

STATE OF WISCONSIN

REPLIES REQUESTED:
*ASAP – please, no later
than July 10, 2009*

June 4, 2009

RE: QUESTIONNAIRE ON ARRA BROADBAND GRANT/LOAN INTENTIONS

TO: **Providers, governmental entities, organizations and others interested in broadband deployment in Wisconsin:**

In December 2008, Public Service Commission (PSC) Chairperson Eric Callisto sent all Wisconsin telecommunications providers, and many other interested persons, a request for input on the broadband landscape in Wisconsin and on whether there were enhancements to broadband that could be achieved with federal stimulus funding, an issue then being seriously discussed in Washington, D.C. In February 2009, Chairperson Callisto and Commerce Secretary Richard Leinenkugel sent a follow up alerting the same entities that federal stimulus legislation was imminent and that there would be an as yet undefined state role in the broadband funding programs that were under consideration. Parties were advised that there would be some state reporting needed – at a minimum – once the federal broadband grants/loans package was enacted and that interested entities would be asked for further input in the future. That time has come.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) was signed on February 17, 2009. A portion of that Act makes grants and loans available from two agencies: the U.S. Department of Commerce, through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, through the Rural Utilities Service (RUS). As these agencies get closer to releasing their Notices of Funds Availability, which will provide greater detail on the parameters of their grant and/or loan programs for broadband and will shed further light on definitions and application needs relative to these programs, it is important that the State be involved and be ready to support Wisconsin broadband enhancement projects.

It is a goal of this State that all prudent steps will be taken to ensure that Wisconsin is well served by the ARRA, including the broadband programs. Governor Doyle and the state Office of Recovery and Reinvestment have assigned the Public Service Commission, the Department of Commerce and the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to lead the State effort in accumulating, evaluating and organizing broadband grant and loan requests for Wisconsin. We are aware of the need for improvements in broadband coverage and capabilities in parts of Wisconsin. We are also aware, in general, that many entities intend to seek federal monies to move a variety of broadband projects forward. To assist the State in effectively fulfilling its role as advisor to the federal agencies and in serving as a strong advocate for Wisconsin companies and consumers, we are seeking your help.

We are collecting input at this time for two reasons:

1. Knowledge of the types of applications to be expected will help tailor and streamline our review and recommendation process.
2. We want to know how the State agencies can assist providers with their applications.

We have developed a web-based questionnaire form that seeks input about your intentions for seeking federal broadband funding.¹ This information will be aggregated and reviewed by our three agencies. We will be working to support projects and to prepare any necessary advice on funding that will be sent to the NTIA and RUS in support for projects. It is widely anticipated that the NTIA and RUS will be officially seeking applications by a Notice to be issued in late June. **Consequently, we need to get your input very soon. Please submit the information we are seeking by this web-based form as soon as you can, but, please, no later than July 10, 2009.**²

You can access this request for data at the PSC's website and fill it out on-line. **Please go to <http://psc.wi.gov/broadbandgrants> to complete and submit your responses.**³

The NTIA and RUS still need to release their grant and loan application materials to provide clarity and direction for these funding applications. Increasingly, many expect that broadband projects that have local support (from users, other entities and government) and projects that serve multi-purposes may have advantages once the hundreds or, more likely, the thousands of NTIA and RUS applications get filed. Please keep these issues in mind when preparing your proposals. In this regard, the State seeks to help and assist the Wisconsin applicants in securing funds for the benefit of Wisconsin businesses and consumers.

As noted earlier this year, only by active, widespread, candid and thoughtful participation can we best ensure that Wisconsin is a key beneficiary of the broadband elements of the ARRA. Please assist us, your organization, and, most importantly, your customers or potential customers by responding to this request for information.

Thank you.

Very truly yours,



Eric Callisto
Chairperson
Public Service Commission



Richard J. Leinenkugel
Secretary
Department of Commerce



Rod Nilsestuen
Secretary
Department of Agriculture,
Trade and Consumer Protection

¹ We understand that there still is a need for final directions and more clarity of definition from the NTIA and RUS, and therefore that you may well not have finalized your application materials and plans or perhaps even your intentions for seeking grants or loans. Please send us what you can. These filings will not constitute a commitment on your part – we are just trying to get a better understanding, and an early understanding, of what may be proposed for Wisconsin, so we can better support those applications.

² There is some speculation that the RUS and NTIA may ask applicants to file copies of their ARRA grant or loan requests with the states where the projects are proposed. If the federal application guidelines do not require such a submittal to the states, we would request that you provide us with at least a summary of your actual application once it is filed with the RUS/NTIA.

³ At this point, **all replies submitted via this web-based request for input will be handled confidentially.** We understand that there may be some competitive concerns about your plans. We also recognize that your projects and applications may still be in a developmental state.