).

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*The Blandin Broadband Community program has been a powerful catalyst and inspiration for us to form a strong and diverse team. We have allocated our Blandin funds across a strong slate of local projects which have launched us on a path to becoming our own version of an "intelligent community." Our engagement with local leaders and stakeholders is strong and we thank you for your partnership in getting it all started.*

- James Yount, Small Town Tech, Inc. & Koochiching Technology Initiative

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## Rock County



As of 2019, and again in 2020, Rock County is the top ranked county in Minnesota for broadband speeds meeting the state’s 2026 speed goals of 100/20. They received \$5 million in 2015 from DEED’s Border-to-Border Broadband grant program to build gigabit-capable fiber to the premise network throughout the county. While the availability of high-speed internet access is a great advantage to Rock County, the BBC team recognized that their residents and businesses in many cases still needed the skills to take full advantage of those services. Especially in the areas of healthcare and agriculture.

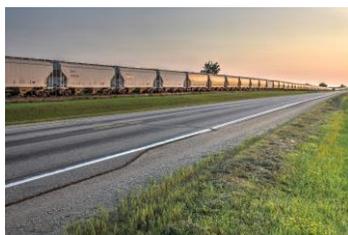
Libraries play a key role in closing the rural broadband gap by providing access to people who may not be able to afford home subscriptions, and librarians can help connect people with information and resources. Thus, it is not a surprise that this Rock County Community Library-led effort focused on providing free public Wi-Fi and the training to use it.

The team designed and implemented projects to provide free public wireless internet at six area campgrounds and two parks. They also implemented Wi-Fi on school buses, purchased mobile Wi-Fi hotspots for check-out at the Library, and installed computer labs in the senior center and public housing complex.



Project	Impact
<p>Blue Mound Tower is a 70-unit income-based housing facility. The project supplied two PCs for People computers and Wi-Fi for residents’ use when registering for services, accessing medical records, applying for jobs and to connect with family and friends. They are also invited to attend classes at the senior center or library to learn to use technology better.</p>	<p><i>Many of our tenants cannot afford to own a computer nor can they afford a monthly internet bill. These computers [acquired through BCBP] have made it possible and convenient for tenants to search employment opportunities and apply for jobs. They can establish an email address for communicating with family and friends and employers. Many of our tenants do not have transportation, therefore online ordering may be the only way they can purchase their basic necessities. Several have established Facebook accounts which have connected them with family and friends. Currently we are live streaming the MN DNR and Decorah, IA, Raptor Resource Project eagle cameras. Tenants of all ages love to check in on the eagles. These computers have opened a window to the outside world and enhanced many lives at the Housing Authority of Luverne/Blue Mound Tower.</i></p>
<p>- Tammy J. Johnson, Executive Director, Blue Mound Tower</p>	

Project	Impact
<p>Wi-Fi at campgrounds serve both tourists and temporary workers. It also allows for security cameras and benefits campground staff.</p>	<p><i>We've had some essential workers that've moved in [to Magnolia Campground] this spring. One is a traveling nurse living out of their camper while remote working. They log on every night through that Wi-Fi. She's able to conduct [tele-health] in a campground because of the backbone that's provided. ... They're conducting essential work out of the campground because they're able to travel down and do those things.</i></p> <p>- Kyle Oldre, Rock County Administrator</p>
<p>The library mobile hotspots can be checked out by patrons for two weeks at a time. They use a reservation system so people can be sure to get them when they need them. They've had a great response and generally keep a waiting list.</p>	<p><i>The hotspots are always checked out! We have families who take them on vacation and students who check them out to do schoolwork. We have heard so many times from our library users how great the service is and how happy they are to have the hotspots available in our community! The five hotspots have been available for ten months, and they have checked out a total of 99 times!</i></p> <p>- Calla Bjorklund Jarvie, Director, Rock County Community Library</p>



Agriculture is the major industry in Rock County. Advances in technology are transforming how it's done. One BBC project surveyed Ag producers on their technology interests and needs and then provided a day of learning to help address them. Seventy people of all age ranges attended and found it valuable.

Other projects included a booth at the county fair to promote the team's BBC work, customized social media and website training for twenty small businesses and nonprofits in the county, mental health education offered via distance learning, computer classes and early childhood distance instructional equipment through community education, and distance learning terminals for boys housed at the local detention and education center.

## Swift County



Swift is another fiber to the premise county, having received Border-to-Border Broadband grant funding in 2015. They ranked third in the state based on the 2026 state speed goals in 2019; 4<sup>th</sup> in 2020. Swift County applied for the BBC program to make sure their residents, businesses, and schools have the tools and knowledge to utilize broadband effectively. How can they do things better, smarter, cheaper and faster?

Swift County's economy is heavily reliant on agriculture. Their largest employer manufactures sprayers and cotton pickers. When assessing local work force needs, the ability to offer vocational training locally, particularly welding, was identified as a major priority. The steering team investigated a variety of possible options and in the end partnered with Ridgewater

College in Willmar to offer a four-week course utilizing online classes in addition to onsite training. Students were provided a computer if they needed one. There was a waiting list for the class, and 16 of the 20 participants completed the program. Welding jobs in the area start at \$18-22/hour, which represents a significant improvement in wages for participants.



Youth was another focus for Swift County. The BBC team worked with Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg Community Ed to offer a summer STEM Camp for 80 students entering 2<sup>nd</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Their goal was to provide a low-cost opportunity for kids to learn about robotics, computer coding, technology, engineering, and math. The camp was a success, in fact they exceeded their expectations when it came to registrations. They plan to implement a second camp in 2021, or when it is safe to do so.

Another youth and family-focused project was creation of a Swift County 4-H Extension App. The goal of the app is to connect members and families across the county, provide quick and easy access to program updates and events, and generally promote community connectedness. Benefits of the app are wide-ranging, including easier clean-up at the fairgrounds, since fewer people will be misplacing their paper fair booklets! It will also allow for push notifications for events and schedule changes.



Swift County also helped four small cities without websites develop them, provided hands-on digital marketing consulting to seven small business owners, convened a digital marketing round-table group for community and economic development organizations, developed a system for taking online campsite reservations, and distributed PCs for People computers to an additional 20 income-qualified families.

### East Range Joint Powers



The East Range Joint Powers Board (ERJPB) is a collaboration and partnership between the Iron Range cities of Aurora, Biwabik, and Hoyt Lakes, and the Town of White. The four communities share a school district and pool their time and financial resources toward joint services, facilities, and programs and initiatives.

Large portions of the East Range area are un- or underserved, or available broadband services are unreliable and/or prohibitively expensive, particularly outside of denser population centers or towns. To address this need, the towns served by the ERJPB have joined with fellow IRBCs

Laurentian Chamber of Commerce and Tower to conduct a feasibility study to determine what options exist to expand broadband services in the region.

Enhancing public Wi-Fi was a priority for these communities. The ERJPB team installed hotspots at the Biwabik City Center and at the libraries in Hoyt Lakes and Aurora.



The ERJPB BBC team increased their region’s capacity to work better together by significantly upgrading the partnership’s website<sup>9</sup> to include a shared community calendar and repository for information on the region’s broadband enhancement efforts.

The ERJB team is working directly with local businesses to assess and address their technology training and planning needs, including with the help of a new portable training lab developed to increase the ability of local employers, educators, economic development organizations, clubs, associations and others to offer computer, technology, community and professional education and training to individuals and groups across the region. They later added a component that provided individualized website and social media training for local businesses through Northeast Small Business Development Center.

ERJB team also has been active in statewide broadband advocacy efforts, including engaging their local business community in making the case for the need to improve broadband access and adoption.



The Mesabi East school district is large and spread out, meaning students spend a lot of time on buses. The BBC is equipping four longer-haul buses with Wi-Fi so students can do schoolwork while traveling. They are also helping the school district better communicate with its families and community by improving its communication infrastructure.

As part of an effort to improve the region’s tech literacy and inspire knowledge workers, the team supported a project to offer STEM education for all ages. They aim to have students teach older adults how to use mobile devices. They’ll also schedule classes at the library on coding and robotics, create kits to check out with preloaded apps for robotics and coding, and will acquire and manage a supply of devices to be checked out for those who don’t have cell phones or tablets of their own.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://erjpb.com/>

Lastly, the ERJB team implemented a few projects centered around modernizing the region’s emergency services, including technology upgrades for Hoyt Lakes Public Safety Building and Palo Volunteer Fire Department, and updating laptops for use in East Range and Hoyt Lakes squad cars and ambulances, and for EMS training. They also addressed safety for recreational vehicle users through a project that extended cell service to the local snowmobile club-maintained trails, and internet to the club building.

### Iron Range Tourism Bureau



The Iron Range Tourism Bureau (IRTB) BBC is the first “community of interest” to participate in the program as a Blandin Broadband

Community. IRTB is a tourism association that serves the communities of Hibbing, Chisholm, Buhl, Mountain Iron, Virginia, Eveleth, Fayal Township, Gilbert, Biwabik, Aurora, Embarrass, and Hoyt Lakes. The IRTB team’s goal as a BBC was to help small tourism businesses better use the internet and technology to attract new visitors to the area.

Attracting and retaining workforce is a big concern for tourism businesses. To address this challenge the team is implementing two projects in 2020: a “local pride” campaign promoting activities and opportunities available on the Range, and a “talent attraction” microsite targeted at people considering moving to the area.

Another priority for the IRTB BBC was to improve the digital marketing and social media skills of the region’s tourism businesses through one-on-one trainings, professional design services, and equipment upgrades.

Arts are a great asset throughout the region, but not always very visible to the general public. IRTB is showcasing the work of area artists and cultural opportunities in the region by creating a digital map<sup>10</sup>. The map will help raise resident and visitor awareness of arts opportunities, increase the audience for cultural events and improve artists’ ability to market their work.

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*The small business marketing assistance allowed 15 nonprofits to purchase equipment and services vital to their success. Items such as scanners, website design, and software purchases allowed the Virginia Area Historical Society, Lyric Center for the Arts, the Tourist Center Seniors and others increase their visibility and meet their organization's goals.*

- Beth Pierce, Iron Range Tourism Bureau

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<sup>10</sup> <https://ironrange.org/arts-and-culture/>

Empowering community members creative expression, while educating the community and potential visitors about life and culture in the region, is the aim of the *Stories of the Mesabi* project. IRTB will teach people how to create their own documentary about their experience of the region, and their stories will be shared online. A particular emphasis will be placed on diverse experiences.

Another community video and photo project will focus more squarely on tourism with a specific attraction or recreational activity featured monthly online. The *Sounds of the Mesabi* project will also find a home on IRTB's website. This adventure in sound could include ATV engines, waves on the shore, or mining trucks.



### Laurentian Chamber of Commerce



The Laurentian Chamber promotes business through education and advocacy to advance the prosperity of the service area, which includes the Quad Cities of Eveleth, Gilbert, Mountain Iron, and Virginia. The Chamber has identified broadband as critical for economic vitality, civic engagement, and enhanced quality of life and place in the region.

The Laurentian Chamber's service area struggles with some of the poorest internet in the state. To address this challenge, they have joined with fellow Iron Range Broadband Communities of East Range and Tower to conduct a joint feasibility study of options for expanding affordable broadband services across their region (*details on page 33*).

While most projects implemented by the Laurentian Chamber have a business or workforce focus, some cross sectors. Recognizing the paucity of free public Wi-Fi availability in the Quad Cities area, the Laurentian BBC team set out to create more safe places for residents and visitors to access the internet. Better Wi-Fi was installed at the Gilbert Campground, and in three downtown areas in Gilbert. Eveleth, Gilbert and Virginia school districts were funded to install Wi-Fi on school buses allowing students to do homework on long bus rides.



To address their goal of improved profitability for local businesses through enhanced tech literacy and sophistication of use, the Laurentian Chamber BBC team decided to implement a digital marketing and tech audit program modeled on efforts that have delivered great results in other BBCs. Ten area small businesses were selected to receive professional consulting services from Northeast Minnesota Small

Business Development Center. These businesses received one-one-one tech advice on topics that concerned them most -- from websites, to POS systems, to social media use along with an actionable report -- and included recommendations for next steps, along with up to \$1,500 of additional investment in technology or marketing to implement those recommendations.

Other projects developed and implemented by the Laurentian BBC Team include:

- Equipment and technology upgrades to the chamber’s meeting space facilities, enabling the chamber to better serve their members’ training and professional development needs.
- Creation of a virtual interview room at the CareerForce Center to help the region’s employers attract knowledge workers. The facility will allow job seekers to apply and interview for positions remotely, and can also be used for mock interviews, and other training purposes.
- Installation of an ITV system in the workforce center conference room allowing the center to offer distance learning training content of all kinds. The facility will also be available for public use.
- Creation and promotion of a “Small Business Saturday” mobile app to promote local business. The app will encourage shopping local on Small Business Saturday and throughout the year by enabling push notifications, promoting specials, and giving customers a resource to find local shopping options.
- Technology upgrades for Rock Ridge Schools including Adobe Creative Cloud software and STEM curriculum for middle schoolers.
- Software training for Mesabi Humane Society staff and volunteers.
- PCs for People mobile internet subscriptions for 75 income-qualified households.



## Tower Economic Development Authority

In developing its 2025 Vision Plan, the City of Tower recognized the need for better broadband. In their application to Blandin they wrote: “Our area has been anxiously awaiting more technological growth for quite some time. To be able to entice more businesses, families, and tourism with world-class internet access would give us the edge we need to grow and sustain our local economies.”



With their unique way of life and remoteness, the City of Tower needs access to broadband to be able to promote a “work anywhere” lifestyle, retain residents and attract potential newcomers. To explore options, the Tower BBC team obtained support from local units of government to participate in a Feasibility Study project along with the East Range and

Laurentian Chamber BBCs. The City also upgraded their website to improve the look and feel, and to share information about services and opportunities.

Increasing their own knowledge and educating residents about the importance of broadband was another key activity for the BBC team. They also implemented projects to install public Wi-Fi at Hoo Doo Point Campground, and at the Tower Depot and Farmer’s Market. Internet at the Farmer’s Market will allow vendors to use their mobile devices to take credit card payment, thus improving their sales while allowing visitors internet access in the public space around the Depot.

To improve the quality of tech education and training available in local schools the Tower BBC team supported projects in the two local schools:

- Tower Soudan elementary received funds for a mobile computer lab and AV equipment for their media center. The mobile lab will allow more classes to incorporate computers in teaching and learning. The community hadn’t had access to a computer lab or AV equipment previously, and this equipment will be available to them when school isn’t in session.
- Vermilion Country School (VCS) will receive support to increase and improve the use of Smartboards in classrooms and to create a computer lab. The lab will be used by VCS students and families, as an internet café for AEOA Senior Dining clients, and as a training venue Tower Soudan Community Ed classes. VCS will also create an interactive field trip and music lab. This space will allow for increased online curriculum, and receive online music instruction, and be available for other community members outside of school hours.



## Aitkin County



Aitkin County invested most of its first round of IRBC grant funds on improving broadband access in this very poorly served county. These investments included upgrading satellite internet service to Long Lake Conservation Center, acquiring library mobile hotspots for check out, installing Wi-Fi on buses, and equipping public meeting centers with internet, computers and other technology tools.

The public meeting centers established with round one funding have seen considerable use, so with the second grant round the Aitkin BBC team is investing in additional technology upgrades for those centers, and in the spring of 2020 invested in Zoom accounts and training. They have continued their focus on public access by funding the establishment of a Wi-Fi hotspot at the Jacobson Community Center, the first public hotspot in the town.



The team also has invested in a fiber connection build to Long Lake Conservation Center, finally bringing to the environmental learning center the future proof technology solution it needs to support program delivery across its large and wooded campus. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the importance of this project when LLCC shut down to in-person visitors but was able to use the new fiber connection to offer online outreach.

Lastly, the county is working with Riverwood Healthcare Center to increase MyChart usage amongst patients and caregivers to improve patient outcomes and give them a greater feeling of ownership over their health and treatment options.

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Thank god for broadband in Aitkin County! Honestly, we've really relied on virtual medicine and we've served over 900 people in the first few weeks. We've been able to serve over 900 people with virtual appointments, and if it wasn't for broadband that, obviously, wouldn't be possible.

- Liz Dean, Riverwood Healthcare System

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## Chisholm



During its first round as a BBC, the Chisholm team supported projects to fund Wi-Fi on two school buses; develop a community website/portal<sup>11</sup>; create Wi-Fi hotspots at the Chisholm Public Library, Balkan Community Center, and the Lake Street Pocket Park; make ten mobile hot spots available for check-out at the public library; offer computer training programs, and provide device training to older adults. The team also helped the Minnesota Discovery Center upgrade the facility's internet

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<sup>11</sup> <https://chisholm55719.com/>

connection and improve Wi-Fi throughout the building and grounds. The team continues to explore the idea of opening a coworking/business center in town.

The BBC team in Chisholm underwent a leadership change between the first and second rounds of BBC grant funding. ReGen, a nonprofit organization of young Iron Rangers, took over project leadership from Chisholm EDA. They continued work from the first round through support of a new Balkan Township website, and increased marketing for the Chisholm55719.com web portal. Additional projects include:

- The Chisholm Schools Wi-Fi hotspot project will allow the schools to acquire 100 mobile internet hotspots to address the needs of the 100 (out of 535) school-age who lack internet access at home. Students will be able to check out the hotspots for two-week intervals.
- Minnesota Discovery Center’s Distance Learning program will fund the purchase of distance learning equipment and curriculum development staff can use to conduct online educational field trips. This will expand the outreach capacity of the center and increase the visibility of the region.
- Individualized 1:1 professional technology and digital marketing consulting for ten local businesses and nonprofits.

## Ely



Ely completed a variety of projects during the first round of IRBC work, including: a feasibility study of better connectivity throughout the school district; opening of a thriving coworking space, “Ten Below”; creation of a showcase regional marketing website, the Elyite<sup>12</sup>; support to local businesses and entrepreneurs through technology and social media consulting, training, and meetups; and a broadband use and business development survey to support community efforts to recruit better broadband services.

The second round of projects developed by the Ely BBC team leverage the power of the internet as an engine of economic development and quality of life. They include creating a complete Google Local Listings on behalf of all businesses in Ely, which will make those businesses more visible online. Ten Below coworking space will facilitate free professional development “skillshares” workshops for local business owners on leveraging the power of the internet and social media to drive engagement and sales year-round, which were ultimately delivered via Zoom.

Hak Ely will utilize the Meetup.com event-marketing and scheduling platform to allow organizations to input their own events into a shared marketing platform. Proximity marketing

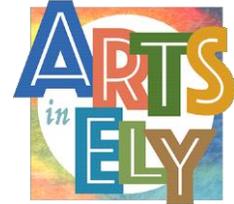
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<sup>12</sup> <https://elyite.com/>

is another fun way to engage park visitors and generate greater awareness about scheduled events and activities; Bluetooth enabled beacons will push notifications to visitors' devices. A video series will further engage residents, visitors, and potential visitors by highlighting stories of the unique characters found within the community.

The Ely team considers Ten Below a successful pilot. As of March of 2020, they had 77 members and were looking into larger spaces. However, as a non-essential service, they were forced to close just as the need intensified. Once the COVID situation improves, they hope to start up again.

The arts are a major asset in Ely, and another project will create an internet-based directory that will link artists, art consumers, and materials providers in an easy-to-access and maintain website<sup>13</sup>.



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*Looking at what's been going on: Treehouse broadband, our downtown fiber loop with our feasibility study done by Design Nine, the funding made available through IRRRB, all of these things are coming together and I think we'll be way farther ahead at the end of this than we would ever would have been without this help from Blandin, and being a Blandin Broadband Community. On behalf of the council and the city I thank you guys for the assistance you gave us. We're going to keep forging ahead and with the help of Eva and Richard and the rest of our team there is going to be a lot of exciting things, I can guarantee, that are going to come out of this.*

- Harold Langowski, Ely City Administrator

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### Grizzlies (Bois Forte, Cook, Orr)



North Woods School is home of the Grizzlies; and was opened in 2012 when the schools in Cook, Orr and Bois Forte were consolidated -- which is how "Grizzlies" became the name for the IRBC effort within the school district's boundaries.

Broadband access and use are both key concerns for this sparsely populated area. The region's long-standing efforts to partner with existing providers began to pay off in 2020 when Bois Forte Tribal Government received Border-to-Border Broadband grant funding to connect ten unserved and 468 underserved locations throughout four sectors of the Bois Forte Reservation (*details on page 41*).

Other first round projects that address both access and use included adding public hotspots to the Cook Library and the Orr Center; upgrading computer labs in Nett Lake, the Orr Center, and

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<sup>13</sup> <https://artsinely.org/>

at the Cook Library; purchasing five mobile hotspots for checkout at the Cook Library; and hosting a wide variety of technology trainings throughout the three communities.

For the second round, the Grizzlies are continuing with adult education classes and technology support at the Orr Center and the Cook Library, and will expand on the QuickBooks training classes that were offered to small business owners during round one. A project emerged in spring of 2020 to help at-risk residents with social distancing by helping the local grocery store set-up an online ordering system.

The Bois Forte Reservation acknowledges that its heritage, language, and culture are at risk. To help preserve and document for future generations existing cultural knowledge and practices the tribe will use second round project funds to establish a video creation, collection and archiving program of culturally relevant materials.

Finally, when looking at project ideas to unite the three communities



that now share a school, the IRBC team agreed that creating a sports blog and website would fulfill that goal. Students and community members will help design and contribute content to the site, which will include a journalism education component. Plans for the site include development of video and radio broadcasting capability through Bois Forte Reservation's KBFT Radio. A related but separate project extended the school's Wi-Fi to the athletic fields surrounding the building.

### Hibbing



The Hibbing IRBC effort was led by the Hibbing Area Chamber of Commerce. During the first round the team focused on projects to raise the the technology skills of local businesses and entrepreneurs. The Digital Marketing for Small Businesses project was so successful they selected an additional sixteen businesses after the initial round of seven.

The Hibbing team also prioritized digital inclusion-focused projects, including:

- Purchase of twenty mobile internet hotspots for library check-out.
- New public Wi-Fi hotspots in the community.
- One hundred refurbished computers distributed to income-qualifying families, seniors and the disabled through PCs for People.
- Helped Hibbing Community College host a Technology Career Fair for students in grades 9-12.

Continuing with their business focus, in the second round the BBC team worked with TechTank to host for the Hibbing business community a series of free-to-attend monthly meet-ups with paid facilitators on topics such as entrepreneurship, financial management, and marketing.

Second round projects also help community anchor institutions maximize community benefits from the internet. They include:

- Helping Access North Center for Independent Living implement an aging-in-place initiative, using smart home technology to allow seniors to stay in their homes as long as possible.
- Partnering with Fairview Range to supply devices for use by Infusion Center patients, allowing access medical care records and to stay in touch with families and friends.
- Provide low-cost internet service to sixty low income apartment units at the local public housing complex.
- Purchasing devices to connect eleven area emergency vehicles with the Fairview Range Emergency Room.



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*It was great to dig into [digital inclusion] more, and how it reflects on a lot of the resources, in general, that we have in our communities. Broadband is no different. The difference between true inclusion and access are very different things, and so our work has to focus on all those different pieces - and that's why I love these mini projects is you get a bunch of different pieces in your circle, of different aspects of intelligent community. Not every project is tackling all of them, but they all help work towards a more inclusive community around broadband and technology.*

- Vicki Hagberg, Hibbing Chamber of Commerce

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## Mt. Iron-Buhl



The IRBC group in Mountain Iron-Buhl (MIB) was led by the school district. During the first round, several of the team's projects were school-based, including instillation of Wi-Fi on buses; procuring equipment for a new journalism class and Makerspace classroom; and bringing technology to outdoor classroom opportunities.

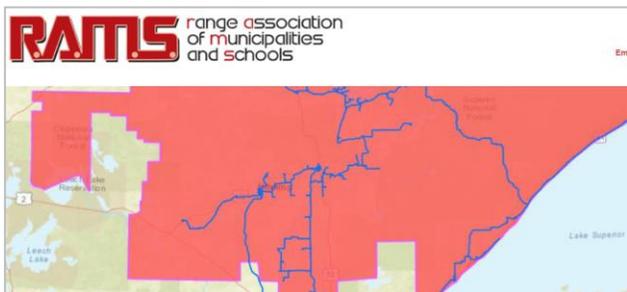
Other projects supported by the MIB BBC team included:

- New web-presence for Great Scott Township<sup>14</sup>
- Upgraded technology at the government buildings in Great Scott and Kinney
- Upgraded Wi-Fi at Mt. Iron City Hall, the Library, and other public spaces around town
- Hosted technology breakfasts and technology training classes, and
- Offered marketing audits for area businesses.

During the second round, the MIB BBC team continued with projects to support the use of enhanced technology in the school forest by acquiring twelve GPS units, geocaching container, a weather station, and a community greenhouse. The school aspires to attract even more users of the forest through enhanced environmental learning, and to open up the STEM Lab and technology offerings to the public. The school has sought and received additional funding that will allow instructors to develop curricula, programming and other opportunities for community members to interact with the technology. Participants will learn about graphic design, CAD, web design, video editing and publishing, and engineering. The school also is establishing a community journalism program and opening its journalism program to community members.

Other community-generated projects that received MIB's BBC support include:

- An upgrade to the Open Y software program and upgraded technology at the Mesabi YMCA, including offering Wi-Fi throughout the building
- A new app developed for the City of Mountain Iron to provide information to residents
- Improved Wi-Fi at Mountain Iron Community Center



One self-described "direct" result of the work of the MIB BBC team that required no funding, but did require leadership, was the decision by the Range Area Municipalities and Schools (RAMS) to create, host, and manage a website<sup>15</sup> to serve as a central shared location for all of the documents

related to broadband projects on the Iron Range, including feasibility studies, public

<sup>14</sup> <https://greatscotttownship.com/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://broadband.ramsmn.org/>

presentations, fact sheets, and media reports. Fulfilling this information management function is a key component of the civic infrastructure necessary to support collective impact, according to Kania and Kramer of FSK and Harvard’s Kennedy School. Claiming and executing ownership of this project undergirds the enhanced role RAMS has begun to play as an advocate for the broadband needs of its members since joining BCBP.

### Central Range Feasibility Study

Three first round Iron Range Broadband Communities (Chisholm, Hibbing and Mt. Iron-Buhl) collaborated to complete an area-wide feasibility study grant to determine options for bringing broadband to the Central Iron Range. The study area included Chisholm, Balkan Township, Hibbing, French Township, Cherry Township, Mountain Iron, Buhl, Kinney, and Great Scott Township.

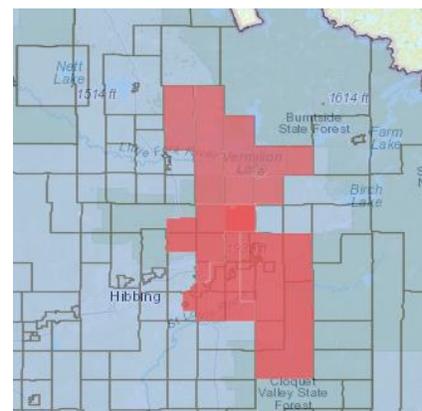
A coordinating leadership team was created that oversaw the completion of the study. The results, including detailed local area findings, have been shared with each of the communities and are being used to identify areas eligible for government funding. Conducting the study created an opportunity to develop closer ties with existing and prospective broadband providers who are now interested in serving the Iron Range for the first time. The accomplishments of these Central Rangers offer a pathway for the Laurentian, Tower, and East Range communities to follow as they begin implementation of their own feasibility study. The most exciting thing about this project was seeing the communities work together toward a common goal.

This study has led to one infrastructure success thus far when CTC and Cherry Township collaborated and received USDA Rural ReConnect program funding in early 2020 to build a fiber to the home network throughout the township (*details on page 47*).

### LTE Feasibility Study

A second Iron Range feasibility group is making significant progress towards launching their study. The study area ranges from the Quad Cities (excluding Mountain Iron which participated in the Central Range study) through the East Range up to Tower. This study will cover over 1,000 square miles of northern St. Louis County. The Ely area was covered by an earlier Blandin/IRRR feasibility study grant.

The \$75,000 required local match has been raised from a combination of sources, including cities, townships, school districts, chambers of commerce, local businesses and individual contributions, a great accomplishment for small and financially challenged communities. Consultant selection is in its final stages with work to begin immediately with the goal to have work completed and projects identified for state broadband funding programs in summer 2020.



## Strut Your Stuff Tours

Key to staff's reflective learning practice are twice-yearly field visits we call "Strut Your Stuff" tours. These semi-annual visits to each Blandin Broadband Community provide an opportunity for shared reflection and learning about the community work and about how the program might be adapted or enhanced for better outcomes and support.

Staff and community teams discuss questions like:

- 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?

These conversations inform program review and adaptation and sometimes generate ideas for new projects or opportunities.

**2020 COVID-19 Response:** Under normal circumstances, community teams are encouraged to invite the public and the media to the third and final Strut Your Stuff Tour to join in celebrating success. BBC Steering Committees use the occasion to revisit the community goals that informed their activities, report on progress achieved toward those goals, and recommit to continued efforts. However, in 2020 the third visit was being planned for early spring, so the decision was made to shift to virtual meetings via Zoom. Furthermore, most communities were very busy with COVID planning and emergency relief activities related to Minnesota's Stay-at-Home order. As a result, these were smaller, virtual gatherings where the focus was on both progress-to-date and COVID adjustments.

One nearly across-the-board adjustment was that communities were invited to extend their grant periods through December 31, 2020. Most had been scheduled to be concluded by mid-year. The reason this was necessary was because a lot of the work was paused while team members were occupied with emergency response, and in-person gatherings and trainings were put on indefinite hold. An extension allowed the BBCs to pause and reassess current projects and allocate or reallocate funding to implement technology-related COVID response projects.

Other common challenges for BBCs included:

- Mobile devices, hotspots, and even some laptops became difficult to find due to high demand as schools shifted to online learning.
- The gap between students with internet access at home and those without became even more significant, and districts scrambled to find solutions for students. The

solutions were often mobile Wi-Fi hotspots or reduced cost internet subscriptions through local providers.

- Trainings and workshops originally designed as in-person had to shift to videoconference. This was a particular challenge when the expected audience had very limited exposure to technology, such as senior citizens.
- Delays related to equipment availability and concerns related to social distancing with installation.

However, the challenges of 2020 highlighted the importance of universal broadband. It became clear to so many additional people that high-speed internet access and the skills to use it is critically important infrastructure. Working and schooling from home is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity, and internet access makes it possible to do so successfully. Meanwhile inequitable access to the internet leads to inequal educational and work opportunities. The digital divide intensified but received more attention from new advocates.

Businesses began to adapt to more online and less in-person traffic. Many BBCs have funded digital marketing and technology trainings for small local businesses and nonprofits over the past few years, and those businesses were in better shape to adapt and respond to the pandemic.

*This is the second year that [Blandin Foundation] has invested in specific competency development of our local leaders, as part of the broadband grant. Our leaders leverage technology every day on an off-site. What we've found with the whole COVID-19 is that it's more critical than ever for folks to have skill sets, particularly in finding on-boarding and developing employees, whether they're working onsite or working remotely.*

- Eva Sebesta, Ely Chamber of Commerce

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*I think as a society we are learning from this event. You're seeing that by businesses moving to remote [work] where they can. We're going to have smaller office complexes because [businesses will] have 25-50% of their workforce always working from home. Social Services already told 25% of their staff they're staying home until the end of December because they found that they're as efficient, or more efficient, working from home. ... What we're all learning is that we can survive in this technology world, regardless of age, and it actually works quite well if used properly. The tools, whether it's PowerPoints and shared screens - I never dreamt I'd be doing this stuff. But you're able to do it. I could talk to someone in Biwabik today and we could have a great conversation for \$16/month on my Zoom account. What I'm finding is that it works.*

- Kyle Oldre, Rock County Administrator

## Technical Assistance: Meeting Communities Where They Are At

Community Broadband Resources Program: Communities struggling with substandard broadband services want to know: 1) where they stand with broadband compared to other communities, and 2) their options for moving forward.

BCBP offers engagement and foundation support along a continuum of community readiness as capacity is built through shared learning and action. Community Broadband Resources (CBR) is the open-end of the funnel. CBR is designed to meet communities “where they are at,” with assistance requested ranging from technical, educational, or informational, to convening and facilitation support. CBR is available upon completion of a simple online form with community engagement beginning almost immediately.

CBR participants often continue to build relationships and receive additional resources from the Foundation. For example, in our newest cohort of Blandin Broadband Communities (beginning in 2020), three communities had received CBR assistance: Chisago Lakes Area, and Le Sueur and Otter Tail counties. Each of these has also received Robust Network Feasibility Fund (RNFF) Study grants as well; a fourth – White Earth Nation – also received a RNFF grant.

The nineteen communities that received assistance via CBR during this reporting period include cities, counties, tribal governments, regional economic development groups and the Minnesota Association of Townships. Each of these organizations has elevated the lack of broadband to a community/organizational priority and sought out CBR as a resource.

Significant resources were devoted to communities in northeastern Minnesota, from the Duluth suburbs to the Iron Range to Koochiching County. South Central Minnesota counties have realized their region’s broadband shortcomings and are becoming more active, at least in part due to a recent Region Nine Broadband Summit; Blandin Foundation was a leading force in creating this event along with local and regional partners.

Supporting the creation of an informed and motivated leadership team including multiple community champions is the key objective of CBR. Blandin provides training, usually beginning with a “Broadband 101” presentation that includes general information about broadband technology terms, defining characteristics and trends, and a high-level analysis of existing area broadband infrastructure and services. Best community practices for improving broadband services are highlighted as well as “most likely” paths forward.

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*Working with a consultant has helped to sort through all the information that is out there. I appreciated having someone with the knowledge and expertise to walk alongside our citizen broadband group to help us achieve our broadband goals.*

- Suzanne Herstad, Rice Lake City Council

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CBR also guides communities through their information gathering process. This usually involves creating a list of existing and prospective providers which are invited for community interviews as to their existing capabilities or planned improvements. Discussions generally focus on identifying what conditions would motivate a provider to invest in the community.

Providing an online survey tool that generates a data report – and help interpreting the data – is often helpful to communities. Blandin provides sample surveys and an online portal for data collection and analysis. The task of promoting the survey within the community builds the local team and the provided survey results provide quick feedback on the local broadband situation and market information to take to potential provider partners.

Generally, a community broadband summit is held to receive additional community input about their broadband experience, review the gathered information from the survey, provider interviews and available broadband data. These meetings can provide motivation to the broadband team leaders, inform more community members, add additional broadband volunteers, and empower elected leaders to pursue private sector broadband investment in tandem with public sector financial commitments.

CBR communities often take the next steps to conduct a more detailed feasibility study which then, hopefully, leads to broadband investment. Blandin Broadband team discussions have recently centered on whether participation in CBR should be required for a Robust Network Feasibility Fund grant. Not surprisingly, the study process seems more productive when there is a strong local team in place to design and implement follow-up on study findings.

CBR participants can often make great progress on their broadband quest in a relatively short time. For example, the following communities participating in CBR during this reporting period recently received state or federal broadband infrastructure grants that will be deployed in 2020-21:

- Le Sueur/BevComm - state grant
- Central Iron Range/Cherry Township - USDA ReConnect grant
- Koochiching County/Paul Bunyan (also BBC) - state grant
- Scandia/Midco - state grant

A complete list of Blandin-enabled broadband projects that have successfully applied for public funding during this reporting period are included on page 41.

The thirty-two hours of available assistance per community seems adequate; communities averaged twenty-seven hours of requested assistance. Once initial CBR assistance is completed, they often maintain contact and seek additional *ad hoc* information and assistance, subscribe to the broadband blog, join the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition as well as attending state and regional broadband events.

Below is a summary of the 444 hours of assistance delivered to nineteen participating communities and entities during the 2018-2020 reporting period.

Community	Assistance Description	Highlights
<b>Central Iron Range Feasibility Study</b>	Serve as advisor to this diverse group of broadband activists through consultant solicitation, consultant selection and study implementation.	Study successfully completed with the Cherry Township portion of the project submitted by CTC for USDA federal funding. A \$5 million grant was received with a fiber to the home network to be constructed summer 2020.
<b>Intelligent Community</b>	Complete the City of Red Wing's and the Brainerd Lakes Area Development Corporation's benchmarking application to the Intelligent Community Forum for consideration as Intelligent Community of the Year.	Local leaders engaged and educated on the Intelligent Community framework. Communities each received Intelligent Community benchmarking report comparing them to more than 400 communities around the world.
<b>Le Sueur County</b>	Provided significant technical assistance to the Le Sueur County Broadband Task Force. Also recruited the County to participate in the Broadband Planning Charrette at the 2018 Broadband Conference.	The County received a Blandin Robust Network Feasibility Study (RNFF) grant to continue its work, resulting in a successful \$1.8 million MN Border to Border Broadband Grant in partnership with BevComm to build FTTH in significant portions of the county, covering almost 600 households and businesses. The County is continuing its work on infrastructure while also beginning work as a Blandin Broadband Community.
<b>Blue Earth County</b>	Provide leadership education and a broadband overview to staff members of Blue Earth County. County followed up by receiving a Blandin RNFF grant.	The study was successfully completed.
<b>Koochiching County</b>	Provided significant technical assistance to the Koochiching County Broadband Task Force. Also recruited the County to participate in the Broadband Planning Charrette at the 2018 Broadband Conference.	As a result of the planning charrette, Koochiching County partnered with Paul Bunyan Communications on a successful \$2.5 million grant that included pockets of Koochiching County and the Lake Kabetogama area of northwestern St. Louis County.
<b>Waseca County</b>	Provide leadership education and a broadband overview to leaders of Waseca County. The County also participated in the conference planning charrette.	The county considered applying for CBR and a Feasibility Study grant.

Community	Assistance Description	Highlights
<b>Rice Lake</b>	Provided leadership education and broadband overview to city staff, council members and citizens of Rice Lake (northwest of Duluth). The City followed up by receiving a small RNFF grant to conduct an engineering study.	Community is in discussions with CTC on next steps to prepare a DEED grant application.
<b>Nicollet County</b>	Provided leadership education and broadband overview to county leadership. County then applied for and received a RNFF grant.	Study in process.
<b>GPS 45:93</b>	This five-county regional economic development group in east central Minnesota received assistance to pursue financial and technical assistance from the Post Road Foundation. An application was prepared and submitted.	The group did not receive the grant but remains in contact with the Post Road Foundation. Work toward improving broadband services continues.
<b>Redwood County</b>	Due to staff changes, information about past and present broadband challenges and opportunities were presented to the new staff.	No action taken by community.
<b>Scandia</b>	Follow-up on previous assistance to renew committee energy.	Community supported the Midco application to MN DEED for a combination of the expansion of Midco's existing cable TV footprint and deployment of fixed wireless services. This \$510,358 application was approved that will improve services for 200+ households.
<b>Lake Shore</b>	Provide on-occasion guidance to the community around their broadband situation.	The community has been unable to maintain group membership and momentum.
<b>Laurentian-Tower-East Range Feasibility Study</b>	Provide ongoing assistance to this group as they collaboratively implement a RNFF study over a large area of the eastern Iron Range.	Blandin RNFF grant was awarded. Consultant selection in process.

Community	Assistance Description	Highlights
<b>Intelligent Community 2019</b>	Conduct regional informational seminars on the Intelligent Community followed by hands-on assistance to help communities complete the Intelligent Community benchmarking process.	Completed applications submitted by Alexandria, Brainerd, Winthrop, Koochiching, and GPS 45:93.
<b>MN Association of Townships</b>	Provide presentation at their 2018 annual conference.	Presentation well-received. Broadband is a top priority of the association.
<b>Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe</b>	Leech Lake requested assistance around the development of a tribal technology plan which is beyond the Blandin Broadband team expertise. Planning tools were identified and transmitted to the tribal government.	Unclear as to project status.

**Building Community Capacity for Broadband Funding Success:** A significant number (nine out of 30) of awardees in the 2019 round of state Border-to-Border grants benefited from Blandin’s community broadband development assistance, from community leadership education and facilitation to broadband feasibility studies (an essential component of any broadband infrastructure grant program). Our program processes prepare community leaders to actively and smartly engage and partner with existing and prospective broadband providers. Our BBCs, through a two-year engagement process, recognize both the value of broadband and the negative impacts of being under/un-served. These communities build significant momentum in support of broadband deployment projects.

While many existing broadband providers prefer to “edge out” with small opportunistic projects, communities that have participated with Blandin Foundation work to ensure large-scale deployments across counties, reservations and townships. While the average state grant amount was approximately \$775,000, projects funded in Blandin-active communities was just over \$1 million. Of the 30 state broadband grants, only eight were over \$1 million dollars; four of these were related to Blandin Foundation efforts. In addition, the Cherry Township USDA Re-Connect (described on page 47) was for more than \$5 million dollars.

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*The expertise and support through this partnership has brought us huge success with a \$1.8 million Border-to-Border grant with Bevcomm. WE COULD NOT HAVE DONE THIS WITHOUT BLANDIN! The Blandin Foundation gave us hope, expertise, resources, financial support to move this ahead. The impact on economic development in our rural county is immeasurable.*

- Barbara Dröher Kline, Le Sueur County Broadband Coalition

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The following chart describes the broadband infrastructure projects receiving state funding in 2019 in which Blandin played a role.

Community	2019 Border-to-Border Broadband grant award details	BCBP Involvement
<b>Aitkin County</b>	<p>This last mile project will upgrade approximately 242 unserved and 103 underserved locations in the Esquagamah Lake and Round Lake areas of Aitkin County. In a funding partnership with the State of Minnesota and Aitkin County, Emily Cooperative Telephone Company will improve broadband service levels up to 1 Gbps download and 1 Gbps upload, exceeding the 2022 and 2026 state speed goals. The use and development of broadband will provide various home-based business options, stimulate economic growth, and stimulate innovation and investment.</p> <p><b>Total eligible cost is \$752,000</b>  <b>Local match is \$376,000   DEED Grant is \$376,000</b></p>	<p>Aitkin County is an active participant in first cohort of Iron Range Broadband Communities. In 2015-16 they participated with the Central Woodlands BBC.</p>
<b>Aitkin County</b>	<p>This last mile project will serve 269 unserved homes, three unserved businesses, three unserved farms, one unserved community institution and five underserved homes in areas of Glen Township in Aitkin County. In a funding partnership with the State of Minnesota and Aitkin County, SCI Broadband will improve broadband service levels up to 250 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload, exceeding the 2022 and 2026 state speed goals. SCI will leverage its existing middle mile infrastructure to deploy a last mile fiber to the premise network to local businesses and residents. Building the fiber to the premise network will improve access to education, telemedicine, telecommuting, and economic development as-a-whole within the region.</p> <p><b>Total eligible cost is \$401,695</b>  <b>Local match is \$205,847   DEED Grant is \$195,848</b></p>	<p>Aitkin County is an active participant in first cohort of Iron Range Broadband Communities. In 2015-16 they participated with the Central Woodlands BBC.</p>
<b>Bois Forte Tribal Government</b>	<p>This last mile project will upgrade approximately 10 unserved and 468 underserved locations throughout four sectors of the Bois Forte Reservation in northeastern Minnesota: Nett Lake, Palmquist, Indian Point, and Vermilion. In a funding partnership with the State of Minnesota, MN Dept of Iron Range Resources &amp; Rehabilitation, and the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, Bois Forte will improve broadband service levels to at least 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload, meeting or exceeding the 2022 and 2026 state speed goals. This project will help increase jobs, wealth, and revenue throughout the entire reservation.</p> <p><b>Total eligible project cost is \$2,497,580</b>  <b>Local match is \$1,248,790   DEED grant is \$1,248,790</b></p>	<p>Bois Forte serves as lead organization and fiscal agent for the Grizzlies (Bois Forte, Cook, Orr) Iron Range Broadband Community.</p>

Community	2019 Border-to-Border Broadband grant award details	BCBP Involvement
<b>Chisago County</b>	<p>This last mile project will upgrade approximately 956 unserved and 64 underserved locations in Nessel Township in Chisago County. In a funding partnership with the State of Minnesota and Nessel Township, CenturyLink will improve broadband service levels up to 1 Gbps download and 1 Gbps upload, exceeding the 2022 and 2026 state speed goals. Building a fiber-to-the-premise network that provides advanced, high speed broadband services to households, businesses, and farms in the proposed grant area improves access to critical school e-learning applications while also making agricultural operations more efficient and enhancing crop production through enabled precision agriculture tools. The broadband network will improve access to rural health care resources and will stimulate a more robust local area economy.</p> <p><b>Total eligible project cost is \$5,525,167</b>  <b>Local match is \$3,867,617   DEED grant is \$1,657,550</b></p>	<p>Chisago County was a Blandin Broadband Community leading to an increased focus on broadband infrastructure. This is the third grant that Chisago County is benefitting from, all in partnership with CenturyLink.</p>
<b>Fond du Lac</b>	<p>This last mile project will upgrade approximately 37 unserved and 99 underserved locations in a portion of Carlton County located within the boundaries of the Fond du Lac Reservation, including the western part of the City of Cloquet and Perch Lake Township. In a funding partnership with the State of Minnesota, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa will improve broadband service levels up to 1 Gbps download and 1 Gbps upload, meeting or exceeding the 2022 and 2026 state speed goals. By building a fiber to the home network, faster internet speeds will open up many opportunities such as telemedicine, home health care, electronic health records, online schooling, business development and more. All these factors will assist in creating a more vibrant community and region.</p> <p><b>Total eligible cost is \$1,205,832</b>  <b>Local match is \$602,916   DEED grant is \$602,916</b></p>	<p>Fond du Lac was an active participant in the 2013-14 Blandin Broadband Communities program.</p>
<b>Koochiching County and the Lake Kabetogema area in St. Louis County</b>	<p>This last mile project will upgrade approximately 914 unserved and 439 underserved locations in parts of the Leech Lake Indian Reservation and rural portions of Cass, Itasca, Koochiching, and St. Louis counties. In a funding partnership with the State of Minnesota, MN Dept of Iron Range Resource &amp; Rehabilitation, Koochiching County, and Morcom Township, Paul Bunyan Communications will improve broadband service levels up to 1 Gbps download and 1 Gbps upload, exceeding the 2022 and 2026 state speed goals. A fiber-to-the-premise project, the proposed project areas are a response to consumer demand and will provide relief in economically distressed communities that need new alternatives to diversify and strengthen.</p> <p><b>Total eligible cost is \$6,268,400</b>  <b>Local match is \$3,705,484   DEED Grant is \$2,567,916</b></p>	<p>Koochiching County received assistance through the CBR Program and participated in the 2018 Conference Planning Charrette, partnering with a Paul Bunyan Communications consulting team. They are a 2018-20 BBC</p>

Community	2019 Border-to-Border Broadband grant award details	BCBP Involvement
<b>Le Sueur County</b>	<p>This last mile project will upgrade approximately 417 unserved households, 88 unserved farms, 59 unserved businesses, and 4 community anchor institutions in rural areas around the communities of Montgomery, Heidelberg, and New Prague in Le Sueur, Rice, and Scott Counties. In a funding partnership with the State of Minnesota and Le Sueur County, BEVCOMM will improve broadband service levels up to 1 Gbps download and 1 Gbps upload, exceeding the 2022 and 2026 state speed goals. Sustainable broadband adoption will transform these unserved areas into highly productive rural communities. This use and development of broadband will provide various home-based business options, stimulate economic growth, and stimulate innovation and investment. Education, health care, agriculture, energy efficiency, and public safety will improve with high-speed internet access.</p> <p><b>Total eligible project cost is \$3,714,752</b>  <b>Local match is \$1,857,376   DEED Grant is \$1,857,376</b></p>	<p>Blandin Foundation provided assistance through Community Broadband Resources and also invited Le Sueur County to participate in the 2018 Broadband Conference Planning Charrette. The County was subsequently awarded an RNFF grant, and has now been selected as a 2020 BBC.</p>
<b>Meeker County</b>	<p>This last mile project will upgrade approximately 206 unserved locations in rural South Haven in Wright County. In a funding partnership with the State of Minnesota, Vibrant Broadband will improve broadband service levels up to 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload, meeting or exceeding the 2022 and 2026 state speed goals. Building a fiber-to-the-premise high-speed broadband services network that will assist households, businesses and farms in the proposed grant area by providing access to critical school e-learning applications, making agricultural operations more efficient and enhancing crop production through enabled precision agriculture tools, and providing effective telemedicine options that offset rising health care costs. The broadband network will improve the lives of all the citizens of the area, lessening the “technological divide” between urban and rural areas.</p> <p><b>The total eligible cost is \$993,134</b>  <b>Local match is \$695,194   DEED grant is \$297,940</b></p>	<p>Meeker County received a Robust Network Feasibility Study grant leading to an entry into broadband services by Meeker Cooperative Light &amp; Power.</p>

Community	2019 Border-to-Border Broadband grant award details	BCBP Involvement
<b>Otter Tail County</b>	<p>This last mile project will serve 70 unserved households and 18 unserved businesses, telecommuters, and farms in the Elizabeth Township area of Otter Tail County. In a funding partnership with the State of Minnesota and Otter Tail County, Otter Tail Telcom will improve broadband service levels up to 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload, meeting Minnesota’s 2026 state speed goal. Building a fiber-to-the-premise network that provides advanced, high-speed broadband services to households, businesses and farms in the proposed grant area improves access to critical school e-learning applications while also making agricultural operations more efficient and enhancing crop production through enabled precision agriculture tools. The broadband network will improve access to rural health care resources, will stimulate a more robust local area economy and improve public safety through IPAWS.</p> <p><b>Total eligible cost is \$448,440</b>  <b>Local match is \$291,486   DEED grant is \$156,954</b></p>	<p>Otter Tail County received assistance through the Community Broadband Resource Program and a RNFF grant. Otter Tail County has now been selected as a 2020 BBC.</p>
<b>Scandia</b>	<p>This last mile project will upgrade approximately 64 unserved households and 155 underserved households in areas of Scandia in Washington County. In a funding partnership with the State of Minnesota and the City of Scandia, Midco will improve broadband service levels up to 1 Gbps download and 20 Mbps upload, meeting or exceeding the 2022 and 2026 state speed goals. The broadband network will improve access to critical school e-learning applications, and health care resources; enable telecommuting options for residents; and make businesses and city institutions more efficient.</p> <p><b>Total eligible cost is \$1,020,717</b>  <b>Local match is \$510,359   DEED grant is \$510,358</b></p>	<p>Scandia received assistance through the Community Broadband Resources Program and a RNFF grant.</p>

## Advocacy

Broadband was one of five advocacy topics addressed by the Foundation during this reporting period. Broadband Advocacy goals and outcomes for this reporting period:

Goal	Outcome
1. Iron Range feasibility communities have received state grant funding.	Two grant proposals received funding; Blandin Foundation seeded the understanding of St. Louis County decision-makers by hosting a summit prior to application.
2. Flip the story of failure in Lake County to one of widespread benefit.	Ginny Storlie, county commissioner, discussed the benefits of the project in an op-ed. Blandin Foundation recognized the county leaders through its "Courageous Leadership" program with accompanying media outreach.
3. Public benefit remains a primary motivator in statewide conversation.	This will be the major area of focus in 2020, supported by a more willing Governor's Broadband Task Force.
4. Build confidence of key decision-makers	The BoB Blog is a ready and trusted source of deep and accessible information for decision-makers. A newly constructed page <sup>16</sup> on the Foundation's website, as well as the BoB Blog, carries county by county insights, providing both encouragement and prompts at a more local level. Long-term engagement with community leaders through BBC, CBR and the MN Rural Broadband Coalition builds confidence and capacity.
5. Success stories of co-ops remain visible within the co-op community.	Co-ops were provider partners in the successful BBC grant projects. There is a growing interest in broadband deployment by electric cooperatives, including Roseau Electric, Mille Lacs Energy, MI Energy, and Meeker Coop Light and Power.

<sup>16</sup> <https://blandinfoundation.org/learn/research-rural/broadband-resources/minnesota-broadband-county-profiles/>

## Organizational-level Impacts: Broadband for Innovation

While most of Blandin Foundation's broadband grant awards in 2018 and 2019 were made to new and alumni Blandin Broadband Communities, late in 2019, several Broadband Innovation grants were awarded to organizations and local unites of government. These projects are just getting under way.

Kairos Alive! will work with hosting organizations in the Walker, Bemidji and Two Harbors areas to launch programs to offer in-person orientation and Dancing Hearth Live online distance learning engagement sessions in community.



Le Sueur County will reconvene the Le Sueur County Broadband Coalition, engage citizens and townships through technology programs, convenings, social media and other outreach, and needs assessments to promote access, adoption, and use of broadband and advance county-wide economic development.

Region Nine Development Commission will work to develop a tele-mental health network within their nine-county service area with a focus on historically marginalized groups such as immigrants, migrant agricultural workers, disabled, or veterans. In collaboration with local community clinics, schools and government offices the network will provide tele-mental health and substance abuse services via a remote HIPPA compliant video service that will provide direct services to underserved rural areas. This will be a very user-friendly process with little technology skills necessary in order to log on to the computer provided and directly reach the clinical provider.



Advanced Minnesota is the premier training partner for Customized Training in Northern Minnesota. They will update and upgrade training

opportunities through Virtual Reality training, Zoom classes, online training, and simulators, so they can offer businesses and individuals in Northern MN state of the art training that is offered in other parts of the state without having to pay the higher fees associated with travel and the Twin Cities business environment.

## Regional Impacts



The Foundation's broadband work continues to have impacts at a regional scale. Particularly on the Iron Range, where IRRR and Blandin partnered to bring programming to a total of ten communities within IRRR's service territory, communities came together to collaborate at a scale necessary to achieve their broadband goals.

For example, Iron Range Broadband Communities partnered in June 2019 with Blandin Foundation and IRRR to host a community forum on *What's Happening with Broadband in St. Louis County*. About sixty people attended.

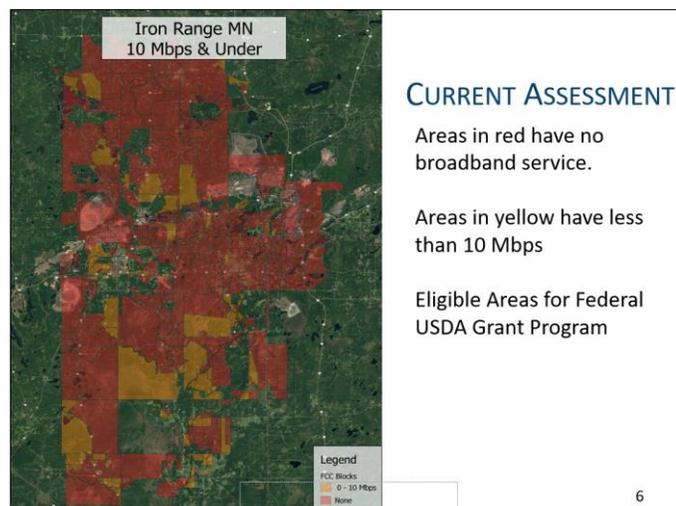
A few themes emerged:

- 1) People need broadband to live; it's not a luxury anymore.
- 2) In areas that aren't yet served it's going to take an effort on the part of the local community to get it.
- 3) Partnership helps.

The story of Cherry Township's participation in the program illustrates Blandin's belief that local leadership matters. When the township board was invited by BBC leaders from nearby Range communities to join the Central Range Feasibility Study project, supervisors hesitated. They are an older group and hadn't thought much about the need for broadband.

Area resident Kip Barbaconi understood the opportunity and wanted to help. Kip went door to door in the township to collect signatures and encouraged the board to hold community meetings. Together, the residents built a lot of demand. Their provider partner, Consolidated Telephone Company (CTC), was encouraged by the strong community support to apply to the USDA Rural ReConnect program for funding to build the network. The \$5.2 million-dollar USDA was received in January 2020 that will provide fiber to the home connectivity to nearly 700 homes in Cherry and Great Scott Townships.

Project partners will continue to look for other sources of funding to build out remaining portions of the feasibility study area.



Feeding Innovation in Greater Minnesota: Agriculture is a significant driver of rural vitality in much of greater Minnesota. Technology is growing in importance as farmers work to maximize yields and minimize inputs. Several ag-dependent counties have made significant strides in ensuring high quality broadband while others remain relatively underserved or unserved. The Blandin Broadband Team recognized an opportunity to spotlight the importance of broadband access and use in ag-dependent counties with a regional convening.



Event description: A one-day event demonstrating the role and potential of broadband-powered technology to spur the competitiveness of Minnesota's ag sector and our rural communities through presentations, discussions and demonstrations.

Purpose Statement: To increase awareness and understanding of the role of broadband and ag technology are and will play in the future of Minnesota's agricultural sector and ag-centric rural communities creating energy around opportunities.

Goals:

- Fire the imagination for increased collaboration around broadband-enabled ag technologies as a state and regional economic development strategy.
- Demonstrate the competitive advantage of world-class connectivity for the ag industry and rural communities.
- Increase the sense of urgency for rural areas that suffer from a lack of broadband by providing good information on technologies, how to get it, 5G vs. fiber, and multiple uses of broadband.

Lacking content expertise, the Blandin Team decided to contract for third-party assistance to design and deliver a quality conference. This decision to out-source to a third-party vendor the role of planning and coordination usually played by the Blandin Team was a first in our practice.

An event coordinator with strong ag connections was hired to help develop and market the event, and she helped convene a table of ag stakeholders to generate ideas and identify presenters. Members included the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, the marketing director for FarmFest, the general manager of a regional agricultural cooperative and others. The team estimated that the event could attract up to 200 attendees.

Yet when registration opened, there was little response, even after paid radio and newspaper advertisements. Faced with very few registrations, the steering team made the decision to cancel the event. The event team could only speculate as to the reasons for the failure:

- Emerging farm crisis due to a combination of weather and Ag tariffs absorbed all energy and attention. Highest levels of farmer suicide ever.
- Detrimental weather affecting uncertainty about harvest timing.
- Overly broad agenda that did not do enough to attract any of our targeted constituencies (farmers, county commissioners, economic developers, township officials.)
- Agenda that included a split focus:
  - What connected counties could do with broadband?
  - What unconnected counties need to do to get better broadband?

## Statewide Impact

Governor's Broadband Task Force: During this reporting period, the state transitioned administrations from Governor Dayton to Governor Walz. Governor Dayton's Broadband Task Force, which Bernadine was a long-time member of, was adjourned at the end of 2018.



In February 2019 Foundation President Kathleen Annette forwarded to newly elected Governor Walz a letter urging him to consider a set of recommendations from the Blandin Broadband Strategy Board. Those recommendations<sup>17</sup> included:

- Re-establishing the Governor's Broadband Task Force with representatives that reflect a fair balance of perspectives including rural people, tribal community members, and other historically marginalized communities, and that the Task Force revisit the state's speed goals.
- Continue support for state investment in broadband infrastructure, and to maximize any public investment by ensuring any policy changes prioritize benefits to communities, businesses, and residents over the interests of existing providers.
- Continue to support the Office of Broadband Development.

Each of the recommendations was acted upon by Governor Walz.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://blandinonbroadband.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/annette-bbsb-to-walz-2019-final.pdf>

In late 2019, the Walz administration announced it was seeking applications for a reconstituted Governor's Broadband Task Force that indeed included an increased number of seats for rural and tribal communities. Bernadine applied, and was appointed, along with three other members of Blandin Foundation's Broadband Strategy Board:

- Marc Johnson, Executive Director of ECMECC – East Central MN Educational Cable Cooperative, and Blandin Broadband Strategy Board member.
- Jim Weikum, Mayor of Biwabik and Executive Director of Arrowhead Library System, Blandin Broadband Strategy Board member and IRBC participant.
- Steve Giorgi, Executive Director of Range Association of Municipalities and Schools, and IRBC participant.

These appointments significantly strengthen rural voice on the new task force.

The *Blandin on Broadband blog* (BoB) continued during this reporting period to be a powerful tool for informing Minnesota's statewide broadband conversation and policy making decisions impacting broadband access and adoption. Among its services to Minnesota's broadband policy community, BoB provides the only coverage of Minnesota Broadband Task Force meetings and all legislative hearings on broadband.

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

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, Governor Walz's biannual budget included the coalition's proposed \$70-million for broadband. There was bipartisan support for broadband bills in each chamber, and the final two-year state budget included \$40 million of funding for broadband grants (a first-ever two-year allocation with twenty million dollars each for 2019 and 2020.)

DEED's Office of Broadband began accepting applications for the *Border-to-Border Broadband Development Fund grants* in September 2019. They received 80 applications for \$70 million, and in January 2020 the office announced thirty projects funded totalling \$23 million. Additionally, Governor Walz and Representative Ecklund have announced plans to request \$30 million of additional one-off funding from the supplemental budget for the 2020 grants. The Governor's broadband task force has supported this request in a letter to the legislature.

## Building Community Capacity for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

- Promoting ICF: As part of its effort to strengthen the capacity of its community partners to compete in the twenty-first century, in June 2019, Blandin Foundation sponsored a delegation of Minnesotans to attend the *Intelligent Community Forum (ICF) Global Summit* in New York City. ICF is a global network of communities that



uses a broadband-enabled framework of community and economic development to create inclusive prosperity, tackle social and governance challenges, and enrich quality of life.

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*The ICF report has helped us understand the strengths as well as weaknesses in our community so we can continue to work towards being the best place to live and work in the world.*

- Mike Bjerkness, Brainerd Lakes Area EDA

Blandin Foundation has been using the ICF framework in its community work since 2008. In 2019, the Blandin team assisted two Minnesota communities – Red Wing and Brainerd – complete applications to participate in the Intelligent Community of the Year competition.

Each year ICF identifies Smart21 Communities of the Year, then culls that group down to the Top 7 Intelligent Communities, and finally, announces the Intelligent Community of the Year at its annual Summit, which brings together participants from cities and towns in Canada, Taiwan,

Scandinavia, Australia, Europe and South America, as well as from across the United States.

The Minnesota delegation to the 2019 awards conference was made up of six Blandin Community Broadband partners from across the state who are using the ICF framework in their economic and community development efforts. Staff summarized learning from the trip<sup>18</sup>; here are some select reflections from participants:

*I do believe we can and should use the ICF framework for more of our programming and planning. I believe it will really help leaders and community members grasp the purpose behind community and economic development as well as how we plan for change.*

- Elissa Hanson, President and CEO, The Northspan Group

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*It will help me bring new ideas and framework to current projects and objectives back to Bemidji. I look forward to reviewing New York's proposal to recently attract tech company. My suggestion for the foundation is to stay the course with an emphasis on Broadband for rural communities. The Foundation's investments are garnering great returns and will only multiply into the future.*

- Sheila Haverkamp, Executive Director, Brainerd Lakes Area EDC

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<sup>18</sup> <https://blandinfoundation.org/content/uploads/Reflections-on-ICF-Global-Summit.pdf>

*The Blandin Foundation is clearly the leader in Minnesota for the ICF model. Their past investments in our community continue to grow in sustained programming and knowledge. I believe a statewide ICF effort would make Minnesota more competitive in the 21st-century economy.*

- Neela Mollgaard, Executive Director, Advance Minnesota

In December 2019, Blandin staff met with DEED Commissioner Steve Grove to present the ICF framework as a model for understanding the role DEED programs play in community and economic development. DEED senior staff Neela Mollgaard, Director of DEED's new Launch Minnesota<sup>19</sup> program, and Office of Broadband Development interim Director Angie Dickison, participated in the meeting to echo their support for a model that puts affordable, accessible broadband at the heart of economic and community development.

## National Impact



In September 2019, consultant Ann Treacy participated in the inaugural *National Tribal Broadband Summit* hosted by the US Department of the Interior, Department of Education and Institute of Museum and Library Services. Ann moderated a keynote panel and presented at two breakout sessions.

Bernadine Joselyn was invited to present Blandin's broadband work to an audience of top broadband officers from each of the fifty states convened in Washington DC by the National Telecommunications Information Agency (NTIA) of the US Department of Commerce.

Blandin's role in advancing broadband adoption and support was highlighted in a national research study by Pew Trusts' Broadband Research Initiative<sup>20</sup>. The report featured Minnesota among a half-dozen states



identified with best practices. Commenting on the study before the US Capitol press corps, Minnesota State Broadband Director Angie Dickison singled out Blandin for commendation as did Minnesota Senator and Presidential candidate Amy Klobuchar when speaking about rural broadband on the campaign trail.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://mn.gov/launchmn/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/projects/broadband-research-initiative>

## Reflections on Fifteen Years of Investment

The occasion, in 2019, of the fifteenth-annual Blandin broadband conference, prompted staff to look back at the work through the lens of the objectives originally established for the program in 2003:

1. Generate awareness among leaders about the need for action to improve broadband access and adoption.
2. Increase rural business and residential use of broadband.
3. Increase public and private investment in broadband.

Since 2003, Blandin has worked on broadband with 71 communities in 58 (out of 87) Minnesota counties in support of over 380 community projects.

**Impacts on Internet Access:** Of the 48 network feasibility studies Blandin has funded to date, 28 have been either fully built out, partially built, or are under imminent construction. Thirteen studies have been used to develop applications to the state’s broadband grant fund to build the network they envision; nine of these projects were funded in the most recent grant round in 2019.

In addition, many of Blandin’s community partners have increased broadband access through adoption projects that make free public wifi available in public parks, laundromats, on school buses, and in local businesses and coffee shops.

**Impacts on Broadband Adoption:** Since 2003, in collaboration with the computer refurbisher PCs for People, Blandin has resourced and supported our seventy-one community partners to distribute computers and subsidized internet connections to 2,300 income-qualifying families. Blandin Broadband Communities also have launched a wide range of digital literacy training programs for residents and businesses.

Through this program, many communities have come to better appreciate the important role that libraries play in their civic and economic life. As a result, many have increased their financial support for libraries and their staffs, and for increased library hours.

In 2002 in rural Minnesota:	In 2019 in rural Minnesota:
dialup access was the norm	84 percent of rural households have access to 25/3 wireline broadband
77 percent of rural households reported access to dial up	68 percent have access to 100/20
only 21 percent had access to broadband	22 percent have access to gigabit speeds

**Impacts of Broadband Use:** Since adopting it in 2009 for the Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities program, Blandin Foundation has used the Intelligent Community Framework with each of our forty-four partnering communities as a tool for helping them improve broadband access and adoption.

Using this framework, between 2004 – 2019 the forty-four Blandin Broadband Communities designed and implemented a total of **409** projects that advance their technology goals.

Some projects – like this one sponsored by the Koochiching Technology Initiative - touch as many as four of the six elements of the Intelligent Community Framework: Broadband, Knowledge Workforce, Innovation, and Digital Equity:



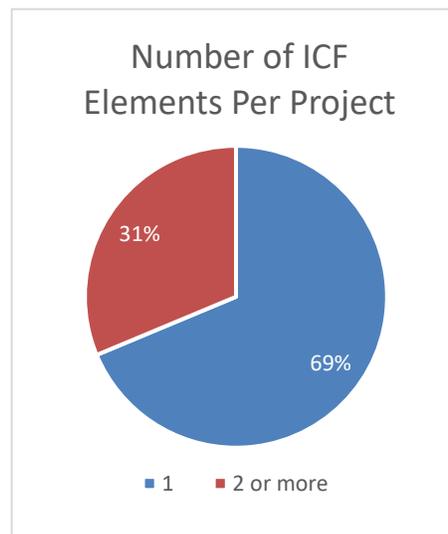
“To increase broadband adoption and use by helping the International Falls Public Library expand its services in the community, including through improved Wi-Fi access at Smokey Bear Park, six LinkedIn Learning mobile internet subscriptions for check-out, expanded reference service to texting and LiveChat, and the addition of Adobe Creative Cloud software for use by patrons in the library’s new recording studio.”

For the purpose of the following analysis, staff has coded the 409 community broadband projects implemented between 2009 and January 2020 by up to two ICF model indicators. See Appendix B for the data table.

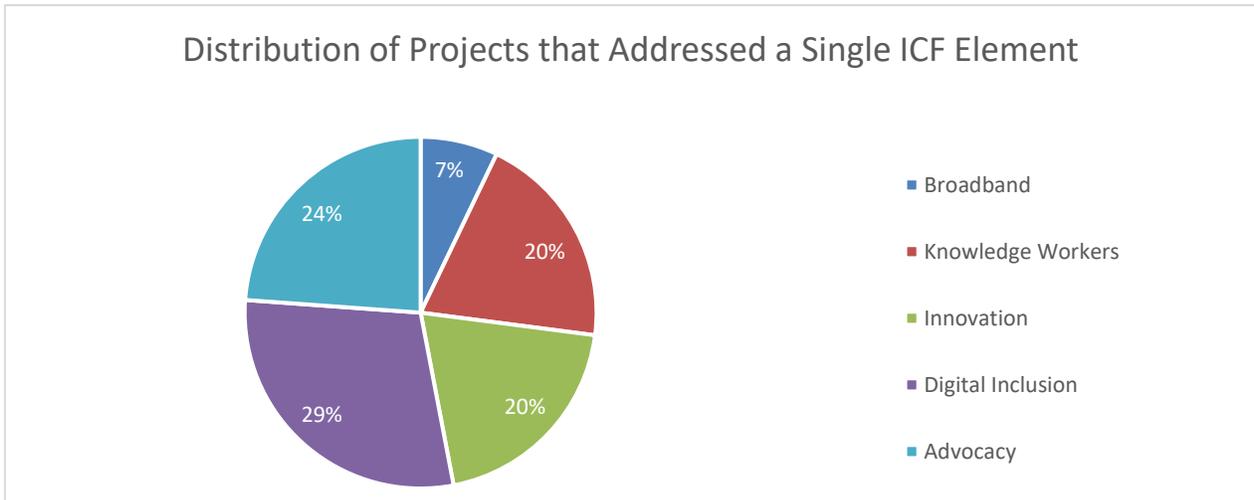
**Summative Sorting of 409 Community Projects by ICF Element: Distribution and**

**Intersectionality:** To inform their broadband planning and investments, Blandin Broadband steering committees conduct an analysis of existing community assets using the ICF elements and are encouraged to create projects that address gaps and opportunities they identify.

The 281 community projects that fit a single ICF category (68.7% of the total 409 projects) are distributed fairly evenly across the five ICF elements, suggesting communities saw opportunities in each. Digital Inclusion had the most projects, at eighty-two, followed by Advocacy with sixty-seven projects. Knowledge Workers and Innovation tied for third place at fifty-six projects each. The

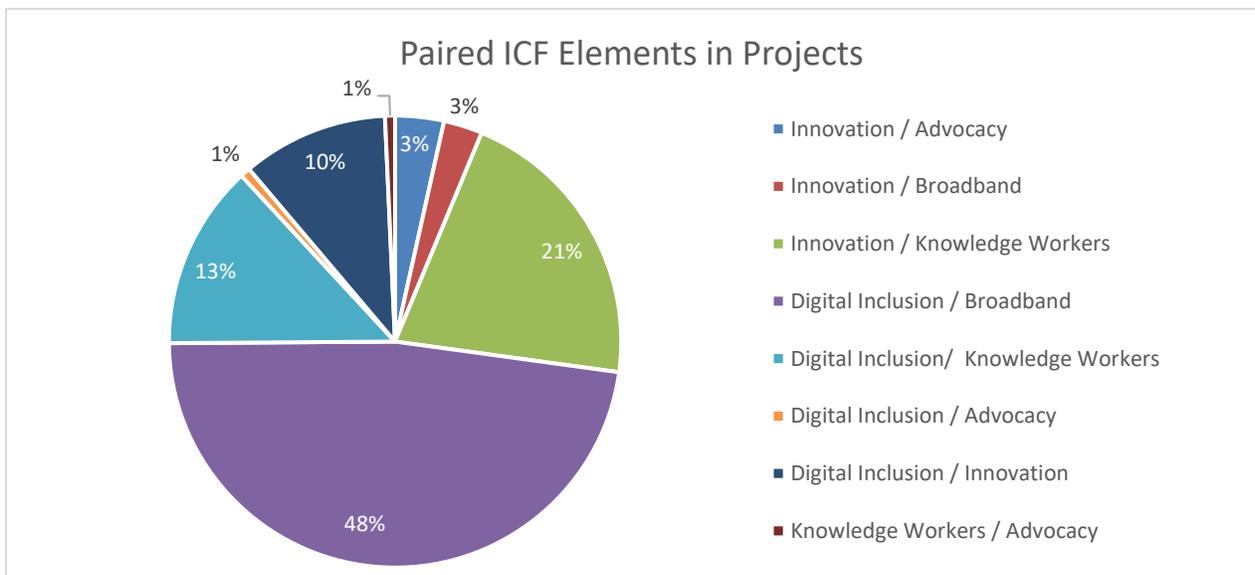


twenty broadband infrastructure projects not paired with Digital Inclusion or any other element are mostly feasibility studies and community surveys.



Communities designed projects that paired the ICF elements of Digital Inclusion and Innovation with each of the other four elements. Advocacy was paired with three other elements; Broadband was paired with two.

The sixty-seven projects that pair Digital Inclusion with Broadband Infrastructure represent over fifty percent of the paired projects - nearly thirteen percent of the total 409 projects - and give a sense of the scope of the impact of these investments. Funded projects brought free public wifi to public parks and trails (27); school buses (6 districts); public housing (3); libraries (6); and twenty-eight public community spaces, like township halls, community centers, and downtowns.



## Impact on the Level of Public and Private Investment in Broadband Access and

Use: Since beginning the broadband program in 2003, Blandin Foundation has invested over \$4.4 million dollars of grant funding and leveraged \$6.5 million in community match and \$5.8 million in investments by funding partners – for a total of \$16.7 million in direct investments.

The Minnesota Border-to-Border Broadband Infrastructure grant program, launched in part as a result of the efforts of Blandin and our partners in the work, has to date invested \$109 million in state funds, matched with \$146 million in private and local dollars, in the form of 140 broadband expansion projects across the state.

Of the 140 grants made by DEED, 52 or 37% of the awarded communities, received technical assistance from Blandin in gathering data, ensuring the project reflected community input, and gathering community support.



## **Mountain Summit: Accountability for Learning, Development & Adaptation**

In working with our next cohort of Blandin Broadband Communities, staff will continue to be guided by this opportunity statement, which describes the most promising opportunities we see for our work going forward:

*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.*

**Building upon proven practices:** Based on positive community feedback we will continue to use an intense community engagement process that brings communities from goal setting to action within about 90 days. We will increase investments in promoting the Intelligent Community Framework as a model for helping community leaders, and DEED, think holistically about technology-based economic and community development. In 2020 we are adapting our program to include a Community Broadband Leadership Workshop targeted specifically at those Minnesota counties most struggling to meet the state’s broadband goals.

**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. In 2020 the Blandin Community Broadband Program is partnering with two tribes – White Earth and Red Lake – for the first time.

**Attracting Additional Passionate Partners:** Blandin staff has recruited West Central Initiative Foundation as a new BCBP funding partner, allowing us to serve a total of five communities in the new 2020-2022 cohort.

**Drive Collaborative Approaches:** We have adapted our conference planning process for 2020 to bring in new partners and voices. New leadership and membership – including four members of the Blandin Broadband Strategy Board - on the Governor’s broadband task force opens up new opportunities for collaboration with this leadership group, including on conference planning.

**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. While Minnesota once led in state broadband policy, other states have now overtaken us in terms of investment and policy goals. Given our relationships with the national network of state broadband leaders, NTIA, USDA and others, Blandin Foundation is uniquely positioned to help ensure that Minnesota’s broadband policy debate is informed by rural advocacy efforts nationally.

**Adaptations Going Forward:**

1. Require CBR participation for Feasibility Study Funding.
2. Design and deliver a Community Broadband Leadership Workshop to the bottom performing counties.
3. Recruit new stakeholders to refresh conference planning process and bring Governor’s broadband task force to the table.
4. Collaborate with West Central Initiative Foundation in new ways as funder and co-learner in working with White Earth and Ottertail County.
5. Bring Acknowledgement statement into our hosting protocol when hosting broadband events in the building.
6. Build a feedback loop into county broadband profiles by soliciting input from county administrators.
7. Add more analysis to county broadband profiles on website.
8. Recruit new diverse Strategy Board member.

## Appendix A: Grants Awarded through Blandin Community Broadband Program from July 2018 – December 2019

Community / Grantee	Project Owner	Project Name	Description	Amount
BBC: Cannon Falls  Grantee: Cannon Falls EDA	Cannon Falls EDA	Cannon Falls Local Foods Initiative	Define, develop and position a brand that promotes Cannon Falls as the local food capital of Minnesota emphasizing the recreational, scenic, and healthy living assets of the community.	\$75,000
	Cannon Falls EDA	Digital Marketing for Businesses	Promote local business growth and marketing through the use of broadband and technology, including digital marketing, social media, and SEO strategy.	
	Cannon Rivers & The Gardens senior care centers	Wellness VR	Promote wellness, stress reduction, and technology use among older adults through the purchase of four virtual reality headsets and virtual field trip subscriptions for use at the Cannon Rivers and The Gardens senior care centers.	
	Cannon Valley Senior Center (CVSC)	Cannon Valley Senior Center Website	Promote connection and engagement among the elder population during the pandemic through the creation of a new website for the CVSC. The new site will be easier to keep current for the Director, and allow members to navigate the site better, contribute content, and take classes.	
	Cannon Falls Area Schools (CFAS)	Distance Learning Hot Spots	Enable effective distance learning during the pandemic for families and school staff without internet access through the distribution of mobile internet hot spots. At least 28 families and three staff members received a device and internet subscription.	
	Cannon Falls Area Chamber of Commerce	ChamberMaster Software	Increase the competitiveness and efficiency of the Cannon Falls Area Chamber through the purchase of ChamberMaster software, which will allow for better management of member information and the ability to accept payments online. The software will integrate with the current Chamber website.	
	Cannon Falls EDA	Cannon Roots Marketing Campaign	Promote local businesses through the creation and marketing of the Cannon Roots brand. A website and social media presence will increase traffic and visitors at local food and beverage, and retail establishments, currently suffering due to the pandemic.	
	Cannon Falls Area Schools (CFAS)	iPads for Distance Learning	Deliver equitable opportunities for distance learning students by using iPads to stream classroom instruction. This will allow teachers to engage with in-person and at-home students at the same time.	
	Cannon Falls EDA & Chamber of Commerce	Explore Minnesota	Increase the exposure of Cannon Falls outside of the area and attract visitors and tourists to the area by participating in lead generation through Explore Minnesota's website, allowing the Chamber to distribute Discover Cannon Falls guides and targeted materials to people who indicate interest. They'll also advertise on Explore Minnesota and use the exposure to grow their mailing list and social media following.	

Community / Grantee	Project Owner	Project Name	Description	Amount
BBC: Koochiching Technology Initiative  Grantee: Koochiching Econ Dev Authority	Citizens for Backus / AB	Backus Conferencing Upgrades	Improve community meetings and engagement by upgrading the interactive videoconferencing equipment and capabilities at the Backus Community Center.	\$63,500 [+\$11,500 in 2020]
	Servants of Shelter	Internet for the Homeless	Improve internet access at Servants of Shelter, which provides emergency shelter to individuals and families in Koochiching County. The upgraded capacity will allow clients to research employment, education and housing opportunities.	
	Koochiching County Community Television	KCC TV Local Media: Local Lives	Increase locally generated and relevant media content that reflects the lived experience and perspective of county residents available on Koochiching County Community Television by building a coalition of students and other residents trained to use cameras and editing equipment.	
	International Falls Public Library (IFPL)	Coworking Meetups	Create a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship by helping Ballan's iSpace, a new co-working facility in downtown International Falls, offer relevant programming in partnership with the International Falls Public Library and Borderland Young Professionals. Partners will host weekly gatherings of mutual support to share knowledge, build skills, network, and inspire one another.	
	I'Falls Public Library (IFPL)	The Library Reaches Into the Community	Increase broadband adoption and use by helping the International Falls Public Library expand its services in the community, including through improved Wi-Fi access at Smokey Bear Park, six LinkedIn Learning mobile internet subscriptions for check-out, expanded reference service to texting and LiveChat, and the addition of Adobe Creative Cloud software for use by patrons in the library's new recording studio.	
	I'Falls Public Library (IFPL)	After School Libratory	Improve access to STEM education in the community by purchasing equipment for use by the after-school STEM program kids and expanding coding and technology experiences for younger patrons. The equipment could also be utilized by teachers in the classroom.	
	Borderland Young Professionals	Online Meetings	Engage more young people in the organization and community by offering a web-ex participation option for their meetings and events and using their website and social media in innovative ways to engage young professionals.	
	Koochiching County Veterans Service Office	Video Teleconferencing	Increase internet access and use and improve access to medical and behavioral health care by offering video teleconferencing equipment for use by veterans. The nearest VA clinics and hospitals are 200 to 600+ miles from International Falls, making it costly and time-consuming to receive medical care. Offering this equipment will greatly improve quality of life for area veterans.	

Community / Grantee	Project Owner	Project Name	Description	Amount
BBC: Koochiching Technology Initiative  Grantee: Koochiching Econ Dev Authority	I'Falls Library (IFPL); Koochiching Aging Options	Virtual Reality and Healthcare	Increase the use of technology throughout the community by offering a set of ten virtual reality headsets for check-out and use at the library for healthcare applications, including patient and family education, student use, elder wellness and stress reduction – including virtual field trips, etc.	\$63,500 [+\$11,500 in 2020]
	IFalls Nice	Movies in the Park	Improve community events by helping purchase a screen for Movies in the Park and other potential community events to be determined.	
	Borderland Young Professionals	Ballan's iSpace Scholarships	Increase internet access and spur entrepreneurship in the community by offering scholarships to high school and college students, and nonprofit workers to Ballan's iSpace, the new coworking space in downtown International Falls.	
	Koochiching County Historical Society	Digital History	Increase internet use and access to digital exhibits within the museum through the purchase of tablets, allowing visitors to interact with exhibits via pop-up windows and shows, and view delicate materials.	
	Koochiching Technology Initiative	Koochiching County Tech Club (KCTC)	Build a culture of technology use through the formation of a Tech Club, with the purpose of networking and knowledge sharing, provide information about tech careers, and perform community services such as device refurbishment, tech support, and staffing the library tech help desk.	
	Koochiching EDA	Your Ticket Home	Enhance workforce and family recruitment marketing by the creation of www.yourtickethome.org and related social media, with the purpose of matching people with opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship in the area.	
	City of Littlefork	Community Center Connectivity	Increase internet access and use in Littlefork by upgrading the internet connection, Wi-Fi capability, screen and projector for use by meeting and event participants and area residents.	
	Ballan's iSpace	Ballan's iSpace Scholarships	Enable equitable distance learning for students without access to the internet during the COVID-19 pandemic by offering scholarships to high school and college students for Ballan's iSpace, the new coworking space in downtown International Falls.	
	Servants of Shelter	Laptops for the Homeless	Improve access to technology for education, employment, communication, and entertainment for people experiencing homelessness by providing very low-cost refurbished laptop computers to Servants of Shelter clients.	
	Koochiching Technology Initiative	VR Headset Hygiene	Improve safety and continued use of VR headsets for health and elder care during the COVID-19 pandemic by purchasing a Cleanbox unit to disinfect between uses.	
	Koochiching County Sheriff's Office	Portable Data Network	Improve public safety by enhancing communication capabilities in Koochiching County, particularly during disaster situations, through the purchase of a portable data network which serves as a Wi-Fi hotspot, network-in-a-box, and enables cellular, digital-data communications.	

Community / Grantee	Project Owner	Project Name	Description	Amount
BBC: Rock County  Grantee: Rock County	Rock County Community Library	Library Hotspots	Provide five mobile Wi-Fi hotspots for check-out free-of-charge to library patrons.	\$75,000
	HRA of Luverne	Blue Mound Towers Computer Lab	Improve technology access for lower income community members by providing computer access to tenants at the Blue Mound Tower, a 70-unit income-based housing facility in Luverne. Tenants will be encouraged to attend computer training classes at the Rock County Senior Center or Community Library.	
	Hills-Beaver Creek & Luverne Schools	School Bus Wi-Fi Implementation	Improve public internet access and use by installing wireless routers on one Luverne school bus and one Hills-Beaver Creek school bus, allowing student riders access to homework and projects via smart devices.	
	Alliance Communications	Educational Videos and Classroom Tech Training	Improve public digital literacy and technical sophistication by creating and publishing on the internet a series of locally contextualized and informed educational videos.	
	A.C.E of Rock County, Library	Sr. Center Computer Lab	Improve technology access for elders by establishing a six-computer lab in a newly renovated senior facility in Luverne.	
	Luverne Community Education	Ag Tech Day	Design and host a day-long community workshop on various ag tech topics.	
	Luverne Community Education	Community Ed Technology Upgrade	Enable instructors to demonstrate internet access, websites and other media for their students through the purchase a quality laptop computer compatible with Community Ed's wall-mounted flat screen TV.	
	Rock County Community Library	Additional PCs for People Computers	Provide computers to community members in need by purchasing and distributing ten additional refurbished computers from PCs for People.	
	Luverne Area Chamber & CVB	County Fair Booth	Increase awareness of and engagement in Rock County's Blandin Broadband Community projects through a booth at the Rock County Fair.	
	Luverne Area Chamber & CVB	Social Media Optimization	Provide social media training and coaching to ten businesses and ten organizations in Rock County.	
	Blue Mound State Park, Alliance Coms.	Blue Mound State Park Wi-Fi	Improve public access to the internet by providing free public Wi-Fi at Blue Mound State Park campground.	
	City of Hardwick, Alliance	Hardwick Campground Wi-Fi	Improve public access to the internet by providing free public Wi-Fi at the Hardwick campground.	
	City of Hills, Alliance	Hills Campground Wi-Fi	Improve public access to the internet by providing free public Wi-Fi at the Hills campground.	
	City of Magnolia, Alliance	Magnolia Campground Wi-Fi	Improve public access to the Internet by providing free public Wi-Fi at the Magnolia campground.	
	City of Beaver Creek, Alliance	Beaver Creek Baseball Field Wi-Fi	Improve public access to the Internet by providing free public Wi-Fi at the Beaver Creek baseball field and park.	
Southwestern Mental Health Center (SWMHC)	SWMHC/Avera Health Distance Learning and Telemedicine	Improve access to distance learning and mental health care services through the purchase of telemedicine equipment.		

Community / Grantee	Project Owner	Project Name	Description	Amount
	City of Jasper, Alliance	Jasper Campground Wi-Fi	Improve public access to the Internet by providing free public Wi-Fi at the Jasper campground.	
	Luverne Community Education	Technology Classes	Improve digital skills and literacy by offering a series of technology-focused community education classes based on community interests and needs.	
	Luverne Community Education	Instruction Equipment	Provide quality Early Childhood instruction for both in-person and distance learners through the purchase of two iPad Pros and keyboards for Discovery Time teachers.	
	City of Hills	Hills-Beaver Creek TV Station	Improve access to school and community activities, announcements and information through the Hills-Beaver Creek television station.	
	Luverne Area Chamber & CVB	Wi-Fi at The Lake	Improve public access to the internet by providing free public Wi-Fi at The Lake family park in Luverne.	
	Luverne Area Community Foundation	Southwest Youth Services (SYS) Online Learning Upgrade	Provide the opportunity for the students incarcerated at SYS to earn education credits by creating learning terminals with computers and printers. SYS is a detention and education center for boys ages 10-19, and they are struggling with teacher retention.	
BBC: Swift County  Grantee: Swift County RDA	Swift County RDA	Training for CNC and Welding	Improve technical skills and employment opportunities by offering a five-week Weld and Computer Numerical Control (CNC) certificate program to Swift County residents through a combination of online, classroom and shop experience.	\$75,000
	Swift County RDA	Digital Marketing Consulting	Improve local business profitability by engaging seven small business owners (selected through an application process) in hands-on consulting to develop and implement affordable website and social media strategies, resulting in increased brand awareness and customer base.	
	Swift County RDA	Community Websites	Improve individual small community visibility by developing customized economic development profiles and websites for Swift County cities without current websites, including Clontarf, Danvers, DeGraff, and Holloway.	
	KMS (Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg) Community Ed	STEM Camp for Kids	Provide technology enrichment by offering a low-cost summer STEM Camp for children entering 2nd through 7th grade utilizing proven curriculum provided by the National Inventors Hall of Fame to enhance kids' skills in the areas of robotics, coding, and other STEM areas.   A second STEM Camp for kids will be held as soon as pandemic restrictions are lifted and it is deemed safe to do so.	
	U of MN Extension	4-H Extension Mobile App	Improve family engagement by creating a mobile app where 4-H families across Swift County can easily access 4-H information and resources; including schedules, show programs, results, event sign-up, and training.	
	Swift County RDA	Digital Marketing for Community & Economic Dev. Orgs	Convene an ongoing peer communication/marketing roundtable where tools and best practices can be shared, and communication strategies aligned to strengthen community and economic development.	

Community / Grantee	Project Owner	Project Name	Description	Amount
BBC: Swift County  Grantee: Swift County RDA	Swift County	Online Camping Reservations	Improve the visibility and accessibility of camping in Swift County through the creation of an app that displays availability of sites at multiple campgrounds and allows campers to make reservations and pay online.	\$75,000
	Swift County RDA	PCs for People Part II	Provide computers to community members in need by purchasing and distributing 20 additional refurbished computers from PCs for People to income-qualified families.	
Iron Range BBC: East Range Joint Powers  Grantee: East Range Joint Powers Board	ERJPB / The Northspan Group	East Range Business Retention and Expansion Visits	Strengthen the case for greater connectivity on the East Range by soliciting input from area business on their broadband familiarity, use, needs, etc. and to seek to engage them in the Blandin Broadband Community (BBC) process.	\$75,000
	Hoyt Lakes & Aurora Public Libraries	Portable Training Lab	Provide computer/technology training and job search skills to East Range residents by creating and deploying a mobile training lab.	
	ERJPB / The Northspan Group	ERJPB Website	Create a new website to better inform the community about East Range Joint Powers Board and community activities, including the BBC, with the goal of promoting cooperation across communities, creating a centralized point for information about telecommunications technology in the region, and raising awareness about ERJPB-supported broadband work on the East Range.	
	ERJPB Steering Committee member Peter Senarighi	Public Wi-Fi	Improve internet access by expanding public Wi-Fi access in areas inside and outside of public buildings at the City of Biwabik, and libraries in the cities of Hoyt Lakes and Aurora.	
	East Range Police Department	Squad Car Computer Upgrade	Improve public safety by providing a uniform computer system in all squad cars with faster speeds, downloads, and data request capabilities.	
	Mesabi East School District	Updated Electronic Communications	Improve communications throughout the school facilities by upgrading software and message boards to push information to teachers, students, and visitors.	
	Mesabi East School District	Wi-Fi on Buses	Improve public internet access and use by installing wireless routers on four long-haul school buses, allowing student riders access to homework and projects via smart devices.	
	Hoyt Lakes Ambulance	Emergency Vehicle Laptop Upgrade	Improve public safety and patient care by upgrading computers and software on emergency vehicles allowing for better communications with county dispatch and faster access to patient information.	
	Hoyt Lakes Ambulance	Training Equipment Upgrade	Improve public safety and patient care by upgrading the laptop used for training purposes.	
	Hoyt Lakes Public Library	STEM Kits and STEM Kits To Go	Train residents of all ages about coding, robotics, using apps, and VR systems by providing STEM equipment for use at the library or for check-out to be used at home. The library will host classes, and they plan to engage the Age to Age group so students can help teach older adults.	

Community / Grantee	Project Owner	Project Name	Description	Amount
Iron Range BBC: East Range Joint Powers  Grantee: East Range Joint Powers Board	ERJPB	Facilitation, Training, and Management	Enhance the understanding among community members about the importance of broadband, lead the BBC Process, and lead the Laurentian-Tower-East Range Feasibility Stuff group.	\$75,000
	ERJPB	Digital Marketing Training & Technology Audits	Improve the online presence and social media savvy of East Range businesses by providing training and resources from the Northeast Small Business Development Center.	
	Hoyt Lakes Fire and Police Departments	Public Safety Building Technology Upgrade	Maximize training and community meeting hosting capabilities by upgrading outdated technology and installing a SMART Board in the Hoyt Lakes Public Safety Building. The technology will be utilized by first responders and the public.	
	Ranger Snowmobile / ATV Club	Technology Upgrades for Snowmobile Club	Improve the safety, efficiency, and engagement of Club leaders and members by upgrading technology, including cell signal boosters, and improving internet access at the Club building and on the trails they maintain. This will help with DNR reporting requirements, groomer and user safety, and allow the club to better communicate with members, tourists, and other clubs.	
	Town of Palo	Palo Volunteer Fire Dept. Tech Initiative	Improve public safety by purchasing and utilizing technology equipment such as computers and iPads with hotspots for the Palo Volunteer Fire Department.	
Iron Range BBC: East Range Joint Powers	East Range Joint Powers Board	Planning Grant East Range JPB	Donation to support planning efforts in the East Range Joint Powers area, including hosting and attending meetings, and spreading awareness about the initiative.	\$1,000
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	City of Virginia	Laurentian-Tower-East Range (LTE) Broadband Feasibility Study	To conduct a feasibility study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services throughout the Laurentian Chamber/Tower/ERJPB area. They will also use this process to identify potential partners to provide these services.	\$75,000
Iron Range BBC: Iron Range Tourism Bureau  Grantee: City of Eveleth	Iron Range Tourism Bureau	Talent Attraction Microsite	Create and market a fun and informative microsite on Iron Range Tourism Bureau's website that will provide needed information for those seeking to relocate to the area, including housing, daycare, what to expect during winter, etc.	\$75,000
	Iron Range Tourism Bureau	Local Pride Campaign	Promote local pride and a positive sense of place by launching a social marketing campaign.	
	Small Business Development Center (Northland Fdn)	Small Business Trainings	Improve the technology and online marketing skills of tourism businesses to enhance their profitability through one-on-one trainings, professional design services, and equipment upgrades.	
	Iron Range Tourism Bureau	Interactive Arts Map	Showcase and promote the work of local artists, cultural opportunities, and cultural sites in the region by creating an interactive online map.	
	Iron Range Tourism Bureau	Community Video Project	Enhance the tourism narrative of the region by developing a monthly video and photo shoot to showcase the region's recreation and attractions.	

Community / Grantee	Project Owner	Project Name	Description	Amount
Iron Range BBC: Iron Range Tourism Bureau  Grantee: City of Eveleth	Iron Range Tourism Bureau	Stories of the Mesabi	Empower, support, and educate community members of all ages by teaching them to create their own documentary about life and culture in the region, with a particular emphasis on BIPOC experiences and voices. Resulting short films will be shared at a public screening and curated online.	\$75,000
	Iron Range Tourism Bureau	Sounds of the Mesabi	Embark on an “adventure in sound” by compiling the sounds of the Mesabi, such as ATV engines, waves on the shore, mining trucks, wind in the pines, and more for use in marketing, and work with a local musician to create a theme song for the region.	
Iron Range BBC: Laurentian Chamber of Commerce  Grantee: City of Virginia	City of Gilbert	Gilbert Campground	Improve public access to the internet through the installation of a fiber connection to the Gilbert Campground and a free public internet access point.	\$150,000
	Small Business Development Center (Northland Fdn)	Digital Marketing / Technology Audits for Area Businesses	Improve the online presence and profitability of at least ten local businesses by providing technical assistance, including an audit of the businesses’ current technology platforms, websites, and use of social media.	
	Laurentian Chamber of Commerce	Chamber Technology Upgrades	Enhance the ability of the Chamber of Commerce to host businesses and chamber members for meetings and events through the purchase of a new computer with upgraded software, projector, screen and a Bluetooth conferencing unit.	
	Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency	PCs for People Distribution Event Enhancement	Improve digital literacy skills of local residents through training, education and other support to the recipients of computers distributed by PCs for People.	
	City of Virginia	Wi-Fi in the Parks	Improve public access to the internet by installing Wi-Fi hotspots in three public parks in the City of Virginia.	
	Laurentian Chamber of Commerce	Small Business Saturday App	Increase small local business profitability on Small Business Saturday and throughout the year through the development of an app that shoppers can use to learn about local options and enable participating businesses to share promotional offers.	
	DEED Workforce Center	Virtual Interview Room	Improve employment opportunities for people using the Workforce Center by providing a remote interview cubicle with a computer, camera, and microphone. The equipment may also be used for training purposes, specifically on interview skills.	
	DEED Workforce Center	Interactive Television	Increase access to training by installing an interactive television (ITV) at the Workforce Center to allow staff and the public to videoconference, participate in remote trainings, increase training opportunities, reduce travel costs, etc.	
	City of Eveleth	Safe, Accessible Public Wi-Fi	Improve access to the internet by providing dedicated, comfortable, and safe spaces in three public locations in Eveleth where residents, visitors and guests can access Wi-Fi.	
	Eveleth-Gilbert and Virginia School Districts	Wi-Fi on Buses in the Eveleth-Gilbert and Virginia Schools	Increase public internet access and use by installing Wi-Fi on school buses, allowing students who rely on school bus transportation access for schoolwork.	

Community / Grantee	Project Owner	Project Name	Description	Amount
Iron Range BBC: Laurentian Chamber of Commerce  Grantee: City of Virginia	Town of Fayal	Fayal Township Website Upgrade	Increase community engagement through the creation of an upgraded website for Fayal Township that will include a community calendar, forms, and permit applications for download, and enable better communication between residents and Township officials.	\$150,000
	Rock Ridge School District	Technology Upgrades and STEM Curriculum	Enhance and improve curriculum offerings in preparation for the new Rock Ridge School District (consolidated from the Eveleth-Gilbert and Virginia school districts) through technology improvements including Adobe Creative Cloud licenses and middle school STEM curriculum. Access to Adobe will allow art and digital photography students to work with local employers on student-led projects, exposing them to tech-enabled creative arts careers. They will also purchase and implement the Pre-Advanced Career Middle Grades STEM Curriculum, which will expose middle school students to skills essential to many of today's jobs.	
	Mesabi Humane Society	Mesabi Humane Technology	Increase the efficiency and expediency of shelter operations by installing high-speed internet, new IP phones, and other internal technology improvements to improve animal care, intake and adoption.	
	Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency	PCs for People Internet Distribution Event	Increase technology adoption and use by providing one year of internet service to 75 individuals and families who meet PCs for People income eligibility requirements. AEOA is partnering with three local school districts, two government employment programs, Head Start, and the local HRA to identify qualifying households.	
	Laurentian Chamber of Commerce	Chamber Technology Upgrades 2020	Enhance the ability of the Chamber to host socially distanced businesses and chamber members for meetings and events through the purchase of conference phones, webcams, VPN service, and a Zoom subscription.	
Iron Range BBC: Laurentian Chamber	Town of Fayal	Planning Grant Fayal Township	Donation to support planning efforts in the Laurentian Chamber area, including hosting and attending meetings, and spreading awareness about the initiative.	\$1,000
Iron Range BBC: Tower Area  Grantee: Tower EDA	Township of Breitung	Workstation for Public Access	Improve public access to the internet by providing a workstation with a computer and printer in the new community room at the Breitung town hall.	\$75,000
	City of Tower	Hoo Doo Point Campground Wi-Fi	Improve public access to the internet by providing Wi-Fi throughout Hoo Doo Point Campground.	
	City of Tower	Broadband Access to the Tower Depot and Farmer's Market	Improve public access to the internet by providing Wi-Fi access to people using the Tower Depot for information, and to Farmer's Market participants and visitors.	
	Tower-Soudan Elementary School	School and Community Connectivity	Improve digital literacy skills and technology use by creating and supporting a mobile computer lab and AV display for the Tower-Soudan Elementary School media center that will be accessible to the community as well as students.	

Community / Grantee	Project Owner	Project Name	Description	Amount
Iron Range BBC: Tower Area  Grantee: Tower EDA	Vermilion Country School (VCS)	Senior / Public / Student Access Computer Lab	Improve digital literacy skills and technology use by creating a 12-computer lab and AV display that can be used by the school, as an internet café for AEOD Senior Dining clients, and the general public through Tower-Soudan Community Ed classes and VCS after school parental involvement classes.	\$75,000
	Vermilion Country School	Interactive Field Trip and Music Lab	Improve digital literacy skills and training opportunities for students and the public by expanding the Vermilion School computer lab into a space that can be used for interactive educational and community education programming, virtual field trips, visits with scientists and writers, along with technology to create a digital music lab, including a digital piano and other instruments.	
	Vermilion Country School	Smartboards in our Classrooms	Improve technology use by installing Smartboards in VCS classrooms, particularly math and science rooms, and to take full advantage of the new fiber optic capabilities to the school building.	
	City of Tower	Tower Website	Upgrade the website for the City of Tower to enhance timeliness of content, expand access to city services and information, and improve the site's look and feel.	
	Tower BBC Steering Team	Sharing Broadband	Learn about broadband infrastructure, projects, and policy, and share the information with community members to increase knowledge and demand.	
Iron Range BBC: Tower Area	Tower EDA	Planning Grant Tower EDA	Donation to support planning efforts in the Tower area, including hosting and attending meetings, and spreading awareness about the initiative.	\$1,000
Iron Range BBC Alum: Aitkin County  Grantee: Aitkin County	Aitkin County	Wi-Fi Hotspot in Jacobson Community Center	Increase public access to the internet by installing a 25 megabit-per-second Wi-Fi hotspot in the Jacobson Community Center; a hub that hosts many local events and is an East Central Regional Library remote site.	\$50,000
	Long Lake Conservation Center	High-Speed Broadband at LLCC	Install high-speed fiber optic broadband at the Long Lake Conservation Center, enabling higher internet speeds and increased educational programming.	
	Riverwood Healthcare Center	Increase MyChart Usage at Riverwood Healthcare Center	Increase the use of the MyChart online patient portal amongst patients and caregivers at Riverwood Healthcare Center, which allows patients better access to their electronic health records, and to schedule appointments, contact their provider, view test results, monitor health maintenance, etc.	
	Aitkin County	Enhance Interactive Community Conference Centers	Increase access to training and decrease meeting travel by enhancing and expanding the existing interactive capabilities at the well-used community conference centers in Aitkin and McGregor by adding interactive cameras to allow for onsite and offsite use.	
Iron Range BBC Alum: Chisholm  Grantee: ReGen Northland	Chisholm Public Schools	Wi-Fi Hotspots for Check-out	Increase students' access to the internet at home by making hotspots available for check-out by students at the Chisholm Public School Library.	\$50,000

Community / Grantee	Project Owner	Project Name	Description	Amount
Iron Range BBC Alum: Chisholm  Grantee: ReGen Northland	Minnesota Discovery Center	Distance Learning Program	Improve Minnesota Discovery Center's public outreach by establishing a distance learning program related to Iron Range history and natural history for remote audiences, including a mobile cart with video conferencing capabilities	\$50,000
	Balkan Township	Balkan Township Website	Improve community member engagement by updating Balkan Township's website with a user-friendly content management system which will allow them to post more timely information about meetings, services, events and activities.	
	Chisholm Area Chamber of Commerce	Marketing Chisholm55719.com	Showcase Chisholm to residents and visitors alike with a new billboard and promotional videos to promote the area and drive visitors to the recently-created community portal – <a href="http://www.chisholm55719.com">www.chisholm55719.com</a> .	
	Chisholm EDA	Technology & Marketing Assistance for Local Orgs	Increase visibility and revenues for ten local businesses and nonprofits by providing individualized 1:1 professional consulting support on digital marketing and improved technology strategies	
	City of Chisholm	Website Update	Update the City of Chisholm website to offer a user-friendly experience for residents and visitors.	
Iron Range BBC Alum: Ely  Grantee: City of Ely	Incredible Ely	Google Local Listings	Showcase Ely to prospective residents, businesses, and visitors, by creating a website with information on cost of living, the arts, restaurants, churches, business opportunities, infrastructure, etc	\$50,000
	Incredible Ely	Community Building Skillshares	Improve local business profitability through free professional training on internet and social media use offered through Ten Below Coworking.	
	Incredible Ely	Proximity Beacons	Promote local events and businesses by using Wi-Fi enabled Bluetooth proximity beacons to deliver fun, interactive, and unique experiences to park visitors.	
	Incredible Ely	Ely through my Eyes	Create a promotional video series, starting with four episodes that highlight Ely through diverse stories of the unique characters found within the community.	
	ARTS in Ely	Arts Directory	Promote area artists by creating a web-directory that will link artists, art consumers, and material providers in an easy-to-access and easy-to-maintain website.	
	Hak Ely	Ely Meetup	Increase the sophistication of Ely's web presence through the use of Meetup.com software by businesses and organizations to consolidate and post all community event listings online in one location.	
	Incredible Ely	2020 Training and Marketing Skillshares	Educate and support local businesses on using broadband for marketing and maximize the impact of the upcoming broadband deployment in downtown Ely, through a series of free, monthly professional trainings on marketing and social media.	
	Ely Chamber of Commerce	Workforce and Leadership Development	Provide continued support to local businesses exploring how broadband can enhance their marketing efforts by offering a series of workshops on workforce development and leadership skills.	

Community / Grantee	Project Owner	Project Name	Description	Amount
Iron Range BBC Alum: Grizzlies (Bois Forte/Cook/Orr)  Grantee: Bois Forte Band of Chippewa Indians	Orr Center	Community Education	Increase internet access, digital literacy and technology use by providing adult education classes and public Wi-Fi at the Orr Center.	\$50,000
	Cook Library	Wi-Fi Hotspots and Adult Education	Increase internet access, digital literacy and technology use by providing public Wi-Fi, Wi-Fi hotspots for check-out, and technology training and activities at the Cook Library.	
	Bois Forte Reservation	QuickBooks Business Training	Improve business technology skills by providing technical training and support for small business owners on QuickBooks.	
	Bois Forte Reservation	Native Video Archive	Establish a Native Video Archiving program with videos of various events so future generations can see, about learn about culturally significant activity throughout the reservation.	
	North Woods School District	Grizzlies Sports Blog and Website	Provide digital literacy and skills to students and community members through training in journalism, web design, and blogging while promoting a sense of one-ness between the three communities in the North Woods school district by establishing a webpage designed specifically to cover all Grizzlies sporting events and programs.	
	North Woods School District	Wireless to Ball Fields	Enable the broadcasting of athletic competition and provide access for teachers and students by extending Wi-Fi access to the athletic fields surrounding the school.	
	Bois Forte Reservation	Zup's Online Ordering Process	Assist community members social distance during the COVID pandemic by helping to establish a web-based grocery ordering system from the local Zup's IGA.	
Iron Range BBC Alum: Hibbing  Grantee: Access North Center for Independent Living of Northeastern Minnesota	Access North Center for Independent Living	Aging in Place Through Technology	Increase internet use by utilizing smart home technology to create environmental control and enhance safety and security within homes to allow seniors to successfully age in place.	\$50,000
	HRA of Hibbing	Public Housing / Downtown Wi-Fi Network	Increase public access to the internet by providing affordable Wi-Fi to up to 60 low-income families at the public housing facility, with the potential to provide free access in public areas and to businesses in the downtown area within two blocks of the facility.	
	Tech Tank, Entrepreneur Fund	Monthly Business Meetup Meetings	Increase the profitability of Hibbing area businesses by offering free monthly meetups with paid facilitators that focus on topics such as entrepreneurship, financial management, human resources, marketing, workflow mgmt, and technology.	
	Fairview Range	iPads in Emergency Dept, Hibbing Fire Dept, and Ambulances	Provide critical visual connectivity between first responders and emergency department providers by placing iPads in the Fairview Range Emergency Room, six Hibbing Fire Dept vehicles, three Nashwauk ambulances, and two Chisholm ambulances.	
	Fairview Range	Infusion Treatment Center iPads	Provide internet access to patients and family members visiting Hibbing for cancer treatments by offering two iPads at the Fairview Hibbing Infusion Center.	

Community / Grantee	Project Owner	Project Name	Description	Amount
Iron Range BBC Alum: Mt. Iron-Buhl  Grantee: ISD 712 Mountain Iron Buhl	Mesabi Family YMCA	Internet Upgrades	Increase internet access and digital literacy skills by expanding Wi-Fi throughout the Mesabi Family YMCA facility, offering science and technology programs for youth, and through implementing the Open Y platform which allows for more up-to-date website, apps, etc.	\$50,000
	Mt. Iron-Buhl School District	Environmental Community Learning Center	Invite and encourage students and community members to engage with technology to enrich their environment learning by establishing an outdoor learning lab with 12 GPS units, geocaching containers, a weather station, and a community greenhouse.	
	Mt. Iron-Buhl School District	Technology Inspired Design Program	Improve digital literacy and technology skills by making the school's STEM Lab available and accessible to the broader population, and to develop a multi-faceted approach to teaching students and community members about the endless creative possibilities of using the internet and design software.	
	Mt. Iron-Buhl School District	Collaborative Community Journalism	Improve digital literacy and technology skills by showcasing the school's technology to teach community members and students to develop and produce various types of videos, social media, advertisements, posters and more.	
	City of Mt. Iron	City Services App	Develop an app for of the City of Mountain Iron to provide a wide variety of information to its residents.	

Program	Grantee	Project Name	Description	Amount
BBC Support	PCs for People	Distribute 400 computers to 8 Minnesota communities	Coordinate the distribution of 400 computers to eligible recipients in each of eight BBCs. Communities may decide to distribute the computers to eligible individual recipients and/or create a "computer lab" for the public.	\$39,200
BBC Support	PCs for People	Distribute Computers to Rural Minnesota 2020	Coordinate the distribution of 300 computers to eligible recipients in each of five new Blandin Broadband Communities BBCs and other communities to be determined. Communities may decide to distribute the computers to eligible individual recipients and/or create a "computer lab" for the public.	\$29,090
Broadband Innovation	Cherry Township	Expand Existing Wireless Broadband Network	Increase access to broadband for the public at the baseball fields adjacent to the Cherry Township Hall by extending the fiber-fed wireless connection to the ball fields and parking lot.	\$4,990
Broadband Innovation	Hibbing Community/Technical College	Advanced MN Innovation	Update and upgrade career training opportunities through Virtual Reality training, Zoom classes, online training, and simulators; to offer businesses and individuals in Northern MN state-of-the-art training without having to pay the higher fees associated with travel and the Twin Cities business environment.	\$25,000

Program	Grantee	Project Name	Description	
Broadband Innovation	Institute For Local Self-Reliance	All Hands On Deck 2020: More Minnesota Models for Expanding Internet Access	Document multiple public sector efforts to improve broadband in Minnesota communities, specifically by creating a new report "All Hands On Deck 2020: More Minnesota Models for Expanding Internet Access." This project is an expansion and update of a previous project that Blandin Foundation supported that allowed ILSR to research and highlight how local governments in Minnesota were improving internet access for their citizens.	\$22,500
Broadband Innovation	Kairos Alive!	Northeast Minnesota Creative Communities Broadband Project	Work with hosting organizations in the Walker, Bemidji and Two Harbors areas to launch programs to offer in-person orientation and 12-weeks of "Dancing Heart Live" online distance learning engagement sessions delivered to all groups simultaneously. There is the possibility of additional individuals accessing this programming from their home computers or tablets.	\$25,000
Broadband Innovation	Le Sueur County	Le Sueur County Broadband Innovation	Promote access, adoption, and use of broadband, and advance county-wide economic development through community outreach and GIS mapping. Specifically, to reconvene the Le Sueur County Broadband Coalition, engage citizens and townships through technology programs, convenings, social media and other outreach, and needs assessments.	\$20,000
Broadband Innovation	Region Nine Dev. Commission	Tele-mental health portal Region Nine	Develop a tele-mental health network in the nine counties that make up Region Nine. The need for affordable and convenient counseling, therapy, and assessment services are dire in rural areas. A particular focus of this project is to enhance services to underrepresented groups, whether that be immigrant communities, agricultural workers, veterans, or other members of our rural communities.	\$24,970
Broadband Innovation	The Brainerd Baxter Youth Center	PCs for People Youth Project @ TheShop	Reduce barriers and create pathways for at risk youth and young adults to develop IT and Computer Science skills through hands on training repairing and refurbishing gently used computers using Microsoft Refurbishing protocols. The computers will be provided to income-qualified individuals and families in the Brainerd Area.	\$20,000
Broadband Innovation	Winthrop EDA	Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition Operating Support 2020-21	Facilitate two-way information flow between rural broadband stakeholders and legislators and legislative staff, including hosting annual "Broadband Day at the Capitol" events where the rural voice will be amplified, and to pay contracted staff at the Capitol to carry the rural voice through the end of the session.	\$30,000
Broadband Innovation	Winthrop EDA	Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition Operating Support 2019	Facilitate two-way information flow between rural broadband stakeholders and legislators and legislative staff, including hosting "Broadband Day at the Capitol" where the rural voice will be amplified, and to pay contracted staff at the Capitol to carry the rural voice through the end of the session.	\$20,000

Program	Grantee	Project Name	Description	
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	Blue Earth County	Blue Earth County Broadband Study	Conduct a feasibility study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services throughout rural Blue Earth County. They will also use this process to identify potential partners to provide these services.	\$25,000
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	Chisago County HRA-EDA	Franconia and Chisago Lake Broadband Feasibility	Conduct a feasibility study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services within the townships of Franconia and Chisago Lake in Chisago County. CTC will provide the engineering study, and the townships will survey their residents to formally determine their level of interest in improved service.	\$9,700
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	Chisago County HRA-EDA	Lent and Sunrise Township Pre-engineering Study	Conduct a feasibility study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services within the townships of Sunrise and Lent in Chisago County. CTC will provide the pre-engineering study, and the townships will survey their residents to formally determine their level of interest in improved service.	\$5,750
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	City of North Branch	North Branch High Speed Internet Survey	Conduct a broadband survey of all 3,844 households within the City of North Branch, which will be used as the basis for a business model that will be used to expand the availability of internet service to all homes and businesses in the city, particularly the 800 un- and underserved residents and businesses in the outer ring of the city.	\$7,500
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	City of Rice Lake	Rice Lake Citizen Connect	Conduct an engineering study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services throughout the City of Rice Lake. They will also use this process to identify potential partners to provide these services.	\$3,000
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	City of Scandia	Scandia Fiber to the Premise Study	Complete a pre-engineering study to provide factual information about the cost of installing fiber throughout the City of Scandia, which will be used to complement the preliminary proposal results from a potential provider partner.	\$4,600
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	Le Sueur County	Le Sueur County Broadband	Conduct a feasibility study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services within Le Sueur County. They will also use this process to identify potential partners to provide these services.	\$25,000
Robust Network Feasibility Fund	Stearns County	Feasibility Study for Western Stearns County	Conduct a feasibility study to better understand options for improving broadband infrastructure and services within Frontier Communications' service area in western Stearns County. They will also use this process to identify potential partners to provide these services.	\$25,000
			<b>Total grants awarded Jul 2018 – Dec 2019:</b>	<b>\$1,407,800</b>

## Appendix B: Summative Sorting of 409 Community Projects by ICF Element; Distribution and Intersectionality

Projects that Addressed a Single ICF Element			
ICF Element		281 Projects	In Total 68.7% of 409 Projects
Broadband		20	4.9%
Knowledge Workers		56	13.7%
Digital Inclusion		82	20%
Advocacy		67	16.4%
Innovation		56	13.7%
Projects that Paired at Least Two ICF Elements			
ICF Elements		128 Projects	31.3% of total 409 Projects
Innovation	Advocacy	5	1.2%
Innovation	Broadband	4	0.9%
Innovation	Knowledge Workers	30	7.3%
Digital Inclusion	Broadband	53	12.9%
Digital Inclusion	Knowledge Workers	19	4.6%
Digital Inclusion	Advocacy	1	0.2%
Digital Inclusion	Innovation	15	3.6%
Knowledge workers	Advocacy	1	0.2%

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