

INTERNET FOR ALL WISCONSIN PLAN





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LETTER FROM PSC CHAIR, SUMMER STRAND

For the first time ever, the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) embarked on a statewide listening tour to hear from the public, local officials, and stakeholders about how our State should put limited public dollars for the expansion of broadband to best use. From Platteville to Rhinelander and Hayward to Milwaukee, hundreds of Wisconsinites turned out for what we called the **'Internet for All Wisconsin Listening Tour'**. This public engagement helped shape the State's plan to connect all homes and businesses to affordable, reliable, high-speed internet.

The listening tour was only one of many opportunities organized by the Wisconsin Broadband Office to hear from residents as it prepared the State's Five-Year Action Plan and Digital Equity Plan, which laid out the goals and strategies for the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program and the Digital Equity Program, respectively. Signed by President Biden in 2021, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, includes these signature programs, together known as 'Internet for All,' to improve broadband access, affordability, and adoption.

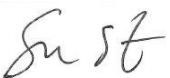
At PSC, we understand that participation and collaboration are fundamental to the success of these programs. The personal experiences and ideas provided by Wisconsin residents, local governments, community groups, and internet service providers improved the plans by creating a more complete picture of the diverse broadband needs of communities across the State.

We have already shown what happens, here in Wisconsin, when we come together to get things done. Under Governor Tony Evers' leadership, **more than 395,000 homes and businesses have new or improved internet access**. It is the critical work we have done over the past five years—through public-private partnerships, data analysis and planning, relationship-building, and State and federal investments—that have led us to this milestone.

I am proud to present the 'Internet for All Wisconsin' Executive Summary as testament to our work in developing both plans, and as a resource to reflect on our continued progress. This summary encapsulates hundreds of hours of discussion, surveys, data, and public comment. Know that our 'Internet for All' plans are better, and more comprehensive, because of the contributions from all who participated.

Our work is still far from over. Once our plans are approved, we will commence with their implementation by working together with stakeholders and partners to build the infrastructure that residents rely on to live, work, and connect with one another. We look forward to working with you to ensure our vision for all Wisconsinites to have equitable access to affordable broadband service and the capacity to fully engage in a digital society will be achieved.

Sincerely,



Summer Strand

Chairperson

Public Service Commission of Wisconsin

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: BEAD FIVE-YEAR PLAN

BACKGROUND

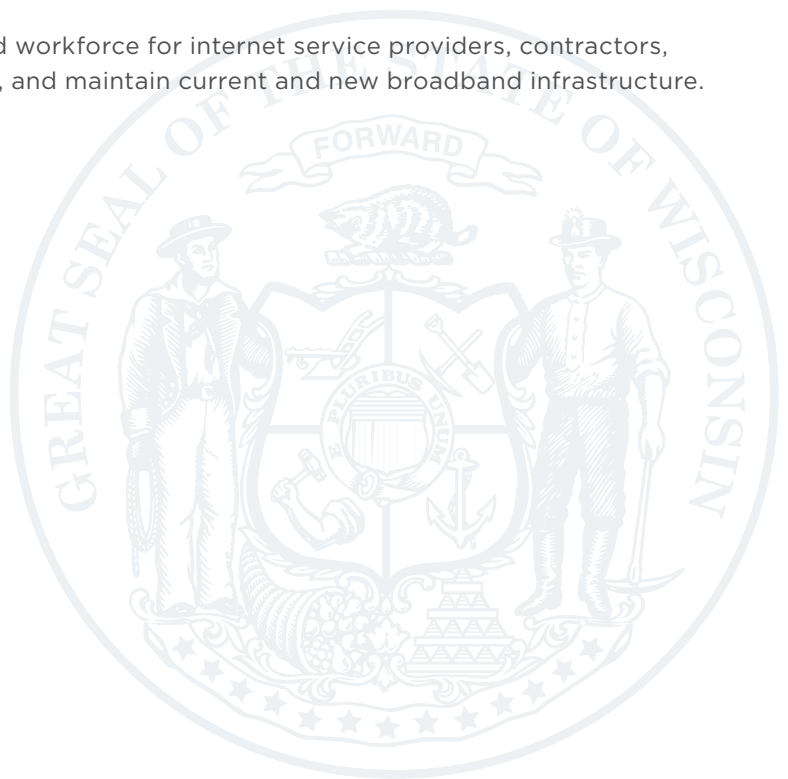
The Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act (also known as BIL) provides \$65 billion nationwide to connect all Americans to high-speed broadband internet that is affordable and reliable. Administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program will provide funding to the State of Wisconsin to expand high-speed internet access by funding planning, infrastructure deployment, and adoption programs.

Wisconsin's vision is that all Wisconsinites will have equitable access to affordable broadband service and the capacity to fully engage in a digital society. High-speed internet will benefit all residents and communities. This Five-Year Action Plan details the current state of internet access, adoption, and affordability in Wisconsin. The plan identifies the needs and gaps and how Wisconsin can achieve universal service by 2030. Over the course of the past year the Wisconsin Broadband Office has engaged in robust outreach and engagement, data collection, and technical assistance to create this comprehensive Five-Year Plan that reflects community engagement, local coordination, and alignment with Digital Equity planning.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals of Wisconsin's Five-Year Action Plan are to:

1. Achieve the highest possible level of broadband deployment and adoption.
2. Deliver sustained, long-term impact on broadband access and digital opportunity for all Wisconsin residents.
3. Increase the affordability and reliability of broadband service in Wisconsin.
4. Ensure a sufficient and trained broadband workforce for internet service providers, contractors, and subcontractors to construct, operate, and maintain current and new broadband infrastructure.



1

Goal:

Achieve the highest possible level of broadband deployment and adoption.

Objectives:

- Connect all Wisconsin homes and businesses to broadband with speeds of at least 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload service by 2030.
- Connect Community Anchor Institutions to one Gig symmetrical service.
- Add or improve broadband service for at least 1 million people in the State by 2030.
- Design and implement a BEAD program that invests in affordable, reliable broadband infrastructure with community support and that will best achieve the State's goals.
- Increase the number of subscribers to broadband.
- Prioritize locations in the State with the most need for broadband service.

2

Goal:

Deliver sustained, long-term impact on broadband access and digital opportunity for all Wisconsin residents.

Objectives:

- Secure Wisconsin's future by encouraging the use of federal dollars on forward thinking and future proof solutions. Fiber should be prioritized.
- Where practicable, place a priority on reaching speeds beyond 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload, including reaching speeds of 100/100 Mbps, 1000/1000 Mbps, and more.
- Plan, coordinate, and capitalize on the increasing federal funding dollars available, including those through the BIL such as the BEAD Program and Digital Equity Programs.
- Braid federal funds with other funding sources such as local, state, private, philanthropic, and other federal funds to increase impact and sustainability.
- Broadband and digital equity investments have community support.

3

Goal:

Increase the affordability and reliability of broadband service in Wisconsin.

Objectives:

- Promote the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) and other related resources for broadband affordability and adoption to increase adoption in Wisconsin.
- Decrease the number of underconnected households and households without adequate broadband.
- Invest resources in promoting adoption and digital literacy, scaling programs and community efforts that are working and initiating new efforts where most needed.
- Households with income below 200% of the federal poverty level have access to fixed, home broadband at a cost of less than \$30 per month.
- Increase outreach and engagement with underserved populations such as aging individuals, incarcerated individuals, veterans, individuals with disabilities, individuals with a language barrier, individuals who are members of racial or ethnic minority groups, and individuals who primarily reside in rural areas to ensure all Wisconsin residents can make full use of the internet and that residents have a voice in program design and evaluation.
- Internet access is reliable, and networks are resilient and secure. Internet access is consistently available and designed to sustain through disasters and threats.

4

Goal:

Ensure a sufficient and trained broadband workforce for internet service providers, contractors, and subcontractors to construct, operate and maintain current and new broadband infrastructure.

Objectives:

- Support and include in the planning organizations such as workforce development boards, economic development, labor groups and unions, contractors, high schools, higher education and technical colleges, and State agencies.
- Ensure that these organizations are being connected with internet service providers and telecommunications associations to increase awareness and create a sustainable and viable pipeline of talent.
- Support equitable training and workforce development initiatives to create and retain both local and regional telecommunications workforce.
- Provide critical pathways for improving geographical, cultural, and economic diversity to the telecommunications workforce.



BROADBAND ACCESS AND DEPLOYMENT ASSETS

PSC MAPPING

With the FCC’s shift to reporting the availability of broadband service from census-block based geography to individual location points, the ability of PSC to identify gaps in availability and direct funding to build reliable service has greatly improved. PSC, alongside countless stakeholders, the public, and internet service providers, undertook an extensive effort to evaluate, challenge, and improve the National Broadband Map through PSC’s Badger the FCC campaign. The National Broadband Map (version two) was used for the plan development, reflects service availability as of December 31, 2022, and incorporates challenges and validation efforts by the WBO and others.

PSC’s **Broadband Grant Footprint map**, below in Figure 1, provides a look at the impact of broadband grant projects statewide. Users can search for grants in their area of interest by performing an address search and navigating the map.

PSC BROADBAND PLANNING MAP

The Wisconsin Broadband Planning Map, Beta version released in May 2023, depicts statewide internet access as declared by internet service providers through the FCC Broadband Data Collection. This tool also shows connectivity summaries by geography and areas where broadband expansion funding has already been committed. Summary map layers from internet speed tests are also available.

STATE AND FEDERAL GRANT PROGRAMS

Since 2014, PSC has awarded 458 grants totaling \$319 million in funding. Wisconsin has a mature broadband grants program with clear documentation of the application and award process, earning PSC a ‘Best in Class’ award from NTIA for broadband grantmaking. Increasing amounts of 100/20 Mbps service availability are undoubtedly driven in part by significant State investments in broadband grants in recent years. As grants take time from award to construction, service availability reported as of December 31, 2022, likely incorporates most of the impact of broadband grants from the FY2020 and FY2021 grant rounds. PSC has administered Federal broadband grant programs from CARES Act funding (2020) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding (2022), totaling roughly \$105 million. This large injection and successful administration of federal broadband grant funding had a marked impact for Wisconsin residents, with 395,000 homes and businesses now awarded grants for new or improved broadband services since 2019.

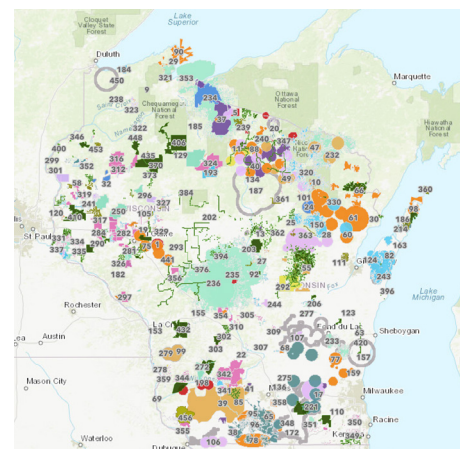


Figure 1: Broadband Grant Footprint

BROADBAND AFFORDABILITY AND ADOPTION ASSETS

AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM (ACP) OUTREACH AND ENROLLMENT

As of August 2023, approximately 387,000 of the estimated 894,005 eligible households in Wisconsin enrolled in ACP. Approximately 41 percent of eligible households in Wisconsin are enrolled in ACP, as compared with an estimated 34 percent of eligible households enrolled nationally.

41% of eligible households in Wisconsin are enrolled in ACP

Since the program's inception, Wisconsin providers have received \$141,069,641 in benefit funding to provide internet service to enrolled households. ACP enrollment is increasing over time, with many counties seeing participation double over the last year. The ACP has the twofold benefit of expanding connectivity for households in need of support to afford broadband, while also increasing subscription rates to broadband service. Because the ACP increases subscription rates, internet service providers are able to capture new customers and revenue that previously did not exist. As a result, higher subscription rates improve the business case for broadband deployment by increasing revenues and offsetting higher provider costs, making the cost-benefit calculation for internet service providers more feasible in areas of the State with more low-income households. Thus, the ACP allows for cost-effective broadband infrastructure construction in higher cost areas and supports low-income households to afford home internet access. Without additional funding, the ACP will end in early 2024.

INTERNET DISCOUNT FINDER

PSC and Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) created the Internet Discount Finder website to help Wisconsin households find and access affordable internet. The new tool can assist in finding free and discounted internet service available to eligible Wisconsin residents.

The Internet Discount Finder quickly matches eligible Wisconsin residents to low-cost home internet service and discount programs by entering their address and identifying their eligibility criteria. The tool will show available plans and describe next steps for enrollment in the ACP.

OTHER ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

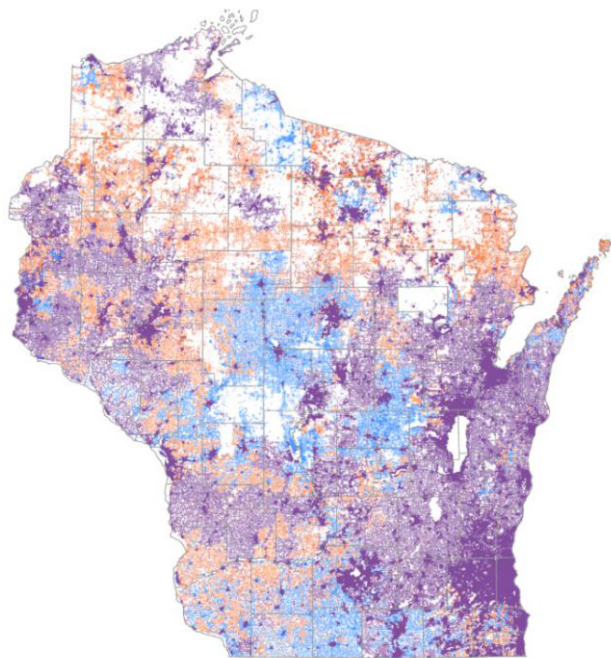
PSC administers a number of assistance programs that provide financial assistance and guidance that overall can help reduce monthly financial burdens for households. This includes the Lifeline program, which provides discounts for phone, cell, and internet services, and other programs to provide telecommunications access to citizens with disabilities. PSC also administers the Internet and Phone Helpline.





BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT AND ACCESS GAPS AND NEEDS

The FCC released version two of the **National Broadband Map**. Version two reflects service availability as of December 2022. The updated map estimates that Wisconsin has 253,000 unserved broadband serviceable locations. Unserved, for purposes of the BEAD program, is defined as lacking wired or licensed fixed wireless service with speeds of 25/3. A further 210,000 locations are estimated to be underserved, which lack 100/20 speeds from a wired or licensed fixed wireless service. The map below shows the availability of service by speed throughout Wisconsin. Orange represents areas lacking 25/3, blue represents areas with 25/3 to 100/20, and purple areas with 100/20 or better. Darker, more saturated areas are those with a larger density of locations.



WISCONSIN'S INTERNET COVERAGE

Coverage by Most Available Local Speed

- Served (100+ Mbps Download/20+ Mbps Upload)
- Underserved (>25/3 and <100/20 Mbps)
- Unserved (<25/3 Mbps)
- Even Mix of Speeds
- No Coverage
- No Broadband Serviceable Locations (BSLs)

Note: Brightness of colors determined by density of BSLs. Brighter colors indicate areas with more BSLs.



Figure 2: Wisconsin's Internet Coverage

BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT AND ACCESS GAPS AND NEEDS CONT.

PERCENT OF ALL BROADBAND SERVICEABLE LOCATIONS IN WISCONSIN BY TECHNOLOGY AND SERVED STATUS

- Served (>100/20 Mbps)
- Underserved (>25/3 and <100/20 Mbps)
- Unserved (<25/3 Mbps or no service available)
- No service

 2.3M total BSLs in WI
 96% of BSLs (2.2M) have high address confidence (location accuracy)

11% of BSLs with unserved or no broadband service available

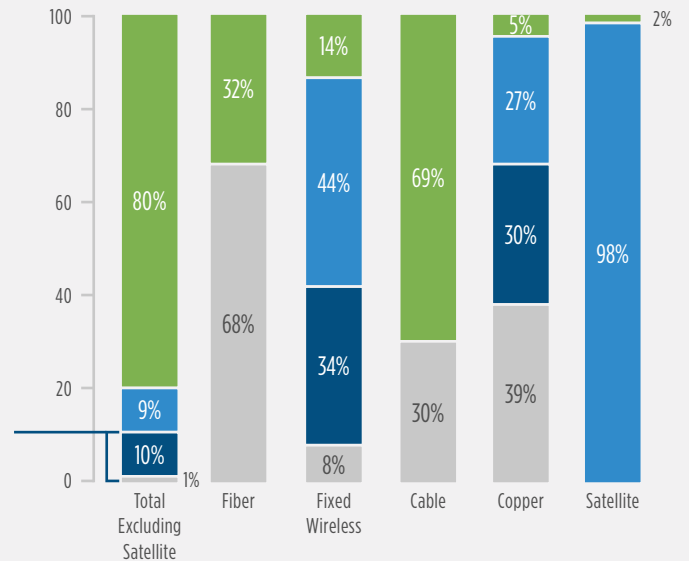
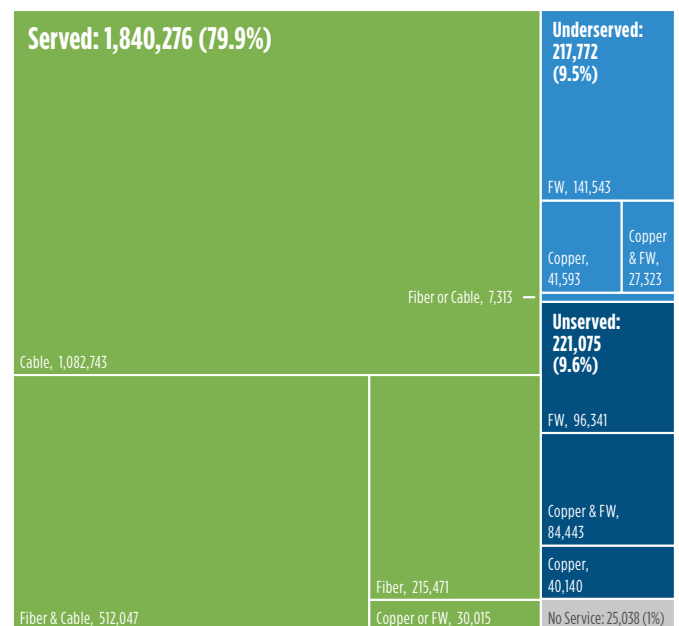


Figure 3: % of All Locations by Technology and Served Status

SERVICE AVAILABILITY FOR 2,304,161 WISCONSIN LOCATIONS

Evolving data reporting underlying the National Broadband Map allows for insights related to the technology mix available in Wisconsin and the associated speeds. Figure 4 shows how these service offerings result in actual served locations using BEAD eligibility criteria and service reporting as of version two of the FCC map. For locations with access to high-speed service of 100/20 or better (green boxes), most all have service from a provider of fiber, cable, or both. Approximately 30,000 locations with 100/20 service lack fiber or cable, and instead receive it from a copper or fixed wireless provider. For locations that are underserved with 25/3 to 100/20 service (light blue boxes) and unserved with less than 25/3 service (dark blue boxes), most service is provided by fixed wireless or copper providers. Barely 1% of Wisconsin locations (grey box) lack access to any wired or fixed wireless technology of any speed. Across these technologies, basic internet access is available to most all Wisconsinites, although not all technologies provide speeds sufficient for modern demands of entire households or growing businesses.



Note: FW = Fixed Wireless

Figure 4: Service Availability



BROADBAND AFFORDABILITY GAPS AND NEEDS

14% of adults with annual incomes under \$30,000 are not online

Many residences throughout the State do not have internet at home because it is cost prohibitive. The Pew Research Center found that nationally, although only 1 percent of adults with annual incomes over \$75,000 do not use the internet, 14 percent of those with annual incomes under \$30,000 are not online. The EducationSuperHighway Report

No Home Left Offline estimated that **Wisconsin's broadband affordability gap prevents 273,415 households from accessing the internet at home and impacts 650,000 people in the State.**

AVERAGE MINIMUM PRICE FOR SERVED SPEEDS BY URBANICITY (CENSUS BLOCK)

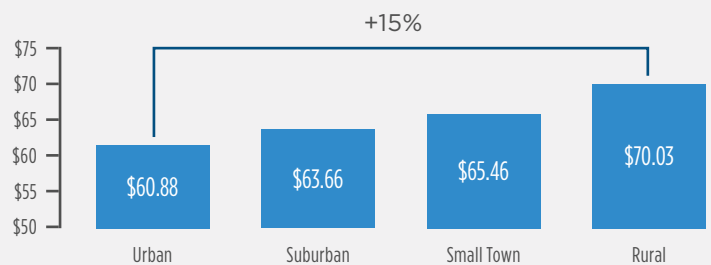


Figure 5: Average Minimum Price for Served Speeds

AFFORDABILITY AND COST BURDEN DATA

Most households in the State that do not subscribe to available broadband service (“underconnected households”) are burdened by the cost. Using the State median monthly income and establishing the threshold of 1.17% of monthly gross income, about 65 percent of unsubscribed households are cost-burdened, meaning their monthly subscription costs exceed 1.17% of median monthly income. Broadband subscription cost analysis also confirms the assumption that cost-burdened households make less annually than those not burdened — specifically households making less than \$50,000 annually make up 57 percent of the cost-burdened households. Relatedly, non-white households are also disproportionately cost-burdened, as they fall into the previous category of more often making less than \$50,000 annually compared to white households.

65% of unsubscribed households are cost-burdened

FEDERALLY RECOGNIZED TRIBES: BROADBAND ASSETS, NEEDS, AND GAPS

PSC greatly values the opportunity to listen and learn about the experiences of Wisconsin's Tribal nations and is grateful for the ongoing engagement regarding broadband planning across the State. In January 2023, PSC participated in a formal Tribal consultation to discuss upcoming BEAD and Digital Equity planning. The consultation was facilitated by the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Inc. and included representatives from eight of Wisconsin's 11 federally recognized tribes. Tribal members shared challenges, details about future BEAD implementation, and Digital Equity issues. Much of the consultation centered around understanding the planning processes for the BEAD and Digital Equity programs and how each Tribe can prepare for the forthcoming funding opportunities.

WBO conducted a separate survey across Wisconsin, which included individuals of Tribal communities, in part to understand the perception of quality and reliability for those who do have internet. The responses from Tribal community members were largely aligned with responses from all Wisconsin residents with concerns expressed regarding access, performance, and cost. Some Tribal communities also indicated an interest in Tribal ownership of internet facilities.



IMPLEMENTATION

PSC will pursue implementation activities in four categories to realize Wisconsin's vision and achieve Internet for All Wisconsin:

LEADERSHIP AND VISION ACTIVITIES

- Serve as the leader and coordinator of broadband and digital equity programs, data strategies, and activities for the State of Wisconsin.
- Staff the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access and provide expertise, information, and data as the Task Force executes their charge to recommend policy, programmatic, and funding pathways that advance broadband goals and digital equity.
- Ensure that Wisconsinites and broadband stakeholders are aware of federal and State funding opportunities.

PARTNERSHIP AND CAPACITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

- Update and publish a playbook as a resource for communities and technical assistance providers.
- Promote community certification programs, such as Broadband Forward! and Telecommuter Forward! and provide support for communities through the process.
- Support broadband technical assistance work, facilitate connections between communities and providers and between projects and funders.
- Support and include organizations such as workforce development boards, economic development, labor groups and unions, contractors, high schools, higher education and technical colleges, and State agencies.

MAPS, DATA COLLECTION, AND ANALYSIS ACTIVITIES

- Continue to update and improve the Wisconsin Broadband Map (WBM), Wisconsin Broadband Planning Map, and the Wisconsin Broadband Grant Footprint.
- Promote the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) National Broadband Map and the opportunities for the public and stakeholders to challenge availability and location data within the map.
- Support statewide surveying via the Wisconsin Internet Self-Report (WISER) survey.
- Use Broadband Intelligence to improve understanding of access, performance, and costs in the State.
- Effectively utilize the Broadband Intelligence data deliverables and BEAD planning grant partners, Digital Equity Outreach grant partners, and local government to inform BEAD program planning as well as provide data publicly for community planning and transparency.

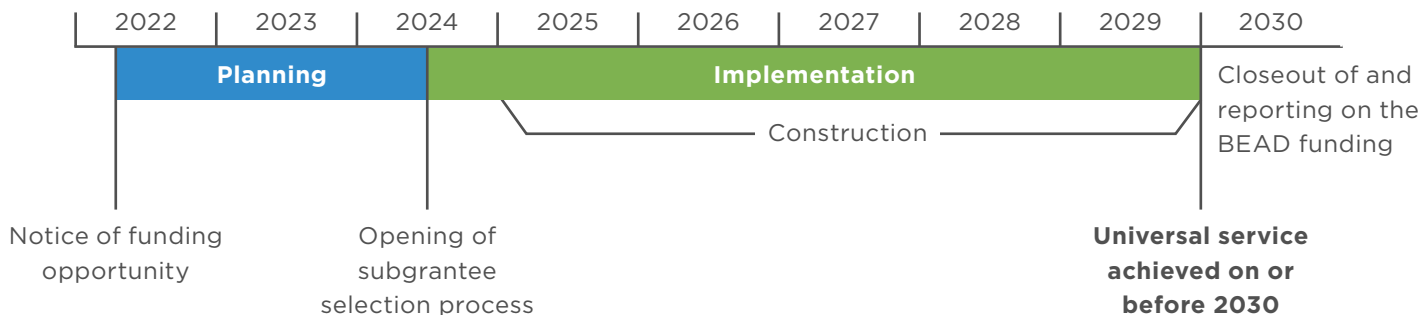
IMPLEMENTATION CONT.

INFRASTRUCTURE EXPANSION ACTIVITIES

- Fully deploy federal funds to achieve all the needed broadband infrastructure expansion and improvements to achieve internet for all Wisconsin residents, businesses, and organizations by 2030.
- Promote public-private partnerships and other community-supported efforts to prioritize high-performance projects and leverage additional public and private investment in resilient broadband infrastructure that will be affordable for residents.
- Coordinate and, when appropriate, braid federal, state, local, and private dollars to broadband infrastructure investments for unserved and underserved locations and as needed for middle mile projects.
- Plan, coordinate, distribute, and capitalize on BIL programs including the BEAD Program and Digital Equity Programs.
- Actively engage and coordinate with industry and workforce development stakeholders to ensure timely workforce development efforts to support BEAD infrastructure projects.

ESTIMATED TIMELINE FOR UNIVERSAL SERVICE

The BEAD Program can be broken into two phases, a planning phase and an implementation phase. The planning phase began in May 2022 with the publication of the program’s Notice of Funding Opportunity and concludes with the opening of the Subgrantee Selection Process, estimated to begin in summer of 2024. **PSC estimates that universal service will be achieved on or before 2030.** The State challenge process will be implemented in 2024. Subgrantees will be selected from 2024 to 2025. Construction will run from 2025 to 2029. Closeout of and reporting on the BEAD funding will occur through 2030.



DIGITAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION ACTIVITIES

- Align Wisconsin's BEAD program with the goals and objectives in Wisconsin's Digital Equity Plan along the five core digital equity values — access, affordability, adoption, trust, and sustainability.
- Disseminate best practices for broadband access, affordability, devices, internet adoption, digital literacy skills training, and other objectives in conjunction with Wisconsin's Digital Equity Plan.
- Develop and support intentional activities and investments to reduce and eliminate historical, institutional, and structural barriers to broadband access and the use of information technology.
- Continue and scale outreach and promotion of the ACP or successor program to reach the highest possible levels of participation in Wisconsin.
- Background on more details regarding the Digital Equity Plan are in the following section.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN

BACKGROUND

PSC and its partners formed the Wisconsin Digital Equity Plan by engaging communities through targeted outreach, gathering data, and conducting analyses to understand the unique needs of Wisconsin's covered populations. While the plan is rooted in data and analysis of digital equity needs, it is also centered around stories and direct experiences of Wisconsinites engaged through this outreach. A deeper understanding of communities' needs and barriers to digital equity informed a digital equity vision and mission, supported by more detailed values that guide the goals of this plan.

The Wisconsin Digital Equity Plan sets an ambitious vision to make sure all Wisconsinites will have equitable access to affordable broadband service and the capacity to fully engage in a digital society. The mission coalesces around five core values that capture the many pieces that are needed to achieve true digital equity across the State. The values that frame the plan are:

- **Access:** Expanding high-speed internet access to every residence, business, and institution in the State.
- **Affordability:** Ensuring broadband and key digital services are affordable for all.
- **Adoption:** Ensuring all residents can connect to the internet, with the appropriate accessible, internet-enabled devices, skills, information, and services specific to their needs in real time.
- **Trust:** Providing readily accessible resources and supports to build trust with communities and ensure all feel safe when accessing the internet.
- **Sustainability:** Supporting intentional activities and investments for ongoing device access, digital skills education, and affordable broadband subscriptions.

For each of these values, targeted goals and objectives were crafted to address specific digital equity gaps and opportunities in Wisconsin. This includes both short- and long-term goals that are adaptable, knowing that digital equity needs are ongoing and evolving. The goals and objectives can be applied to each covered population, although not always to the same extent; particularly, the strategies employed to achieve these goals will not be the same across all cover populations. Strategies will be different, but the need for these strategies to be embedded in the community and culturally relevant to populations was a notable similarity across all covered populations. The following overarching strategies have been identified to guide this Digital Equity Plan:

1. Engage new stakeholders and grow existing partnerships to expand the Wisconsin Digital Equity ecosystem.
2. Develop programs and activities to support and complement the Digital Equity Plan strategies.

The Broadband Office identified existing digital equity assets across the State that can support this work. These assets are vital to the success of the plan and are considered partners in this work. Many of these assets were instrumental in outreach efforts to covered populations.

Based on engagement with a diverse set of stakeholders, covered population groups, and other partners and further bolstered by subsequent data analysis, goals, objectives, strategies and metrics were identified as priorities for Digital Equity in Wisconsin.

Prior to the creation of the Digital Equity Programs through the enactment of BIL, PSC had been actively engaged in digital equity work and had three ongoing activities that informed broadband planning: the Governor’s Task Force on Broadband Access, the Digital Equity and Inclusion Stakeholder group, and the Wisconsin Internet Self-Report Survey (WISER). PSC has aligned these existing efforts with the goals of both the digital equity and BEAD programs. New partnerships, data initiatives, and activities to build the most comprehensive Digital Equity Plan were created, and the plan is informed by all the State’s diverse stakeholders.

PSC engaged counties and federally recognized Tribes through a survey developed in partnership with UW-Extension. The survey collected information about broadband availability, access, and adoption to strategically inform both BEAD and Digital Equity planning. The surveys were distributed to the county and Tribal administrative contacts with the expectation that multiple representatives from counties and Tribes would contribute to the survey. In total, 70 of 72 Wisconsin counties and six of the 11 Wisconsin federally recognized Tribes completed the survey.

Figure 6 below shows the many teams, groups, and partners and their respective activities that have informed the creation of this plan.

WISCONSIN PLAN PROCESS



Figure 6

PSC, its partners, and a diverse group of stakeholder collaborators have centered the plan's detailed goals and objectives on the following core implementation strategies:

- **Engage new stakeholders and grow existing partnerships to expand Wisconsin's Digital Equity ecosystem.**
 - Continue stakeholder group and monthly meetings.
 - Conduct listening sessions and partnership activities.
 - Continue to engage with State agencies around cybersecurity, accessibility, and digital equity initiatives.
 - Identify and share best practices and standards for Digital Navigators, device programs, and culturally relevant training and support.
- **Develop programs and activities at PSC to support and complement digital equity strategies.**
 - Update grant programs to include Digital Equity values and goals.
 - Support and develop new and existing Digital Equity programs and best practices.
 - Coordinate with and support BEAD, Capital Projects Fund, and other funding programs.
 - Provide ACP or successor program outreach and engagement support.

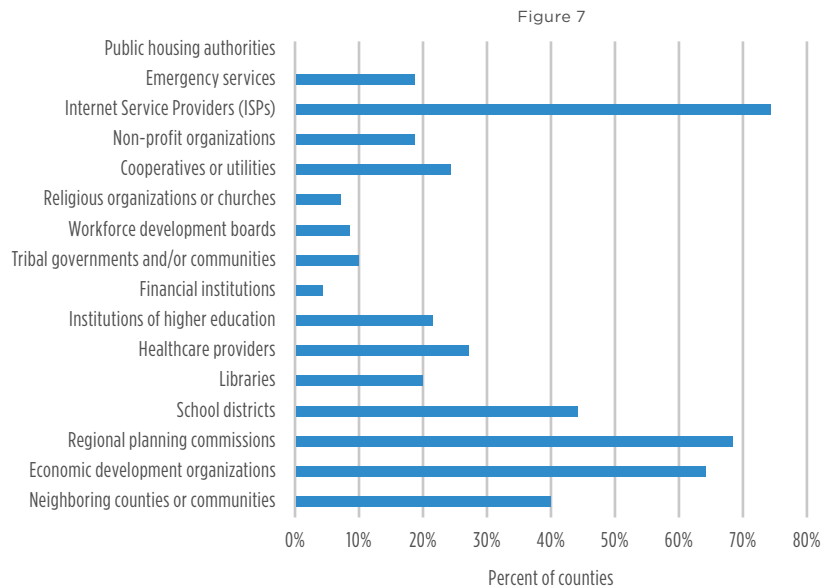




COVERED POPULATIONS

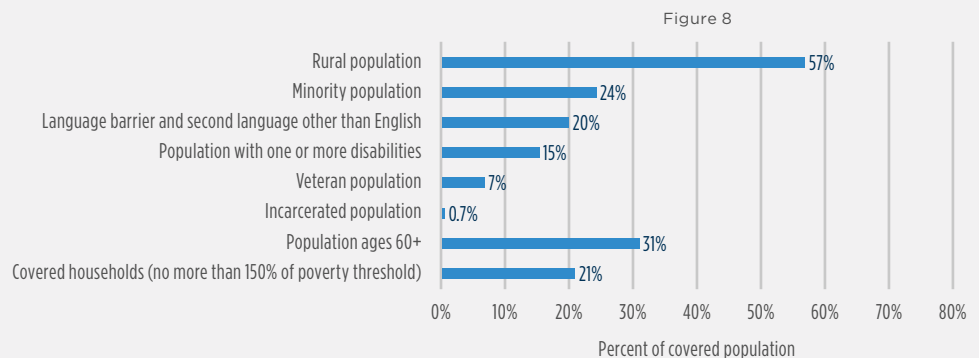
Figure 7 shows the percentage of Wisconsin county survey respondents that currently work with, or previously worked with, the local and regional partners listed below on broadband-related issues such as broadband internet access, adoption, or affordability.

WI COUNTIES' LOCAL AND REGIONAL PARTNERS



Approximately 79 percent of Wisconsin residents fall under one or more of the covered population groups – the figure below displays the proportional percentage of each covered population group based on the 2020 census.

PERCENT OF COVERED POPULATION GROUPS IN WISCONSIN



PERCENT OF COVERED POPULATION (LOW, MEDIUM, HIGH BY CENSUS TRACT)

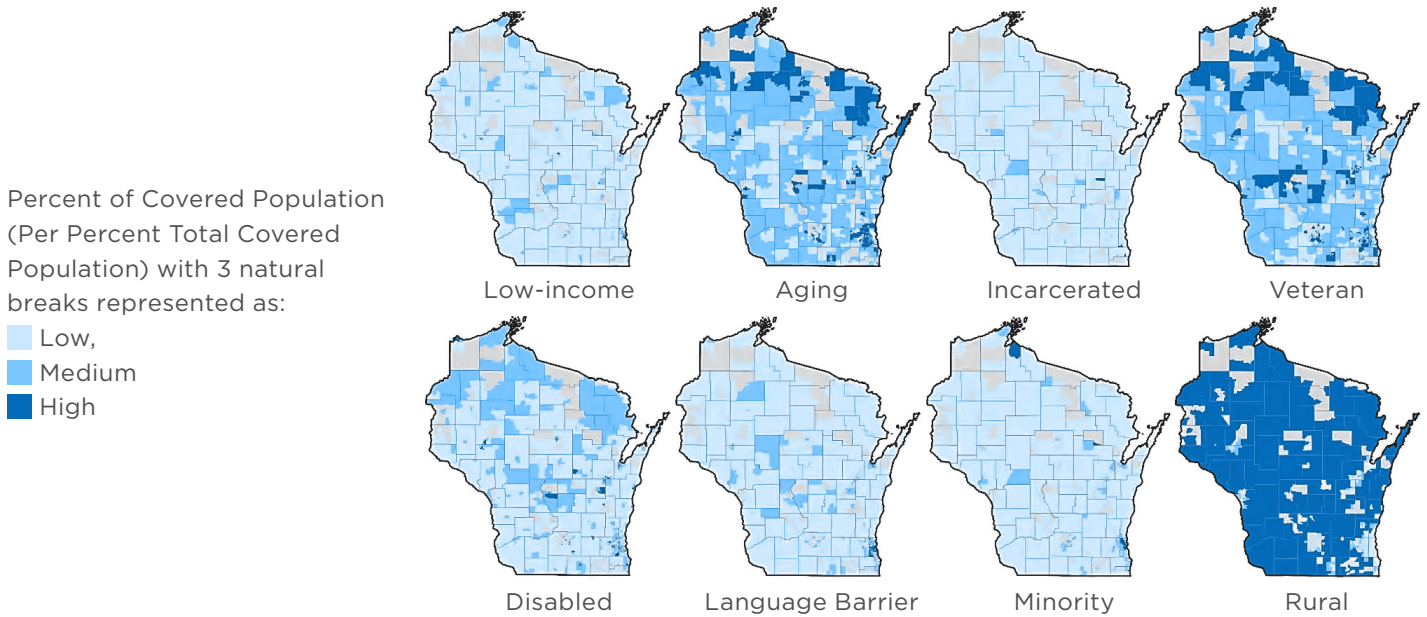


Figure 9

LOW-INCOME POPULATIONS

Across the State, access to virtual learning opportunities, telehealth, housing, benefits, and employment opportunities were all identified as prominent issues for low-income residents. For many of these low-income households with a limited budget, obtaining broadband access that met their specific needs was simply not an option due to their financial constraints and no available affordable broadband subscription options.

AGING INDIVIDUALS

Many groups and individuals over the age of 60 noted that they learn from family members, especially younger family members such as grandchildren. It was further articulated that these individuals want the option to be able to age in their communities and not have to move to live in new areas as they age. They understand internet is a vital part of being able to stay in their community and that support for access and adoption is needed beyond their family.

Many of the aging population engaged had either been scammed or were wary of internet scams. They were deeply concerned about security and how they could trust their access and resources were safe.

INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

People who are incarcerated in Wisconsin do not have regular access to the internet due to policies, safety, and security concerns. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in even more strict isolation of people in jails and prisons, limiting traditional access to computers and the internet further. In response, programs were created to allow incarcerated individuals to purchase tablets that come pre-loaded with programs offering allowed (screened) books, music, and games for download. These devices also allow for video visitation of family and friends. There is a cost, depending on the location, to the person for these devices and for subscriptions to the content that is often higher than what would be paid for similar services by the general public. Additionally, there is a need for those being released to have access and devices to find housing, work, and other necessary services.

VETERANS

Access to and affordability of broadband subscriptions are top barriers across all covered populations, but the magnitude of these barriers are more pronounced for veterans in rural areas. Veterans also identified device and equipment costs as a barrier. Veterans with disabilities often need assistive technologies that can be expensive. One veteran shared that his hearing aids required an internet-enabled device to function properly, which he continually struggles to maintain, affecting his ability to reliably hear with the aids. As highlighted by the above story and others heard across the State, the need is tied to health, well-being, social connections and more. It is a need for every veteran.

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

The experiences of individuals with disabilities and their digital inclusion challenges vary widely, even amongst those with the same type of disability. Mobility, cognition, independent living, hearing, vision, speech, and self-care services are often used for data collection to understand people with disabilities' experiences, but they are by no means comprehensive, and targeted outreach in communities is required to understand specific barriers to digital equity.

Access is often more complex and expensive for people with disabilities, as much of the common technology used for internet access was created by and for able-bodied and neurotypical people, and it often lacks features that allow people with disabilities to fully interact. Adequate adaptive technology is essential to an individual's ability to wholly benefit from Internet for All, and training for adaptive technology is necessary for full use.

INDIVIDUALS WITH A LANGUAGE BARRIER (including individuals who are English Language Learners and have low levels of literacy)

Wisconsin has many populations who identify as English Language Learners. This includes a large Hmong population, Spanish speakers, Afghan immigrants and a significant migrant population. Access to the internet is vital for this population as they need access to learning resources, relocation services, and connections back to their families in other parts of the world. Access is impacted by rural locations, the neighborhoods they live in, and poor internet service.

INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE MEMBERS OF A RACIAL OR ETHNIC MINORITY GROUP

Many of those interviewed emphasized the relationship between race and ethnicity and other covered populations. Many Latinx and Hmong people emphasized that a lack of language-specific resources made adoption difficult. Culturally specific support was identified as a need. Across racial and ethnic minority groups, income presented barriers to both access and adoption.

INDIVIDUALS WHO PRIMARILY RESIDE IN A RURAL AREA

Wisconsin is a state with a large rural population, and many who identify as other covered populations also identify as rural. Farming, specifically dairy farming, is a vital piece of the State's economy and one of the primary small businesses in rural areas. Farmers shared a need for access as a continuing barrier to growing, sustaining, and innovating. Dairy farmers emphasized how much they need reliable internet service to monitor their cows' activities, health, and production output. Almost all barriers for rural populations were related to a lack of bandwidth, slow speeds, poor reliability, or lack of internet access all together. For many, if there was an available way to get broadband access, it was often exceedingly expensive.



WISCONSIN DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN VALUES AND GOALS

ACCESS

Expanding high speed internet access to every residence, business, and institution in the State.

GOALS

Achieve the highest possible level of broadband deployment and adoption.

Deliver sustained, long-term impact on broadband access and digital opportunity for all Wisconsin residents.

AFFORDABILITY

Ensure broadband and key digital services are affordable for all.

GOAL

Increase the affordability and reliability of broadband service in Wisconsin.

ADOPTION

Ensuring all can connect to the internet, with the appropriate accessible, internet-enabled device, skills, information, and services specific to their needs in real time.

GOALS

Support local digital literacy champions and digital navigators embedded within the community and trusted organizations that support the needs of covered populations.

All Wisconsinites will have accessible, culturally responsive resources to grow their digital literacy skills.

All Wisconsinites have needed knowledge and access to resources to maintain cyber security.

Ensure every Wisconsinite has access to an internet enabled device(s) and assistive technologies that meet their needs.

Ensure all Wisconsin populations and communities have accessible, first language, culturally responsive technical support.

TRUST

Providing readily accessible resources and supports to build trust and safety when accessing the internet.

GOALS

All WI communities have resources, access to training and support that is culturally relevant, in their native languages, and clearly provided by a legitimate source they trust.

Fostering trust and transparency among State government, local government, providers, and communities.

SUSTAINABILITY

Supporting intentional activities and investments for ongoing device access, literacy, and affordable broadband subscriptions.

GOALS

Support Digital Equity work by expanding cooperation and partnerships of community-based organizations, anchor institutions, local governments, philanthropic groups, and other trusted local entities.

Ensure community-based organizations, anchor institutions, local governments, philanthropic groups, and other entities engaging in Digital Equity work are aware of and pursuing available funding sources.

CONCLUSION

Wisconsin's vision is that all Wisconsinites will have equitable access to affordable broadband service and the capacity to fully engage in a digital society. To implement that vision, the BEAD Five-Year Plan and the Digital Equity Plan share goals around access and affordability. Additionally, goals specific to expanding infrastructure to all residents as well as providing support for the values of adoption, trust and sustainability have been aligned across both plans. Both plans are designed to keep funds and activities aligned to meet the needs and 2030 timeline for universal access.

These two complementary plans will increase investments in the communities that need them most and build out sustainable programs to make sure those who need to connect to the internet have the access, resources, skill, and support needed for providing universal service by 2030. This includes access for workforce development, economic growth, education, civic participation, and more. Detailed goals, objectives, strategies, and metrics can be found in each of the detailed plans.

The complete approved Wisconsin Five-Year Action Plan for BEAD is available here. <https://psc.wi.gov/Documents/broadband/5YearActionPlan.pdf>

The complete accepted Wisconsin Digital Equity Plan is available here. <https://psc.wi.gov/Documents/broadband/WisconsinDigitalEquityPlanApproved.pdf>

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