



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

July 2013-July 2014

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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Program Overview and Context

Blandin Foundation’s investment in the Blandin Community Broadband Program (BCBP) is based on the premise that abundant and robust access to the Internet -- and the digital literacy skills necessary to take full advantage of this access -- are essential for healthy communities. The program’s objectives are to advance sustainable broadband adoption, enrich economic vitality, and enhance quality of life and place.

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

Commitment to Home	Investing in Leaders	Expanding Opportunity
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BCBP matches community resources and vision with technical support, grants, internet-based information and educational resources, webinars, and conferences. Program components include:

- Community Project Grants
- Community Broadband Resources (technical assistance) and
- Blandin Broadband Community (BBC) partnerships.

Foot of the Mountain: Basic Accountability for Management Processes

Inputs

Human Resources: 1.35 FTEs (Mary Magnuson .9; Bernadine Joselyn .4; Linda Gibeau .05); Consultants: 2,251 hours; \$202,590 (\$90/hr)

Strategy Board: advice and guidance - including deliberation on grant applications - on the part of 15 stakeholders representing a range of experiences and perspectives from business, internet service providers, local government, state government, education and healthcare. The Strategy Board meets quarterly.

Grant funds: \$1.5 million dedicated grant dollars allocated by Blandin Trustees for 2013-14, with approximately one-half of that total amount expected to be expended in each calendar year.

Leveraged funding and other in-kind match: Approximately \$285,000 in match contributed by partnering Blandin Broadband Communities and community project grantees.



BCBP-dedicated program funds: \$33,189 (excluding consultant fees and including conference expenses)

2013-14 Blandin Broadband Community Partners: Lake County, Lake of the Woods County, Lac qui Parle Valley School District, Mille Lacs County, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Southwest Minnesota Broadband Services (a joint power's empowered broadband service provider to eight cities), Kanabec County, and Itasca County

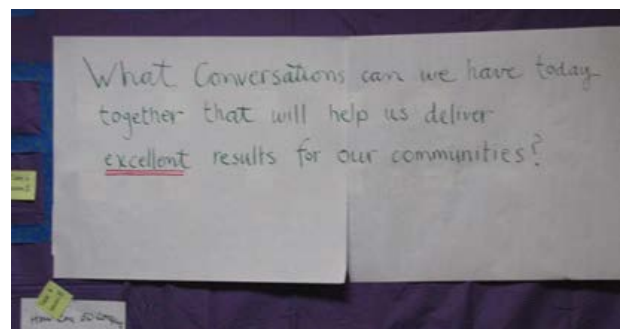


Outputs

Grants: 51 grants approved for a total of \$823,870:

- \$160,000 to fund four **LightSpeed** grants funding advanced applications deployments. The majority of these projects involved tele-health and distance learning initiatives.
- \$60,000 to fund three **Robust Network Feasibility Study** grants.
- \$117,290 to fund six **Digital Inclusion Community Partnership** grants.
- \$38,650 to fund eight **Broadband Innovation** grants in support of projects that advance community-defined technology goals. Examples of funded projects include: researching the creation of a Minnesota Public Broadband Alliance to support collaboration between municipalities, co-ops and other publicly oriented broadband providers; providing videoconferencing technology and training from young adult volunteers to “shut-in” older adults to allow them to participate in community activities from their homes; and increasing the number of “main street” businesses using broadband. (See the Appendix for a complete grant list.)

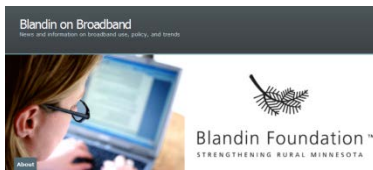
Technical Assistance: Through the “Community Broadband Resources” component of BCBP, during this reporting period program consultant Bill Coleman delivered a total of 196 hours of assistance to ten communities. “Community Broadband Resources is designed



to meet communities “where they are at;” the kinds of assistance requested ranged from technical, educational, or informational to convening/facilitation support. The foundation was able to respond to every request received.

Information/Education Support: Throughout this 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 is cited and amplified by other state-wide and national media. The number of blog posts per month ranged from 32 to 54, with an average of 42 posts per month.

An average of 75-115 people visit the blog each day. Events such as legislative action or funding opportunities increase traffic as do links from other news sources, especially national news sources. Traffic to the site is just one measure of exposure. We have also seen an increase in subscribers to the site – or readers who get BoB posts via Twitter, email or WordPress. We currently have 775 subscribers to BoB. Subscribers include legislators, journalists, national broadband figures and community members.



Visitors to BoB are able to “share” posts with their colleagues through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other social media channels. BoB articles have been shared 6,195 times.

Name	Shares
Facebook	1474
Twitter	1263
StumbleUpon	1093
Reddit	1072
Email	186
LinkedIn	82
Press This	2

In addition, throughout this reporting period Foundation staff coordinated the delivery of 12 webinars. Topics were generated by staff in response to stakeholder perceived needs and interests.¹ Participation in the webinars ranged from 9 to 76, for a total of 272, with an average

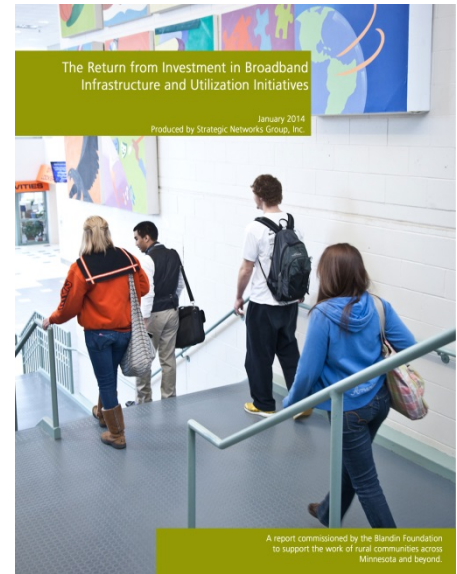
¹ BCBP webinars offered between July 2013 and July 2014:

- 7/11/14 Border-to-Border Infrastructure Grant Program Overview
- 6/12/14 Approaches for Local Governments to Expand Internet Access
- 5/8/14 DIY Tools and Strategies for Communities Google Fiber is NOT Calling
- 4/10/14 Making 700 MHZ Wireless Work in Rural Minnesota
- Will the Border-to-Border Broadband Fund Help Your Community? Update on 2014
- 4/4/14 Broadband Legislation
- 3/14/14 Blandin Broadband Grant Opportunities

participation rate of 23. All webinar content is archived on the Blandin on Broadband blog, where they has been viewed 338 times. The accompanying PowerPoint presentations have been accessed (via SlideShare) 1,579 times.

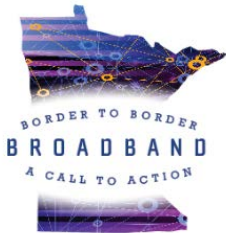
During this period the foundation commissioned two reports designed to inform public discourse about the impact of broadband investments on economic vitality and quality of life. These include:

- *Lessons from Rural Minnesota Broadband Feasibility Studies*, produced by Ann Treacy, Treacy Information Services, Jan 2014
- *The Return from Investment in Broadband Infrastructure and Utilization Initiatives*, produced by Strategic Networks Group, Inc., Jan 2014



The reports were featured at the foundation’s annual broadband conference (see below) and cited by state media, including the *StarTribune*, as proof points in its advocacy for increased state investment in broadband infrastructure.²

Convenings: Foundation staff recruited over 25 organizations to join in co-sponsoring a statewide *Border to Border Broadband: A Call to Action* conference. Over 140 participants, including legislators, county commissioners, economic development professionals, representatives of the internet service provider community,



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|-----------|--|
| 1/9/14 | Community Centers of Innovation |
| 11/14/13 | Online Tools for Community Economic Development |
| 10/10/13 | Community Technology and Entrepreneurship Networking |
| 9/12/13 | Expanding Wi-Fi Access to Your Community |
| 8/8/2013 | Youth Engagement in Community Broadband Initiatives |
| 7/11/2013 | Working Effectively with PCs for People |

² StarTribune, Marcy 19, 2014: Editorial: “State would benefit from sizable broadband fund: Greater Minnesota’s future depends on high-speed Internet access.” ... “More significant is the prospect of a substantial and lasting return on the investment [in broadband infrastructure]. For Greater Minnesota businesses, a \$10-for-\$1 return was projected by a recent analysis sponsored by the Blandin Foundation.”

and community broadband champions participated in this "so what? now what?" conversation about Minnesotans' shared aspirations for border to border broadband.

Conference features included:

- Presentation of Blandin Foundation-commissioned research documenting the economic and quality of life impacts that can be anticipated from increased investment in broadband infrastructure and utilization in Minnesota
- First-hand accounts from, and legislators' reactions to, a legislative listening tour about rural Minnesota communication technology needs
- Participant-led conversation on actions Minnesotans can take to accelerate the achievement of Minnesota's broadband goals and beyond
- Cutting edge "promising practices" in: digital inclusion; business and economic development; broadband infrastructure development; and applications
- Exploration of new "Cool Tools," with Minnesota youth as "digital guides"

As part of an abiding effort to support and inspire innovative uses of high-capacity broadband networks the foundation also supported Red Wing Ignite in its effort to host Red Wing's first-ever (since dubbed "first annual") "hack-a-thon." Red Wing Ignite is a non-profit organization that provides a co-working space, business accelerator and a test bed environment for entrepreneurs, developers and small businesses. Its goal is to help provide the needed resources to help Red Wing businesses grow and flourish and "to inspire and foster innovative ideas that change our world."



The foundation helped Red Wing Ignite conceptualize the hack-a-thon idea and design the event, introduced Red Wing's project staff to other organizations and resources that could help ensure success, promote the event, and tell the story of its impact. The "Red Hot Hack" was designed to stimulate a "culture of use" among community residents, increase connections between Red Wing-based technologists and Twin Cities-based tech companies, and demonstrate to Red Wing residents the value and potential uses of the high-capacity network the city enjoys.



Middle of the Mountain: Accountability for impact

BCBP program has impacts at multiple levels:

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

The foundation has implemented formal information gathering for assessment at the grant and community level. Information about impacts at the other levels named is collected only accidentally and by antidote.

Given the foundation's growing focus on communities as a unit of impact/analysis, this assessment will focus primarily on what we are learning about BCBP's community-level impact. However, as an illustration of the powerful impact this community-based work can and is having on individual participants, we have included below an unsolicited testimonial which speaks also to the impact on individuals as well as to the potential multiplying power of "seeding the field" with BCLP's leadership training:

Being associated with the Blandin Foundation has had a profound impact on my work/life path. In 2012, when I suggested that Lake County apply to be a Blandin Broadband Community (BBC), I had no idea how the experience would impact me both personally and professionally. At the time, all I knew was that association with the Blandin Foundation could help our community achieve its broadband goals--as our county was in the process of building a fiber-to-the-home network.

Working with the Blandin team and our BBC steering committee gave me an opportunity to see our community's broadband and technology needs from a different perspective. Fortunately, many of the members of our BBC steering committee are alumni of the Blandin Community Leadership Program (BCLP), which provided a foundation of communication and leadership skills that fostered the success of our BBC program. This group's positive energy and dedication to working together for the common good motivated me to look at my career path and personal goals in a whole new light (pardon the broadband pun).



Association with the Blandin Foundation helped bring my personal and professional goals into alignment, by helping me to see my role in closing the digital divide. As a long-time county IT leader, I understood the importance of broadband availability for government operations and public service delivery. However, it was through our work with the Blandin Foundation that I realized that even with a broadband-enabled community, digital divide issues could limit engagement with government and access to public services. And that's when I knew that my local government IT experience, combined with my passion for education and technology, could make me an influential advocate for digital literacy and digital inclusion causes.

Thanks to the inspiration and support of Blandin Foundation staff and our BBC steering committee, I have been given the opportunity to serve on the Governor's Task Force on Broadband, and have also been accepted into the 2014-2015 Humphrey Policy Fellows Program at the University of Minnesota. The forces that made both of these opportunities possible have deep ties to the Blandin Foundation's investment in leadership training in rural Minnesota. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with and follow the lead of this group of extraordinary women and men.

Angie Dickison Palmer, IT Director – Lake County, MN

Following is a summary of impacts of BCBP at the community level, informed by written reports prepared by Blandin Broadband Community teams:

Lac qui Parle Valley School District



LqPV Broadband Community has our brought together business, government, community and school stakeholders from our three county/nine community area. This initial coming together, with a common Broadband Community and student focus, has greatly impacted the ability for all of us to create ongoing working partnerships, not for just our individual county or community needs but as an area. These working relationships have led to an even wider degree of collaboration than we could have dreamed of.

P.S. It's easy to write a statement when you truly believe what is being said. Our BBC designation has truly made a lasting impact on our area. My hope is to continually nurture these new partnerships and watch the collaboration grow into the future.

Thank you and the foundation's board for this opportunity!

– Renae Tostenson, BBC Coordinator



Lake of the Woods County



We put computers into 50 low-income households and connected them to the Internet (PCs for People). We established relationships with our internet providers while cooperatively working toward the same goal of Internet utilization.

This program enabled us to provide Internet services in many accessible sites in our county such as libraries, senior centers, museums, parks, and campgrounds, including computer access and public Wi-Fi. We have heard stories of visiting businesspersons being able to do work in the community now, instead of driving back to the cities.

The Blandin partnership funded educational opportunities for our business community to enhance their economic viability through the technology for marketing and operational improvements. Several businesses now have a more robust web-presence than before.

The program improves the lives of our senior citizen population through Internet communication, training and information capabilities.

A project highlight was creating community awareness of the value of the Internet to all walks of life in Lake of the Woods County.

--Ralph Christofferson, BBC Coordinator



Fond du Lac Band of Ojibwe



With the computer classes, we started to see more of an interest in broadband throughout the community. People were learning how broadband could help their daily activities become easier, and they were getting comfortable using it (mostly in the elder population). This was important because these things were really never brought out to the open

before.

Being a BBC has sparked some major interest and has led to innovative activities such as iPads in the classrooms, and creating apps for smart phones and tablets.

Additional grant opportunities with the App Creation, iPad and Wireless Hotspots were well received in concept.

Eventually when all three projects are done there will be a greater interest in broadband in the community. --Jason Holliday, BBC Coordinator



As reported July 17 by the Blandin on Broadband blog:

As a Blandin Broadband Community the Fond du Lac reservation has been working to expand broadband access on the reservation. They recently completed a big wireless upgrade creating 13 wireless hot spots for community use. The wireless service has 30 megabit bandwidth for those who are in range of the antennas. ... And the overall range was actually larger than predicted. At the beginning of the project it was estimated that each antenna would have a range of a quarter-mile radius of the antenna. After the installation several of the antenna's had a range of a half-mile radius. Unfortunately there are folks who live just outside that range and of course they now want access too. But overall the reaction has been very positive for a fairly small project.

Kanabec Broadband Initiative



As reported July 3 by the Blandin on Broadband blog, quoting Marc Johnson, committee chair: "We have made great project toward our goal of utilizing existing broadband to help make Kanabec County a great place to live, work, play and visit."

Johnson said project successes include increasing public access to the Internet in Kanabec County by creating Wi-Fi hotspots, furnishing area businesses with a Web presence, piloting the use of telehealth technology and assisting with the development of a Telework Center with high capacity bandwidth and technology for tele-commuting and after-school homework."

To build public awareness of the benefits of broadband, the Kanabec Broadband Initiative is now conducting an ongoing series of community events. Earlier this summer, nearly 60 people assembled at the Eastwood Life Enrichment Center in Mora to view an interactive presentation lead by the National Park Service and broadcast live from the grounds of the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Among the participants in Mora were several veterans, including John Kirkhuff, who was stationed at Pearl Harbor during the attacks on December 7, 1941.

Southwest Minnesota Broadband Services (SMBS)



Southwest Minnesota Broadband Services (SMBS) is a consortium of eight communities (Jackson, Lakefield, Round Lake, Bingham Lake, Brewster, Wilder, Heron Lake and Okabena) established to leverage the initial success of the WindomNet network, a fiber-to-the-premise network serving the community of Windom, Minnesota. SMBS is the only provider serving as a Foundation partner in the Blandin Community Broadband Program. Uniquely, the challenge for the communities served by SMBS is not access – it is making the best use of the network. SMBS partners report that, thanks to the BCBP program, the communities served by the fiber network are collaborating in ways many never expected.

With the addition Windom and Worthington (foundation partners through the MIRC program), a “triangle” of ten communities along and within Highways I-90 and 60 are working together to promote the area as a great place to live, do business, and telecommute. The “60/90 Ride the Wave” initiative has created a shared regional internet platform for the communities in this region to cooperatively market their area as “wired and ready for business. Well-attended Social Media Breakfasts held in Lakefield and Worthington have helped many businesses enhance their on-line presence.

SMBS employee and BBC coordinator Naomi Pederson reports, “Jackson and Windom now have a solid presence on our regional website. We are working with other small towns in our service area to find their niche and promote themselves on our “Ride the Wave” website. This summer we are targeting class reunions in our service area, as well as folks starting families, to encourage them to come back home.”



Three small school districts in the area have upgraded their computing technology and have opened their facilities to the community for Community Education-sponsored business classes and internet training. Public Wi-Fi access sites are being developed throughout the area to ensure Internet access for residents unable to hook up to the new fiber.

Over 100 computers were distributed to income-qualifying households through PCs for People. Tablets have been made available to patients and their families at Sanford Medical Center in Jackson. Uses include pain management for children, updating Caring Bridge sites, staying in contact with family members, and researching health-related sites. A significant upgrade to the public library includes new mobile devices (Kindles and iPads) that can be checked out by individual patrons or organizations.



Itasca County/Itasca Economic Development Corporation

According to Itasca County project staff, a “culture of use” is developing around broadband technology in the Itasca Area.

- Monthly *Social Media Breakfast* networking events hosted by area business leaders were an immediate success when launched in October, 2013, and continue to attract from 25 to 55 attendees at the newly remodeled Itasca Technology Exchange. A total of 9 successful networking events have been held.
- Business owners are receiving individualized assistance through introductory and advanced level *Online Marketing/Social Media Classes* offered through a joint partnership of Art Unlimited, Itasca Area Community Education and IEDC and by accessing personalized *technology assessments* provided in partnership with the Small Business Development Center. Businesses receiving assessments are eligible for *matching grants* to immediately implement the technology plans along with *low-interest technology loans* offered through the Entrepreneur Fund. IEDC has completed over 20 technology assessments and 4-5 classes, with additional assessments and classes planned.
- A new *Information Technology (I.T.) Professionals* group, launched in December, 2013, is providing an organized resource and structure to I.T. professionals from the private, nonprofit and public sectors. Quarterly, over 20 attendees with the majority from local businesses attend a brownbag educational program and share best practices at the Itasca Technology Exchange.
- Two *college interns* are hitting the streets and personally visiting businesses to promote all the above and provide hands-on assistance in helping business owners claim their Google places. -- Sandy Layman, IEDC



Mille Lacs County

A recent eCommerce workshop, "Roadside Advertising in a Digital Age," offered as part of Mille Lacs County's Broadband Initiative project, led to an unlikely connection between a local high school student and a local business owner.

Jennifer Taylor, a business teacher at Milaca High School, took her Small Business students to the

workshop. One of the participants mentioned he needed help establishing a website for his business, The Hairy Mosquito, an antiques/collectibles shop north of Milaca. Ms. Taylor encouraged one of her senior students to meet with the business owner, and together they created a website for the business, and the manager learned how to use the website tool himself. The business now is listed on Yelp and on Google maps, and the number of visiting tourists has increased dramatically. The student was invited to give a presentation on his project to the Milaca School Board.

We hope future workshops will foster more connections between schools and local businesses.

We have also opened a new Computer Center open to the public. Community members are using the facility to search for employment and apply for jobs. A home-school family uses the computer center to access lessons, and other students who do not have a computer at home use the center to do homework assignments.

Major impacts include a broader understanding of why access to the internet is important for commerce, education, and staying in touch.

--Roxy Traxler, Mille Lacs County Administrator



Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe



Foundation staff has not been very successful in engaging MLBO as a Blandin Broadband Community. The most successful activity was the distribution of 50 refurbished computers from PCs for People to low-income families within the reservation. In conjunction, the Band implemented a computer training program using a \$7,125 grant from the Foundation to distribute additional computers and to hire a band member to provide training. A second grant was used to purchase and install Wi-Fi networks in various tribal facilities across the reservation.



A third grant application to establish a unique partnership with a local Internet provider to bring a fiber optic network to Lake Lena – a distant tribal community not contiguous with the rest of the reservation-- while approved by the Broadband Strategy Board, was never signed by the Tribe.

MLBO project staff attended initial BCBP gatherings, but repeated subsequent attempts to arrange visits, engage them in program events, and even elicit responses to email and phone messages were mostly unsuccessful. The MLBO project lead is the Band's very busy IT manager

who has no other support. His disengagement may be tied to the Band’s leadership rejection of the fiber partnership which was his priority project.

One highlight was the Band’s agreement to host a meeting of the Governor’s Broadband Task Force at its Lake Lena Community Center, giving Task Force members the opportunity to hear firsthand from Tribal staff and community members about the challenges and opportunities facing community members in terms of broadband adoption and access.

Lake County



“This upcoming year will be very exciting. We have a strong spirit of cooperation and optimism in Lake County, focusing on supporting education and economic development. The collaborative broadband efforts are helping Lake County become a

premier location to live, work and learn, making our community a better place for all of our citizens.” –Kirsten Cruikshank, BBC volunteer



One of the greatest impacts of the program in Lake County has been computer, mobile device, and internet training for seniors through Community Education. Each senior was paired with a high school student who provided one-on-one assistance during the training. Great intergenerational-relationships were built and the high school students are now volunteering at other Lake County nonprofits, such as the area food shelf. The Lake County team will be presenting their story at the statewide community education conference in October in Duluth.

Other projects implemented in Lake County include: a soon-to-be-launched community portal linking all the communities of Lake County via a shared community calendar, and promoting area attractions and businesses. A YouTube channel created with local content, especially pertaining to the benefits of high speed internet, currently contains 25 videos created by and with community members. The Food Shelf now has an iPad to help clients access information about other resources available to them in Lake County. In addition, a technology conference was held for area seniors.

Impact from Community Broadband Resources Technical Assistance Delivery:

Community	Assistance Description	Highlights
Region Five Telehealth	Provide ongoing counsel regarding regional telehealth promotion and adoption, including survey development and meeting facilitation	Regional meeting with 14 health care professionals, including all regional hospitals. Priority projects identified.
City of Scandia	Broadband orientation presentation to EDA, including maps. Survey design and implementation on Survey Monkey/report evaluation.	Active response from both cable and telephone company providers to significantly improve broadband services.
Itasca County	Preparation and delivery of broadband presentation to the Itasca County board. Counsel to county staff on next steps.	Staff empowered by county board to work on broadband.
Sherburne County	Problem identification and project scope discussions with county staff. Creation of business and anchor institution survey instrument on Survey Monkey.	Broadband utilization survey is underway.
City of Kingston	Coaching of citizen leader on broadband initiative. Provision of survey instrument on Survey Monkey.	Survey in progress; citizen is building community /governmental support
East Central Broadband Initiative	Provide ongoing coaching to the ad hoc group of community leaders and staff from various cities, counties, school districts.	Broadband awareness and marketing across the region. 2 nd annual broadband summit. Prospective broadband provider partnerships.
City of Cloquet	Provide coaching to community development director and EDA. Development and implementation of key business survey. Provider inventory. Facilitated provider interaction.	Ongoing effort to meet business needs for broadband.
Big Stone County	Presentation to ad hoc broadband committee. Development of farm-focused broadband survey.	Survey implementation underway though progress has been very slow.
City of Birchdale	Community meeting followed by a broadband survey implementation. Discussions with Paul Bunyan, DNR and others about options for improvement, but no apparent solution.	Survey complete.
Feasibility Forward	Discussion and survey of the several communities that had completed feasibility studies, but not yet moved forward on a project	Survey complete. Conference call held to review results and check for collaborative opportunities. Co-op Development Center might be the Blandin response.

Recipients of CBR assistance say...



Working for a municipality we get to wear many hats and must be versed on many topics, however troubleshooting and strategizing pros and cons of technology like broadband was over our heads. This assistance has been very valuable and we appreciate it very much!!! Holly Butcher, AICP Community Development Director, Cloquet

This assistance was invaluable in finding and maintaining contacts, in spreading the word about the importance of broadband and in general, keeping our group on track to move the message and education forward. One of the outcomes that I have seen is the more active engagement of telecom providers in the region, including prospective new partnerships. Roxy Traxler, Mille Lacs County Administrator



Lessons Learned from Implementation of Community Broadband Resources component of BCBP

- CBR is an excellent tool for assisting communities with guidance, especially as they are building a team, identifying issues and developing strategies. The 32 hours seems to be a good parameter for them to properly scope the services delivered from Blandin Foundation.
- Providing an online survey tool, with a data report with help interpreting the data, is appreciated by the communities. The need to get the survey promoted and distributed helps to build the local team and provides some pretty immediate feedback on the local broadband situation. Ann and I have talked about making a better inventory of the survey tools that now include residential, business/anchor institution and farming.
- The bigger the geography, the more important local leadership is for success. Having a key staff person, willing to keep the initiative moving, is also very important.

Trends

- Demand for CBR remains fairly constant at a manageable level.
- People generally are not seeking highly technical advice, but want to know: 1) where they stand with broadband and 2) what are their options for moving forward.

Organizational-level Impacts

Knute Nelson Foundation: While most BCBP activities focus on community impact, the LightSpeed grant component was designed to help organizations by reducing barriers to the implementation of high-capacity-dependent Internet-based services. The goal is to help organizations and institutions (particularly in health care and education) and the communities they serve envision the positive impact that high-capacity networks can have on community economic vitality and quality of life. Below is an illustrative example of the impact one Lightspeed grant, awarded to a single institution, is having across a large region in West Central Minnesota. The project, implemented by Knute Nelson Foundation, is illustrative of the four LightSpeed grants awarded through BCBP during this reporting period (although this grant was awarded in May, 2014).



Excerpted from a written report prepared by the grantee:

With funding assistance from Blandin Foundation, Knute Nelson Foundation was able to provide essential tools to permit aging in place on a widespread (across 25 county region in West Central MN), cost-effective scale while achieving greater patient outcomes and quality of life.



Patients benefitted by connecting to remotely located family and friends at a critical end stage of their life. Caregivers also greatly benefitted by having added levels of safety, bereavement education and communication thus relieving stress, isolation and anxiety.

“Thank you so very much for investing in us and our organization to help our mission thrive. Your belief in us and your support has allowed us the opportunity to have a significantly positive impact in hundreds of lives. - Katie Perry, Vice President of Communications and Development

Red Wing Ignite: The impact and outcomes of Red Wing’s “First Annual Red Hot Hack” were reported by Blandin on Broadband blog:



“The First Annual Red Hot Hack was a resounding success and we want to thank everyone who made it work – the local Red Wing hosts who made all of the technology work, brought tasty food and arranged beer specials, the volunteer judges and coaches, visiting Glenn Ricart and Tim Walsh and of course the attendees.

The event produced great application projects among four teams:

1. **Contextador** – designed a browser extension that strives to create better informed citizens by providing context to news by pulling out basic info such as publisher, date and keywords AND invites experts to help provide access to “more info” by tagging high quality articles to be added to the “basic info” based on keyword
2. **PDF Previewer** – created an app that opens a preview of PDF quickly. It allows users to see the contents of a PDF document without opening it.
3. **Echogy** – designed an app that lets end users see upcoming events on a map, lets local businesses submit events and piggyback events (such as a special on root beer floats at the malt shop during a Little League game) and provides an easy way to develop a buzz online and off, through better event promotion.
4. **SuccesSage** – designed a website that connects students with potential mentors and job opportunities. Students and potential mentors sign up but students would also be able to track connections and pass them onto other students.
5. **Team Babble** – designed on an Open Source app that translates speech to text and back to speech in multiple languages. It worked – briefly.

It was a productive weekend in terms of tangible outcomes – but it was even more productive in terms of relationships and reputation for Red Wing. I spent yesterday connecting with fellow hackers via LinkedIn and Twitter. I made a few calls to help connect new friends with old. It really helped raise awareness and interest in Red Wing’s gigabit access.”



Two of the teams that came together over the two day event were subsequently invited to California to present the applications they created at a national US Ignite event, and they continue to meet to explore opportunities for commercializing their ideas. And at least one young technologist from Red Wing got a job offer, thanks to attending the event.

A key recommendation of the Task Force’s 2013 report to the state legislature, brought forward at the initiative of the Blandin-affiliated Task Force members, was the creation of a \$100 million dollar broadband infrastructure fund to help spur investment in broadband infrastructure in the state’s hardest to serve (mostly rural) regions. Blandin Broadband Strategy Board member Senator Matt Schmit (Red Wing) stepped forward to advocate for this proposal, convening listening sessions across the state to stimulate popular awareness and support. Supported by Blandin on Broadband blog, Blandin Foundation’s BCBP team assisted Senator Schmit in arranging local hosts and locations for these sessions and recruiting public participation. Testimonials gathered at the sessions played an important role in garnering the legislative support necessary to earn eventual enactment of the fund at a level of \$20 million. Applications for the funds will be accepted in late September. Blandin Foundation hosted a webinar with Office of Broadband Development Director Danna MacKenzie (also a member of the Blandin Broadband Strategy Board and longtime foundation partner through the foundation-administered, federally-funded Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities project, which preceded BCBP), to seek input on fund design and implementation. The webinar was attended by over 90 participants, a program record. OBD’s MacKenzie’s rural fund roll-out tour is receiving fulsome coverage on Blandin’s Broadband blog.



The Blandin on Broadband blog (BoB) also has proven to be a powerful tool for informing the statewide conversation and policy making decisions impacting broadband access and adoption.



One of services BoB provides is covering Minnesota Broadband Task Force meetings. BoB provides the most comprehensive notes on the meetings available, and makes them available to the public. Task Force members, as well as representatives from industry, government and community, personally have thanked the Foundation for the notes, saying they rely on the BoB posts to catch up with past meetings and meetings they may have missed. Many of these readers have noted that they share the notes with constituents. Community members have thanked BoB for making “wonky” and technical information easier to understand and share with partners. Policy advocates have not always been happy with the information on BoB but they have always admitted that the blog is fair – and the foundation receives a comparable amount of compliments and complaints from all sides of policy issues.

Projects accomplished by BBCs have been cited as examples to be emulated by regional development champions elsewhere in the state. For example, the Knute Nelson tele-health project has stimulated interest on the part of the Region Five Tele-health working group.

National Impact



The US Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation's Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, and the Internet invited Blandin Foundation to provide expert testimony on best practices in promoting broadband adoption. The invitation came at the recommendation of the National Telecommunication Information Agency, which singled out Blandin as among the top performing

recipients of federal stimulus funding. Bernadine used the opportunity to highlight the inspiring efforts of foundation partners in rural communities to harness the benefits of broadband for economic vitality and quality of life.

During this reporting period Blandin Foundation was invited to showcase its experience and expertise in community-based broadband adoption efforts at other national forums, including an NTIA-sponsored workshop in Washington DC on adoption best practices and the Fiber-to-the-Home Council's regional meetings in Chicago and Dallas.



Upcoming Learning and Reflection Opportunities

To help the cohort of Blandin Broadband Communities (BBCs) reflect on and learn from their experiences with the BCBP program, Blandin BCBP staff is organizing a "Strut Your Stuff" tour this fall. These community meetings are designed to create an opportunity for each BBC team to bring community awareness and attention to the results of their work. The community meetings will recognize, celebrate, and call out learning from the project activities undertaken in each community. Program participants will have a forum to recount the community goals that informed their activities, report on progress achieved against those goals, and recommit to continued efforts. Community teams will be asked to respond to questions including:

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

Videotapes of these testimonials will be gifted to the communities for their use.



Mountain Summit: Accountability for Learning, Development & Adaptation

Once Blandin Trustees approved continuing BCBP beyond 2014, staff organized a retreat to craft an “Opportunity Statement” that would guide design for the program in 2015-2016. The reflective learning session was organized around the question: Based on our experiences and learning, what are the biggest opportunities for our work going forward, and how should the program be adapted to take advantage of those opportunities? We agreed on the following statement:

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.

We then tested this statement with a number of key stakeholder groups, including representatives from former and current Blandin Broadband and MIRC communities, and the Blandin Broadband Strategy Board.

During subsequent planning sessions staff developed a detailed program description to be used in recruiting new community partners and outlining explicit expectations for program participation.

Key program design adaptations made as a result of this reflective and adaptive training include:

- Opening program participation to past and current MIRC and BBC community partners
- Incentivizing collaboration across sectors and communities
- Adjusting the amount of funds available through the grant programs, and eliminating one of the grant programs (LightSpeed)
- Applying for federal funding to increase the capacity of cooperatives to deliver broadband services
- Seeking new partners (e.g. Minnesota High Tech Association and the Rural Internet Technology Association) for community technology events (Hack-a-thons, Maker Faires, ‘Hot Spot in a Box’, and others)
- Recruiting new Strategy Board members to fill in gaps in experience and perspectives among board members

Appendix: Grants Issued through Blandin Community Broadband Program from July 2013 through July 2014

Program	Payee	Request Name	Description	City	Awarded Amount	Start Date	End Date
BBC: Fond du Lac Band	Fond Du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	Application Creation Camp	Project support for a two week technology learning workshop on mobile app creation for students	Cloquet	\$11,640	2/1/14	9/30/14
BBC: Fond du Lac Band	Fond Du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	Fond du Lac Wireless Hot Spot Grant	Project support to increase public access to the internet by creating 13 public access wireless hotspots at tribally-owned locations on the reservation, including housing, tribal office, Head Start and the tribe's medical clinic	Cloquet	\$7,890	4/1/14	10/31/14
BBC: Fond du Lac Band	Fond Du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	Mobile Learning Program	Project support to provide mobile devices to students with learning centered around math and Ojibwe language and culture	Cloquet	\$7,500	1/17/14	6/1/15
BBC: Fond du Lac Band	Fond Du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	Fond du Lac Ojibwe School Wireless Access Project	Project support to upgrade the currently deployed unmanaged and limited wireless network at the FDL Ojibwe School to a modern, centrally managed network with greater capacity	Cloquet	\$10,000	7/9/14	6/30/15
BBC: Itasca County	Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation	Itasca Community Portal support: mobile application, kiosk, maintenance and outreach	Project support to continue implementation and marketing of a collaborative community portal and to create a mobile-friendly version of the portal	Grand Rapids	\$15,000	2/1/14	12/31/14
BBC: Itasca County	Itasca Economic Development Corporation	Itasca Knowledge Workers Phase 2	Project support to help Itasca County become a learning community where technology best practices are shared through "Social Media Breakfasts" and utilized to the benefit of area businesses and organizations	Grand Rapids	\$15,000	1/17/14	12/31/14
BBC: Itasca County	Itasca Economic Development Corporation	Itasca Innovation Project Phase 2	Project support for business technology assessments, a Google Place initiative and to assist with capitalizing a loan fund for small businesses to implement technology improvements	Grand Rapids	\$30,000	1/17/14	12/31/14

Program	Payee	Request Name	Description	City	Awarded Amount	Start Date	End Date
BBC: Kanabec County	City of Mora	Kanabec Broadband Initiative Tele-Work Center	Capital support to provide a public space, equipped with high speed broadband, computer and related technology to support telecommuting and after-school homework	Mora	\$24,920	1/17/14	12/31/14
BBC: Kanabec County	East Central Minnesota Educational Cable Cooperative	Create a network of Wi-Fi hotspots	Project support to increase public access to the internet by creating a network of WiFi hotspots throughout the community	Braham	\$18,245	2/1/14	1/30/15
BBC: Kanabec County	Kanabec Area Chamber Foundation	Kanabec Broadband Initiative - Google Places Site Claiming	Project support to help local businesses increase and improve their use of online marketing through training and technical support, including accessing the current expertise of local students	Mora	\$4,000	1/15/14	1/15/15
BBC: Lac qui Parle Valley Schools	Lac qui Parle Valley School District	Engineering Technology Center	Project support to create a center with hands-on learning opportunities in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) with a focus on agriculture	Madison	\$25,000	2/6/14	2/6/15
BBC: Lac qui Parle Valley Schools	Lac qui Parle Valley School District	Grades 5-12 One to One Mobile Communication Device Initiative	Project support for the District's move to 1:1 device learning for all students in grades 5-12	Madison	\$25,000	1/17/14	9/5/15
BBC: Lake County	Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency	Capacity Building -- Using Internet Screening to Broaden Family Supports	Donation towards introducing the use of an online screening tool for Two Harbors Area Food Shelf patrons that will help identify public programs for which they might qualify	Two Harbors	\$1,000	2/3/14	2/28/15
BBC: Lake County	Lake County	Community Web Portal	Project support to provide a central online source of information, events and resources for Lake County residents and visitors alike, providing both a unifying force and an economic development tool	Two Harbors	\$25,000	2/2/14	2/2/15
BBC: Lake County	Lake Superior School District #381	Lake County Community Wireless Access	Project support to increase public access to the internet, thereby increasing traffic and business for local establishments	Two Harbors	\$25,000	2/1/14	2/1/15

Program	Payee	Request Name	Description	City	Awarded Amount	Start Date	End Date
BBC: Lake County	Northshore Area Partners	Internet Training for Seniors	Project support to provide internet training to the senior citizens of Lake County	Silver Bay	\$1,170	1/1/14	12/31/14
BBC: Lake of the Woods County	Lake of the Woods County	Wi Fi Hotspots	Project support to increase public access to the internet and increase traffic and business for local establishments; to provide additional training to businesses and residents and support for Google site claiming	Baudette	\$15,000	1/17/14	1/1/15
BBC: Lake of the Woods County	Lake of the Woods Senior Citizens Council, Inc	Lake of the Woods Digital Inclusion Project - Phase 2	Capital support to increase public access to computers and the internet by providing more computers and internet access points at several public and nonprofit locations	Baudette	\$24,900	1/17/14	12/31/14
BBC: Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	Lake Lena Connectivity Project	Capital support for a public-private partnership to build Fiber to the Home in Lake Lena	Onamia	\$25,000	1/17/14	12/31/14
BBC: Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Computers and Training Project	Capital support to provide computers and training to 100 low-income band member families	Onamia	\$7,125	1/17/14	12/31/14
BBC: Mille Lacs County	ISD 912 Milaca Public Schools	Wi-Fi on Buses	Capital support for the purchase and operation of 12 Wi-Fi routers for school buses across four districts so students can use travel time for homework and increase their chances of succeeding in school	Milaca	\$12,790	1/31/14	12/31/14
BBC: Mille Lacs County	Mille Lacs County	Computer Distribution to Low-Income Families	Capital support to distribute 100 computers to low-income families in Mille Lacs County	Milaca	\$6,750	2/1/14	12/1/14
BBC: Mille Lacs County	Mille Lacs County	Wi-Fi Hot Spots	Project support to create five new public wi-fi hotspots within the county	Milaca	\$3,750	3/1/14	12/31/14
BBC: Mille Lacs County	Mille Lacs County	GIS Connect MN and Affordability Layer	Project support to conduct analysis around broadband availability and affordability using Geographical Information Systems (GIS)	Milaca	\$5,250	2/1/14	12/31/14

Program	Payee	Request Name	Description	City	Awarded Amount	Start Date	End Date
BBC: Mille Lacs County	Mille Lacs County	MLC Wi-Fi Computer Lab	Project support to create a public access computer lab at the Courthouse with computers placed at two additional locations	Milaca	\$11,000	2/1/14	12/31/14
BBC: Mille Lacs County	Mille Lacs County	Interactive Online Meetings	Capital support to create two video conference centers through which citizens can participate in public meetings held at the courthouse	Milaca	\$3,000	2/1/14	12/31/14
BBC: SW MN Broadband	ISD 2907 Round Lake Brewster	Purchase Mobile Communication Devices for preschool and ECFE programs	Project support to provide access to mobile devices at the schools for P-8 students and their families, and to their local communities through Community Ed classes, open lab time, and Social Media Breakfasts	Brewster	\$15,000	1/17/14	12/31/14
BBC: SW MN Broadband	ISD 330 Heron Lake-Okabena	Community Laptop Integration -CLI	Capital support to provide access to laptops and the internet, both at the schools for students, and to their local communities through Community Ed classes and open lab time.	Okabena	\$22,000	5/1/14	12/30/14
BBC: SW MN Broadband	ISD 330 Heron Lake-Okabena	Access to a community computer lab and internet hotspots	Project support to provide access to a community computer lab and internet hotspots	Okabena	\$9,000	5/1/14	12/31/14
BBC: SW MN Broadband	Jackson County Library	Tablet Access for Everyone	Project support to provide increased library access to mobile devices and the internet for individuals, preschools and seniors, and for other organizations on a check-out basis	Jackson	\$11,000	1/17/14	12/31/14
Broadband Innovation	City of Monticello	Researching possible creation of a Minnesota Municipal Broadband Alliance	Project support to research and review the benefits and potential structures of creating an organizational entity to support collaboration between municipalities, co-ops and other publicly oriented broadband providers	Monticello	\$10,000	7/9/14	12/31/14
Broadband Innovation	City of Starbuck	E-Marketing Workshops	Project support to conduct a series of four e-marketing workshops for area businesses	Starbuck	\$900	9/1/14	10/31/14

Program	Payee	Request Name	Description	City	Awarded Amount	Start Date	End Date
Broadband Innovation	City of Watertown	Create a central business district wi-fi hotspot	Project support to create a central business district wi-fi hotspot	Watertown	\$10,000	10/11/13	7/31/15
Broadband Innovation	Headwaters Regional Development Commission	Headwaters Community Technology Center	Project support to complete an action plan for developing community technology/telework centers in the Headwaters region of rural Minnesota	Bemidji	\$10,000	6/1/14	6/1/15
Broadband Innovation	Institute For Local Self-Reliance	Provide documentation of multiple public sector efforts to improve broadband in local communities	Provide documentation of multiple public sector efforts to improve broadband in local communities in rural Minnesota	Minneapolis	\$10,000	11/1/13	8/31/14
Broadband Innovation	Northwest Minnesota Foundation	IMPACT 20/20 Business Broadband Initiative	Project support to increase the number of area business using broadband, and increase sophistication of use in rural Minnesota	Bemidji	\$9,750	5/1/14	12/31/14
Broadband Innovation	Region 5 Regional Dev Commission	Efficient and Effective Telehealth for Rural Places	Project support to develop a rural telehealth program for the Region 5 area in rural Minnesota	Staples	\$8,000	5/1/14	9/30/14
Broadband Innovation	Winona Senior Friendship Center Activity Council, Inc	Friendships Forever	Project support to provide videoconferencing technology to older adults no longer able to travel to the Friendship Center, while engaging young adult volunteers as trainers	Winona	\$10,000	9/1/14	8/31/15
Digital Inclusion	Artspace Projects, Inc.	Broadband access for the Franklin Arts Center	Project support to provide affordable broadband access and training opportunities to low-income artists and their families and nonprofit organizations who work in the Franklin Arts Center	Minneapolis	\$25,000	2/1/14	12/31/14
Digital Inclusion	Employment Enterprises, Inc.	Computer Access for Persons with Disabilities and Mental Illnesses	Project support to provide clients with disabilities and mental illness access to online job training skills in rural Minnesota	Little Falls	\$4,790	7/12/14	12/31/14
Digital Inclusion	KOOTASCA Community Action, Inc.	Refurbished computers for programs and families	Operations support for the Circles of Support PCs for People affiliate operation in rural Minnesota	Grand Rapids	\$12,500	9/1/14	8/31/15

Program	Payee	Request Name	Description	City	Awarded Amount	Start Date	End Date
Digital Inclusion	Lac qui Parle County Econ Dev Authority	Computer Commuter	Project support to provide incentives for citizens gaining digital literacy by using the mobile computer lab, LqP Computer Commuter, in rural Minnesota	Madison	\$25,000	4/30/14	4/30/15
Digital Inclusion	Project FINE	Connecting Communities program	Project support to provide ongoing training and access to immigrants and refugees; activities will focus on advanced digital literacy and using technology to develop connections with others in the community and beyond	Winona	\$25,000	1/17/14	1/1/15
Digital Inclusion	The Brainerd Baxter Youth Center	PC's for People Youth Project	Project support to establish a PCs for People affiliate office at TheShop youth center where youth will be trained to refurbish and redistribute the computers in rural Minnesota	Brainerd	\$25,000	8/1/14	7/31/15
LightSpeed	Deer River HealthCare Center, Inc.	Deer River Clinic as a Demonstration Training Site for Telehealth	Project support to establish a telehealth demonstration site at the Deer River Clinic for rural Minnesota	Deer River	\$45,000	5/5/14	5/14/15
LightSpeed	Goodhue County Education District #6051	Whitewater Learning Proposal	Project support to provide Goodhue County Education District's 596 licensed staff members access to online professional development courses in rural Minnesota	Red Wing	\$50,000	5/1/14	6/30/15
LightSpeed	Kanabec County	Kanabec County Telehealth Project	Project support to connect FirstLight Health System to other providers in the community, specifically Kanabec County Public Health and St. Clare Living Community of Mora and begin to provide patient services via telemedicine	Mora	\$15,000	3/1/14	3/1/15
LightSpeed	Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Leech Lake Telecommunications	Project support to begin deployment of a wireless network across the reservation to provide quality broadband to tribal members at affordable prices in rural Minnesota	Cass Lake	\$50,000	7/9/14	12/31/14
Robust Networks	Austin Community Charitable Fund	Conduct a feasibility study to build a broadband network in Austin	Project support to conduct a feasibility study on building a broadband network in Austin	Austin	\$25,000	11/4/13	7/1/14

Program	Payee	Request Name	Description	City	Awarded Amount	Start Date	End Date
Robust Networks	City of Annandale	Conduct an ultra-broadband feasibility study	Project support to conduct an ultra-broadband feasibility study in rural Minnesota	Annandale	\$21,250	10/11/13	2/28/14
Robust Networks	City of Winthrop	Feasibility study for fiber project in Sibley County	Project support for an updated feasibility study for a fiber project to connect farms, homes and businesses in Sibley County	Winthrop	\$13,750	11/6/13	5/31/14
				Total:	\$823,870		