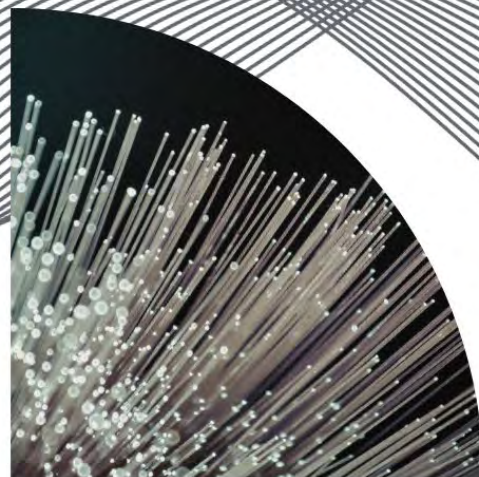




# 2025 GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE ON **BROADBAND ACCESS**

REPORT TO GOVERNOR TONY EVERS AND  
WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE



**Wisconsin**  
Broadband Office

 **PSC**  
of WISCONSIN

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## RECENT CHANGES TO THE BEAD PROGRAM

After the Task Force's final meeting in May 2025 and before the completion of this report, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), which is the federal agency responsible for administering the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program, published the "[BEAD Restructuring Policy Notice](#)." The June 6, 2025, policy notice requires Wisconsin to implement significant changes to its BEAD program and eliminate certain requirements that were previously included in the BEAD Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and in the State of Wisconsin's approved Initial Proposal. Over the past two and half years, the Task Force has actively engaged in the planning process for BEAD; and over the past two reports, has made specific recommendations related to implementation and administration of the BEAD program to reach Wisconsin's broadband goals.

Under the new policy notice:

- States must rescind all prior preliminary awards and complete a Benefit of the Bargain (BOB) round, in which all BEAD eligible locations are available for bidding.
- All previously approved non-deployment activities (including workforce training and upskilling) must be rescinded.
- Certain requirements are eliminated related to fair labor practices, workforce development, affordability, climate change resilience, local coordination, and open network access.
- The scoring criteria initially approved cannot be used in the BOB round, due in part to its inclusion of criteria associated with the eliminated requirements. Instead, the new scoring criteria must primarily favor the lowest cost bidder. Certain additional criteria, including speed to deployment, speed of network, and the applicant's receipt of a preliminary award in Round One, are allowed to be considered when the project costs are within 15 percent of each other.
- The BEAD program must also adopt a technology neutral approach. Prior to the June 6<sup>th</sup> policy notice, BEAD had a fiber first approach that gave priority to fiber projects; now all technologies meeting scalability, latency, speed and performance standards must be considered in the BOB round without preference.

The State of Wisconsin, the Public Service Commission, state agency partners, Tribal Nations, local governments, and Broadband Task Force members have spent more than two years preparing for BEAD implementation through BEAD local planning grants, the 5-year plan, the "Badger the FCC" campaign, development and approval of BEAD Initial Proposal Volumes 1 and 2, and the State Challenge Process. Wisconsin has been making considerable progress in partnership and coordination with local officials, Tribal Nations, internet service providers, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders.

Since the June 6<sup>th</sup> policy notice, the Wisconsin Broadband Office has worked tirelessly to analyze these federal changes and their impact on our BEAD process and to rapidly implement the required changes in the policy notice to comply with the requirement to re-do BEAD subgranting.

Information contained in this report about the BEAD Program was prepared prior to the new changes being announced and may not reflect updated federal guidance that the Wisconsin Broadband Office is continuing to analyze and respond to. Despite the late breaking changes, the Task Force is proud to distribute the 2025 Report, which encapsulates the conversations and collaboration that took place in the last year. The Task Force firmly stands behind its recommendations as presented in this report because they will still help contribute to the core goal of BEAD to ensure Internet for All Wisconsinites and meet state-specific goals and priorities to bridge the digital divide.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The fifth report of the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access (Task Force) continues the ambitious goals set by the Task Force in 2024 and provides forward-looking recommendations that will continue to promote the efficient, strategic expansion of broadband access and adoption across Wisconsin. This 2025 Task Force Report comes at a pivotal time for policy makers and elected officials. Many of the past recommendations that were enacted are resulting in significant measurable progress for internet access and adoption in Wisconsin. Historic investments made in broadband grants in 2021 and 2022 are largely complete and Wisconsin residents are reaping the benefits.

In the past year, internet service providers added 163,000 new fiber internet connections to Wisconsin homes and businesses; 93,000 locations that were unserved last year are now served by highspeed internet service; in just this one year, the number of unserved locations in Wisconsin has decreased by 28 percent. Home internet subscription rates for Wisconsin households are just shy of 90%, a record high and on par with the national average. **There is a lot of progress to celebrate.**

More recently, Task Force recommendations have focused on preparing for the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. Funded as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), the BEAD and Digital Equity Act programs allocate over \$1 billion in federal funding in Wisconsin to address broadband connectivity and internet adoption. The Task Force helped shape the BEAD planning process and, in prior reports, made recommendations to prepare Wisconsin for the once in a generation BEAD program funding. These recommendations have resulted in improved broadband cost and performance data, better permitting resources, additional funding for broadband workforce training and readiness, and enhanced technical assistance and planning resources for local communities, all of which can support upcoming implementation of BEAD-supported projects. **Again, there is a lot of progress to celebrate.**

Yet, in the past year, Wisconsinites faced barriers to continued progress on broadband access, adoption, and affordability. In 2024, more than 427,000 participating households were impacted by the cessation of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). The federally funded ACP was administered by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and offered a \$30 monthly discount for eligible households. The discount program ended in May 2024 when its budget was fully exhausted and no continuing funding was approved. The end of this discount program for low-income households coupled with increasing monthly broadband subscription costs introduces significant uncertainty for affordability efforts moving forward.

Then in May 2025, Wisconsin was notified that the State Digital Equity Planning and Capacity Grants were unilaterally terminated by federal executive action. At the time of the termination, the state and many digital equity stakeholders had spent almost two years getting approved and prepared for the funding by developing the Wisconsin Digital Equity Plan, hosting over 380 outreach meetings, surveying counties and Tribes, and preparing a State Digital Equity Capacity Grant application to NTIA. The state's planned use for the terminated award, which included more than \$13 million in funds initially awarded to Wisconsin, was to fund and grow digital navigator programs in Wisconsin, a key Task Force recommendation from three prior reports. The sudden loss of this critical funding will impact internet adoption and digital skills for Wisconsin residents.

In year five (2025), the Task Force is sharing and celebrating the tremendous progress the State of Wisconsin is making toward broadband access for all. **But the work is not done, and too many Wisconsinites lack adequate internet access, have service that doesn't meet their needs, can't afford internet service, and need additional support and digital skills to fully make use of the internet.** Federal programs can end, change, or get delayed, but when Wisconsin invests funding and makes policy advances, real progress can keep happening.

## Task Force Goals

In 2025, the Task Force continues to emphasize its goals established in the [2024 report](#), which are:

- **By 2029, all homes and businesses will have access to high-speed broadband service that provides a download speed of at least 100 Megabits per second (Mbps) and an upload speed of at least 20 Mbps.**
- **By 2029, all community anchor institutions (CAI) will have access to high-speed broadband service that reliably provides a download speed of at least 1000 Mbps and an upload speed of at least 1000 Mbps.**
- **Where practicable, a strong emphasis and priority should be placed on reaching “future proof” speeds beyond 100/20, up to and including 1000/1000 Mbps for as many homes, businesses, and community anchor institutions as possible.**
- **Fiber technology should be prioritized, but not exclusively required, for public investments where practicable. Also, terrestrial fixed wireless solutions should be pursued in harder to reach areas or as an incremental short-term solution.**

## Task Force 2025 Recommendations

For this fifth annual report of the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access, the Task Force focused its recommendations on four areas: Deployment, Partnership, Functional Adoption, and Preparing for Our Future.

### DEPLOYMENT

#### Continued Investment in State Broadband Programs

- Invest additional state budget funding for broadband expansion to ensure all Wisconsin residents have access to high-speed internet. Prioritize the deployment of fiber technology where practicable and other quality technology solutions in harder to reach areas.
- Where feasible, strategically braid state broadband expansion funding with private, local and federal funds to support broadband deployment and prioritize fiber (including in more remote and less resourced areas of Wisconsin).
- Provide technical assistance to local and tribal governments and continue to explore cost effective ways to fund broadband expansion for communities facing high buildout costs.

## **Permitting**

- Support efficient, transparent, and consistent permitting processes by providing technical assistance to BEAD awardees and internet service providers (ISPs). Publish up to date permitting guidance, web maps, and tools.
- Foster early and ongoing communication between ISPs and permitting authorities at all levels of government to streamline and expediate permitting processes. Consider adopting legislation similar to the Broadband Forward! certification model, which details reasonable costs and automatic approval of permits after a designated time period.
- Explore the creation of a broadband permitting toolkit that has resources for permits that may be required for the construction of broadband projects and specific resources for BEAD awardees. The toolkit should also include detailed information from permitting agencies on typical challenges in their permitting process.

## **Grant Administration**

- Continuously improve, implement, and streamline broadband grant administration, reporting, reimbursement, contracting, and compliance processes while ensuring efficient, accountable and timely deployment of public funding. Provide technical assistance and resources to assist recipients with compliance and reporting.

## **PARTNERSHIP**

### **Broadband Facility Locating**

- Collaborate with infrastructure owners, Diggers Hotline, ISPs, and utility locators to streamline locating processes and ensure timely locates to avoid delays in broadband deployment and construction.
- Increase the availability of design and engineering information to affected entities for grant-funded broadband deployment projects to expedite locating for broadband deployment, including BEAD awardees.
- Make public funding and training available for locators to mitigate potential locate workforce shortages during BEAD construction.
- Establish a compliance system to hold telecommunications utilities and ISPs accountable for failure to complete locates within a required time.

### **Workforce and Training**

- Collaborate with stakeholders – such as workforce development groups, labor organizations, technical colleges, and Tribal governments and state agencies – to address broadband workforce needs for BEAD and other broadband expansion efforts. Foster partnerships between these stakeholders and ISPs to align workforce development efforts with broadband infrastructure needs.

- Invest in and support comprehensive, statewide workforce development efforts, youth apprenticeships, worker training programs and awareness campaigns, to ensure a sufficient, skilled workforce for broadband deployment, operation, and maintenance by allocating funding and offering technical assistance to workforce development organizations.

### **Tribal Coordination**

- Support Tribal Nations in Wisconsin by providing funding and technical assistance for deployment of broadband infrastructure and improving digital adoption.
- Continue to encourage and support coordination with Tribal Nations that are considering and developing partnerships with neighboring local governments and ISPs.
- Develop processes to facilitate collaboration between Tribal Nations and BEAD awardees during permitting and historic preservation reviews. Maintain ongoing communications with Tribal Nations in Wisconsin to ensure consultation and Tribal consent is being sought for grant funded projects on or traversing Tribal lands prior to the awarding of funds.

## **FUNCTIONAL ADOPTION**

### **Affordability**

- Advocate, develop, and implement state-level solutions to maintain broadband affordability for low-income households following the end of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).
- Maintain a list of resources and tools for households impacted by the end of ACP to assist them in accessing affordability internet service.
- Expand availability of the Lifeline Program to more households by providing incentives that encourage internet service providers to become eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs).
- Continue to research, measure, and refine a standardized affordability threshold for internet service in Wisconsin. Publish data and reports on the attainment of affordable broadband across Wisconsin based on the threshold.

### **Digital Skills and Literacy**

- In the absence of federal funds, continue funding and support for digital navigation, adoption, and literacy initiatives to provide Wisconsinites with access, skill development, and assistive technologies for better quality of life. Share information on best practices from those initiatives. Ensure community organizations, community anchor institutions, local governments, philanthropic groups, and other entities engaging in digital skills and literacy work are aware of and pursuing available funding opportunities.
- Continue to improve access to technical support and digital skills education that is relevant for all Wisconsin residents, such as alternative language offerings. Develop, disseminate, and support best practices and trusted resources and supports to increase confidence in accessing the internet and online services safely.

- Strengthen partnerships between state, tribal, and local governments, along with schools, libraries, educational and workforce organizations, internet service providers, and digital inclusion organizations to increase broadband adoption, especially in rural areas. Strengthen these partnerships by addressing barriers such as digital skilling and building trusted relationships.

### **Preparing for our Digital Future**

- Prepare for the development of new technology resources and tools, including chatbots and generative artificial intelligence. Integrate these tools into digital skills education to ensure publicly funded broadband deployments will meet Wisconsin's future technology needs.
- Improve digital literacy and cybersecurity awareness by educating and empowering Wisconsinites to use digital skills and artificial intelligence responsibly, effectively, and in ways that improve their lives.
- Support the recommendations and efforts of the Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence.



# TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Governor Evers appointed members to the Task Force on Broadband Access to provide balanced perspectives, reflect individual's knowledge or expertise, or to represent an organization engaged in the expansion of broadband access, adoption, or affordability. The Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access members include:

**Chris Meyer (Chair)**, Vice President– Business Intelligence and Efficiency, Royal Credit Union

**Bob Abrams**, Senior Managing Consultant, BKD (ret.)

**Robert Earl Baker III**, Founder, RenderTech

**Kwami Barnes**, Broadband Coordinator, Communications Workers of America

**Marta Bechtol**, Executive Director, Educational Communications Board

**Brittany Beyer**, Community Economic Development Specialist, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension

**Salvador L. Carranza**, Board Member, Latino Academy of Workforce Development

**Lori Collins**, President/CEO, SonicNet Inc.

**Angie Dickison**, State Government Affairs Manager, TDS Telecommunications

**Emily Dittmar**, Legislative Director, Wisconsin Educational Media and Technology Association

**Russ Falkenberg**, Board Member, Ntera, LLC

**Chris Her-Xiong**, CEO, Hmong American Peace Academy

**Gail Huycke**, Community Development Broadband Outreach Specialist, University of Wisconsin – Madison, Division of Extension

**Barbara Koldos**, Vice President of Business Development, New North, Inc.

**Howard Marklein**, State Senator (R-Spring Green)

**Jose Martinez**, President/CEO, UMOS

**Jeffrey Mursau**, State Representative (R-Crivitz)

**Brad Pfaff**, State Senator (D-Onalaska)

**Melissa Ratcliff**, State Senator (D-Cottage Grove)

**Michael Rave**, Executive Director of Administration, Ho-Chunk Nation

**Rachel K. Schemelin**, E-Rate and Broadband Education Consultant, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

**Steve Schneider**, Founder, President Emeritus and Director, Bug Tussel Wireless

**Michelle Schuler**, Manager of TechSpark Wisconsin, Microsoft

**Brett Schuppner**, General Manager, Reedsburg Utility Commission/LightSpeed

**Josh Shell**, President, Badgerland Connections

**Dr. Chet Strebe**, Vice President of Business and Technology, Northcentral Technical College

**Randy Udell**, State Representative (D-Fitchburg)

**Chad Young**, CEO/General Manager, Norvado

# LETTER FROM PSC CHAIR, SUMMER STRAND

In 2020, Governor Tony Evers established the Broadband Access Task Force to research and recommend forward-looking broadband policies and initiatives. Over the last five years, Governor Evers' leadership and the efforts and guidance of the Task Force helped drive substantial progress toward these goals. As illustrated in this 2025 Broadband Access Task Force Report, the planning undertaken, partnerships developed, and investments made thus far are significant and impactful, furthering efforts to expand high-speed internet, improve internet affordability, and equip more Wisconsinites with the skills and resources needed to participate in our digital society.



Since the Task Force's 2024 report, Wisconsin has reached several important milestones on the quest to bridge the digital divide. The Public Service Commission (PSC) officially began administering the grant allocation phase of the Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program to fund broadband infrastructure projects throughout the state. We continued to execute the Digital Equity Plan to ensure all people in Wisconsin have the digital literacy and device access necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, education, and obtaining essential services. To offset the impacts of the federal Affordable Connectivity Program's expiration, the PSC helped link customers with other opportunities for affordable internet service.

These achievements would not have been possible without the expertise and contributions of the Governor's Broadband Access Task Force. We are grateful and appreciative of the vision, participation, and collaboration put forth by Task Force members and stakeholders, including community-based organizations, industry representatives, and the public.

Unfortunately, recent changes at the federal level of government may significantly undermine Wisconsin's efforts to expand broadband access. This uncertainty threatens to delay the deployment of much-needed broadband infrastructure and to withhold digital skills training and devices from those who need them most.

The 2025 Broadband Access Task Force report includes crucial recommendations to mitigate the risks of these federal changes and to expedite the availability of affordable, reliable internet service for all Wisconsinites. It is incumbent on our state leaders to heed this call and implement the Task Force's recommendations in order to avoid these obstacles and continue progress on our shared broadband goals.

Once again, the work undertaken by the Task Force this year was a great team effort by everyone involved. Special thanks to each member of the Task Force, to Chris Meyer for serving as Chair, and to Jessica Beckendorf from UW-Extension for facilitating Task Force discussions. Last but certainly not least, a huge thank you to the incredibly hardworking Wisconsin Broadband Office team for their Task Force support and unparalleled dedication to providing accessible and affordable high-speed internet for all people in Wisconsin.

Despite the significant progress made, a great deal of work remains. I am confident that under Governor Evers' leadership and with the Task Force's ongoing support, we can overcome the current challenges and continue to accomplish our internet access, affordability, and adoption goals.

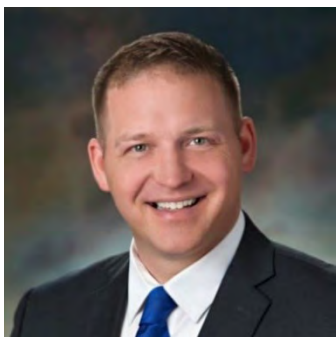
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Su St".

**Summer Strand**

Chairperson, Public Service Commission of Wisconsin

# LETTER FROM TASK FORCE CHAIR, CHRIS MEYER



Honorable Governor Evers, Members of the Legislature, Public Service Commission, Wisconsin Broadband Office, Presenters, Subject Matter Experts, Committee Members, and Residents of the State of Wisconsin,

As the chair of the Governor's Broadband Taskforce, it is my honor to present our annual report. This report encapsulates the diligent efforts and significant accomplishments of our committee over the past year.

First, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Governor Evers for his unwavering support and vision for expanding broadband access across our state. I also thank the members of the Legislature for their commitment to advancing policies that promote broadband expansion and digital inclusion. The Public Service Commission and Wisconsin Broadband Office have been instrumental in guiding and implementing our initiatives, and their expertise has been invaluable.

I would like to acknowledge the numerous presenters and subject matter experts who have shared their insights and knowledge with us. Their contributions have greatly enriched our discussions and helped shape our recommendations. A special thank you goes to the members of the Task Force for their dedication and hard work. Your collaboration and perseverance have been the driving force behind our progress. I also extend my appreciation to your employers for supporting your involvement in this important effort.

Over the past year, we have made significant strides in improving broadband access. Our key accomplishments include the successful implementation of several pilot projects, the establishment of new partnerships with local communities, and the development of comprehensive strategies to address connectivity gaps. Notably, broadband availability continued to improve; 163,000 homes and businesses received access to new fiber internet service.

Looking ahead, our recommendations for next year focus on further expanding broadband infrastructure, enhancing digital literacy programs, and fostering innovation in broadband technology. We believe these steps will continue to bridge the digital divide and ensure all residents have access to reliable and affordable internet services.

Thank you once again for your support and contributions. Together we are making a meaningful impact on the future of broadband in our state.

Forward,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'CM', written over a light blue horizontal line.

**Chris Meyer**

Chair, Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge several individuals for their participation and effort in making this Task Force a success.

Thank you to our presenters, including:

- **Gail Huycke**, Community Development Broadband Outreach Specialist, University of Wisconsin – Madison, Division of Extension
- **Chris Stark**, Digital Equity and Inclusion Outreach Specialist, University of Wisconsin – Madison, Division of Extension
- **Jessica Beckendorf**, Community Economic Development Broadband Partnership Specialist, University of Wisconsin – Madison, Division of Extension
- **Brittany Beyer**, Broadband Resource Procurement Specialist, University of Wisconsin – Madison, Division of Extension
- **John Parish**, Broadband Planning Specialist, University of Wisconsin – Madison, Division of Extension
- **Amy Pechacek**, Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development
- **Drew Garner**, Director of Policy Engagement, Benton Institute for Broadband and Society
- **Dr. Stacy Martin**, Digital Access and Engagement Director, United Way of Greater Chippewa Valley

And thank you to:

- **Jessica Beckendorf** for her help with facilitation, exploration, and coordination of Task Force meetings.
- Wisconsin Broadband Office and other Public Service Commission of Wisconsin staff for their work on Task Force meetings and this report, including: **Bernard Apeku, Sawyer Boldt, Sarah Curtin, Joe Fontaine, Alyssa Kenney, Tara Kiley, Josie Lathrop, Mark Leonard, Christina Luna, Matthew Marcus, Katie Mumm, Hannah Peschek, Tom Scholten, Colter Sikora, Jennifer Smith, Meghan Sovey, and Rory Tikalsky.**



# TASK FORCE PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

The Task Force was established by Governor Tony Evers under [Executive Order 80](#) on July 14, 2020. Task Force members are selected and appointed by Governor Tony Evers. On January 4, 2023, Governor Tony Evers issued [Executive Order 182](#), relating to the recreation of Non-Statutory Committees, including this Task Force. The Task Force's charge is:

"Advise the Governor and Wisconsin State Legislature on broadband actions and policy, including strategies for successfully expanding high speed internet access to every residence, business, and institution in the state; initiatives for digital inclusion; and pathways to unlocking and optimizing the benefits of statewide, affordable access to broadband for all communities in Wisconsin."

This year's Task Force began its work in January 2025 and concluded in May 2025. The work of the Task Force was coordinated by a five-member team, which included Task Force Chair Christopher Meyer, Wisconsin Broadband Office Broadband Planning and Policy Coordinator Mark Leonard, the State Broadband and Digital Equity Director Alyssa Kenney, Broadband Expansion Manager Rory Tikalsky, and University of Wisconsin Division of Extension (UW Extension) Community Economic Development Broadband Partnership Specialist Jessica Beckendorf, who served as Task Force facilitator. The coordination team held debrief meetings after each Task Force meeting (except after the April in-person meeting), met monthly, and communicated through email to plan every meeting's agenda and invited speakers, identify potential resources useful to the Task Force, and monitor progress towards Task Force goals.

A total of five Task Force meetings were held from January to May. These meetings focused on identifying and refining recommendations. In the first portion of each meeting, the Task Force heard updates from the PSC and presentations from invited agencies and stakeholders on topics relevant to the day's topic. In the second portion of each meeting, Task Force members participated in a facilitated discussion related to the day's presentations. Discussions were designed to capture Task Force member's knowledge and were structured such that there were either whole group discussions or members initially met as small groups before discussing as a whole group. PSC staff members served as facilitators during the small group discussions, recording comments and input onto a publicly viewable Google document/slides that served as a temporary workspace for virtual meetings and onto written notes for the in-person meeting, which were then transcribed to a Google document. The Google documents were downloaded for preservation and used as a resource during the writing of this report and its recommendations.

The Task Force met virtually for every meeting except for the meeting on April 24, 2025, which was held in-person at the Hill Farms State Office Building in Madison. After an initial draft of recommendations at the April in-person meeting, Task Force members worked during the May meeting to refine the recommendations. Virtual meetings were conducted via Zoom, and a link to the Zoom meeting room was made available as part of the publicly posted agenda. Each meeting included time for public comment.

## PRESENTATIONS TO AND WORK OF THE TASK FORCE

### January 2025

- Public Service Commission provides updates on federal broadband infrastructure expansion and Digital Equity Program
- Community Engagement and Technical Assistance Presentation from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension

### February 2025

- Update from the Public Service Commission
- Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence Presentation from Amy Pechacek, Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

### March 2025

- Presentation on Post Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) from Drew Garner, Director of Policy Engagement, Benton Institute for Broadband and Society
- Public Service Commission provides updates on BEAD and Digital Equity Program Implementation

### April 2025

- In-person meeting held at the State Hill Farms Office Building in Madison to draft Task Force recommendations for the 2025 Annual Report
- Public Service Commission provides updates on broadband deployment in Wisconsin, BEAD and Digital Equity Programs, Wisconsin Broadband Almanac, and progress on previous years' Task Force recommendations

### May 2025

- Public Service Commission provides updates on BEAD and Digital Equity Programs
- Presentation on Broadband Adoption from Dr. Stacy Martin, Digital Access & Engagement Director, United Way of Greater Chippewa Valley
- Task Force discussion on 2025 Annual Report recommendations

# CURRENT STATE OF BROADBAND ACCESS

From 2024 to 2025, broadband availability improved significantly, with 163,000 households and businesses receiving new access to fiber internet service. Further, the proportion of Wisconsinites that lack access to even basic broadband of 25/3 Mbps decreased from 5.8% to 4.1%. As of December 31, 2024, 88.6% of Wisconsin households and businesses have access to high-speed broadband of 100/20 Mbps or faster. Improvements from 2024 to 2025 are driven in large part by historic investments in broadband expansion under the two largest grant rounds in Commission history; \$100 million awarded in 2021 under the ARPA Broadband Access Program, which was allocated by the Evers administration to prioritize broadband spending), and \$125 million awarded in 2022 under the State Broadband Expansion Program. As discussed below, a majority of these awarded projects have completed in the last year and have connected approximately 63,000 new households since the last report. Continued private investment and other federal funding programs also contribute to these increases year-over-year.

In May 2025, the FCC released its most recent version of the [National Broadband Map](#), demonstrating availability as of December 31, 2024. A broadband serviceable location is defined as a location “where fixed broadband internet access service is or could be installed.” As shown in Table 1, the National Broadband Map lists 2,300,000 broadband serviceable locations in Wisconsin. As seen in the table, **262,000 (11.4%) locations lack access to service of 100/20 Mbps or better from a non-satellite technology, meaning they are “unserved.”** Of these, 94,000 (4.1%) lack access to even basic broadband service of 25/3 Mbps.

Table 1

Speed	Locations	Percent
1000/1000 Mbps or better	1,031,000	44.7%
100/20 to 999/999 Mbps	1,007,000	43.7%
25/3 to 99/19 Mbps	168,000	7.3%
Below 25/3 Mbps	94,000	4.1%
Total	2,300,000	100%

Figure 1

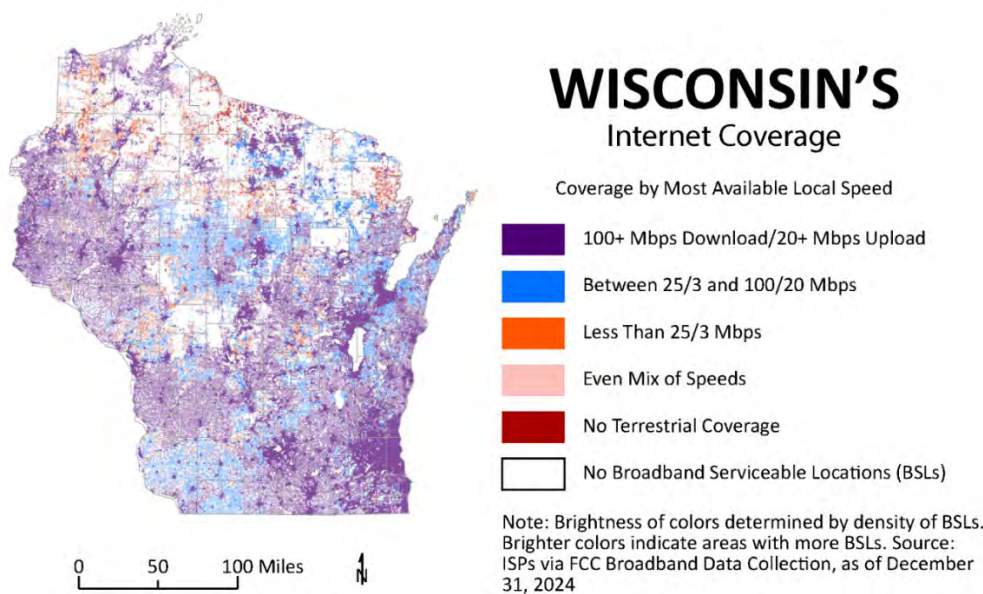


Figure 1 shows the availability of service by speed throughout Wisconsin. In Figure 1, orange represents locations lacking 25/3 Mbps service, blue represents locations lacking 100/20 Mbps service, and purple represents served locations. Darker, more saturated areas are those with a larger density of locations.

CHANGE OVER TIME

Internet service providers report updated availability information to the FCC every six months, providing a clear measurement of progress over time. Between December 31, 2023, and December 31, 2024, ongoing private investment and grant-funded construction, including the completion of projects funded by the ARPA Broadband Expansion Program and the 2022 State Broadband Expansion grants, produced approximately 163,000 additional locations able to access the internet from a fiber connection. Overall, approximately **93,000 more locations are “served” compared to the previous year, meaning they now have access to service of at least 100/20 Mbps.**

The Task Force has a goal that by 2029, all homes and businesses have access to high-speed service of at least 100/20. Table 2 below shows significant progress to this goal since 2022, the first year that location-level data reporting was available. The Task Force also has a goal that as many locations as possible reach 1000/1000 (gigabit) or faster service, which now represents 44.7% under the most recent data. The Task Force goal to ensure gigabit service to all community anchor institutions in Wisconsin remains difficult to measure because the FCC does not require internet service providers to report their service availability to locations that subscribe to enterprise-tier service. However, as part of its BEAD implementation, the WBO has begun the process of collecting this data, which will inform future reports.

Table 2

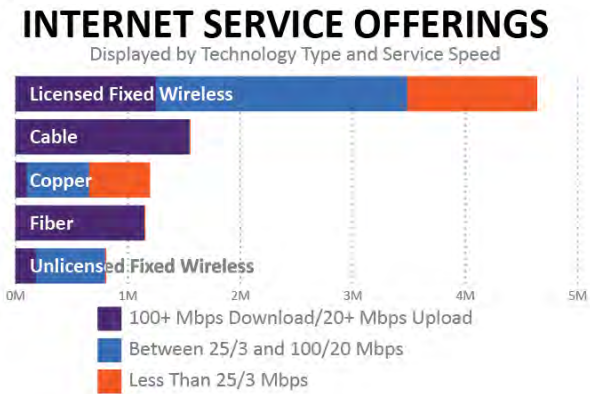
	1000/1000 Mbps or better	100/20 to 999/999 Mbps	25/3 to 99/19 Mbps	Below 25/3 Mbps
Dec 31, 2024	44.7%	43.7%	7.3%	4.1%
Dec 31, 2023	35.6%	48.8%	10.2%	5.8%
Dec 31, 2022	28.7%	55.5%	7.7%	8.0%

The progress over the year is impressive, and it is clear that public and private investments continue to close the gap in high need areas of Wisconsin. However, gaps still exist, and FCC-based availability data remains incomplete in certain areas, especially for community anchor institutions.

AVAILABILITY BY TECHNOLOGY

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the approximately 9.8 million service offerings in Wisconsin among various technologies and BEAD speed definitions. A service offering is one internet service provider’s advertised service for a location. Some locations have multiple offerings, which results in approximately 9.8 million offerings across 2.3 million locations. As seen in the graphic, cable and fiber offer the highest speeds service, while copper and fixed wireless provide a mix of speeds, mostly under 100/20.

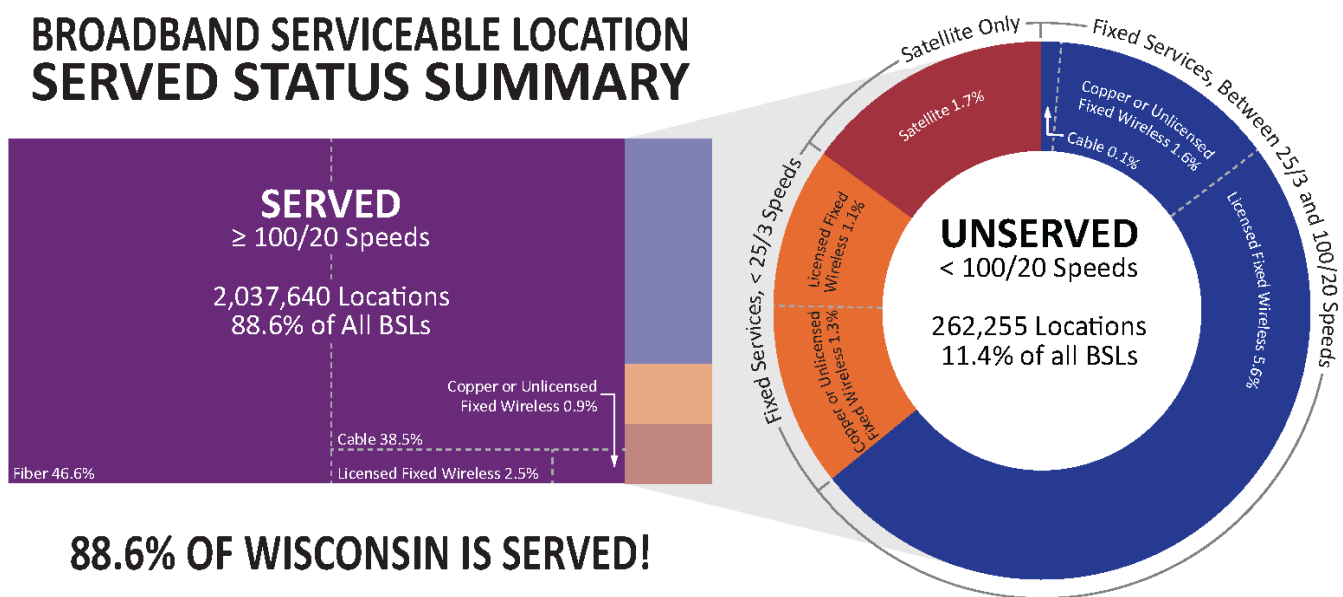
Figure 2



BEST AVAILABLE SERVICE FOR ALL WISCONSIN LOCATIONS

Figure 3 below shows how Wisconsin service offerings result in actual served locations using service reporting as of December 31, 2024. For locations with access to high-speed service of 100/20 or better (purple boxes), most all have service from a fiber provider, totaling 1,071,000 locations. For those with 100/20 speeds but without fiber, an additional 886,000 have cable service and 80,000 have copper or fixed wireless service. The pie chart below shows the breakdown of service availability for unserved locations, which have service typically from copper or fixed wireless. Approximately 64% (168,000 locations) of unserved locations have some type of service offering 25/3 or better, primarily from licensed fixed wireless. The remaining 36% (94,000 locations) lack access to even basic 25/3 service, which includes 15% of locations (39,000) that have access only to satellite service.

Figure 3



AVAILABILITY BY COUNTY

Figure 4 below shows the breakdown of service availability by county. Progress towards universal access is not uniform across the state, and many counties still have significant proportions of locations that lack 100/20 or better service. Despite these gaps, ongoing investments from state and federal programs are driving significant improvements in certain counties. However, due to the variety of eligibility criteria and funding mechanisms, not all areas of the state benefit equally from in-progress funding, especially under FCC programs like E-ACAM and RDOF.

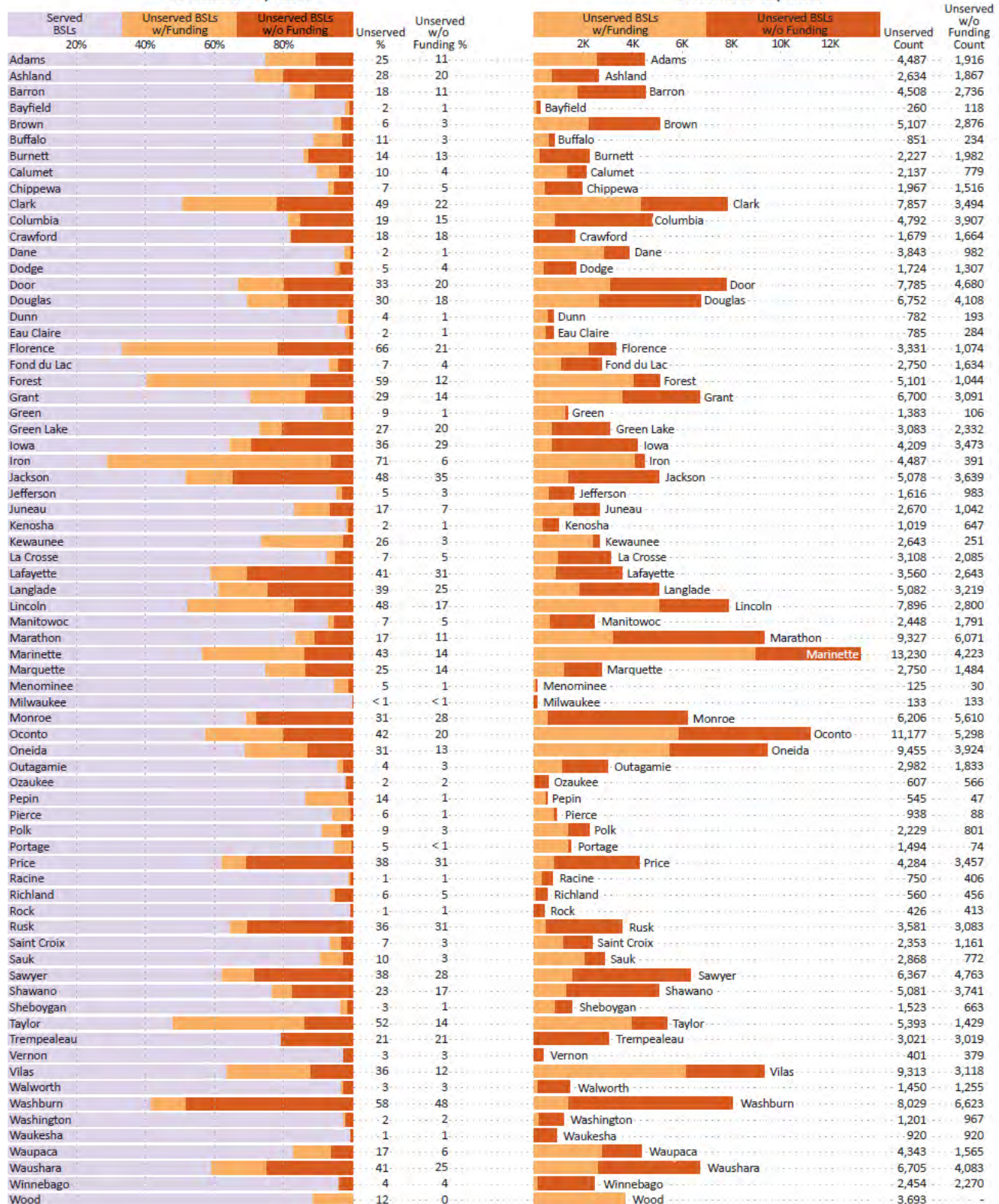


Figure 4

# SUMMARY OF UNSERVED BROADBAND SERVICEABLE LOCATIONS, BY COUNTY

Service Status Rates by County,  
December 31, 2024

Unservd Locations by County,  
December 31, 2024



## WISCONSIN BROADBAND MAP

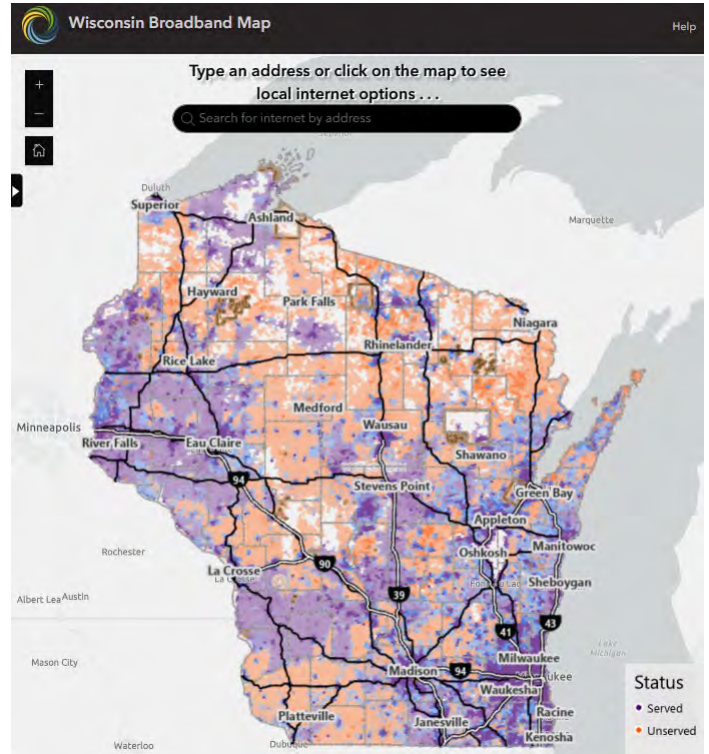
During 2024-2025, the Wisconsin Broadband Office (WBO) redesigned and launched a new version of the [Wisconsin Broadband Map](#). The new mapping tool provides an easy interface to help answer the questions: “Do I have broadband service? If not, when will I get it? Who are my providers?” The map allows users to search by individual address and interact with the map to identify the service status, internet service providers, and broadband technology types and advertised speeds for locations in Wisconsin. In addition to service availability, the broadband map also shows information on ongoing broadband projects to bring service to unserved areas funded through state or federal programs.

The map also includes detailed boundaries for Tribal Nations and local governments, and a cross-reference to the [Internet Discount Finder](#) to ensure eligible households are aware of potential discounted service in their area.

## SUMMARY

Most recently available broadband mapping data provides a detailed picture of internet availability in Wisconsin. While difficulties remain in collecting and verifying broadband availability data, it is clear a trend towards universal service continues in Wisconsin, led primarily by new fiber deployments. On December 31, 2023, 15.9% of Wisconsinites lacked access to service of 100/20 Mbps or better, and that number has now fallen to 11.4%. Grant and privately funded investments continued at an astonishing pace in 2024, that is expected to continue with further state and federal investment. However, availability of funding remains essential as the last to connect locations are those that are the highest cost, most remote, and most technologically challenging to serve. The Task Force supports robust state budget investment as the cornerstone to ensuring high-speed internet for all.

Figure 5



# DIGITAL EQUITY EFFORTS

Availability of broadband infrastructure alone is not enough to solve the digital divide for all Wisconsin residents. Targeted strategies for internet adoption, device access, digital literacy and affordable service are critical to make broadband and technology available for all.

The Wisconsin Broadband Office works to ensure that all individuals and communities in Wisconsin have access to broadband technology. The Task Force recognizes that digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning and access to essential services and that targeted digital inclusion strategies are needed to ensure all Wisconsin residents and communities can make full use of the internet.

Wisconsin's goals related to Digital Equity are laid out in the [Wisconsin Digital Equity Plan](#). Over the past year, the WBO has begun implementing activities from the Wisconsin Digital Equity Plan.

In November 2024, the State of Wisconsin was awarded \$13.2 million from NTIA for Digital Equity Capacity Grants to implement activities from the plan. The Digital Equity Capacity Grant was funded as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), appropriated by Congress, and includes funding for programs and services to help advance internet adoption and digital skills for Wisconsin residents. In March 2025, the Commission opened a competitive grant application for eligible entities. The grant program was designed to improve digital skills and internet adoption support for low-income households, veterans, people with disabilities, older adults, rural residents and other Wisconsin residents who need programs and support to access and make use of the internet. In this initial grant application round, the Commission made available \$9.5 million in grants for a three-year performance period under the Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program for Digital Navigator Grants and Digital Opportunity Coalition Grants. The application window was planned to close on May 20, 2025.

On May 9, 2025, the Commission, along with other states, was notified that the State Digital Equity Planning and Capacity Grants were unilaterally terminated by federal executive action. The Commission was accepting competitive grant applications when the termination notice was received.

Due to the federal termination of the program, the Commission was required to close the Digital Equity Capacity Grant round and stop accepting applications on May 13, 2025. Applicants were notified that their submitted applications would not be reviewed or considered for funding. Despite the federal grant program cancellation, Governor Evers and the Commission remain committed to the grant program's objectives. The Task Force considered the Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program as a key strategy to increase internet adoption and digital skills through additional digital navigator programs. With the unexpected termination of funding, the Task Force recommendation to continue funding and support for digital navigation, adoption, and literacy initiatives to provide Wisconsinites with access, skill development, and assistive technologies for better quality of life became even more critical.



## AFFORDABILITY

Affordability remains one of the most persistent barriers to broadband adoption across Wisconsin, even in areas with broadband service. Using Wisconsin's median monthly income as a benchmark and setting a reasonable affordability threshold at 1.17% of gross monthly income, it is estimated that 39% of households in served areas of Wisconsin are considered cost burdened. For census block groups that are below 200% of the federal poverty line (\$62,400 for a family of four in 2024), this amount raises to 72% of households. This means their monthly broadband service plan costs too much relative to their available budget. Broadband pricing generally declines with increased population density, but this does not always translate to affordability. Many urban and rural counties alike experience significant cost burdens relative to household income. Nationally, [data from the Pew Research Center](#) shows that households earning less than \$30,000 per year are the least likely to have home broadband. However, broadband use has increased among middle-income households, with usage rising from 57% to 78% between 2010 and 2024 for those earning between \$30,000-\$69,999.

Figure 6

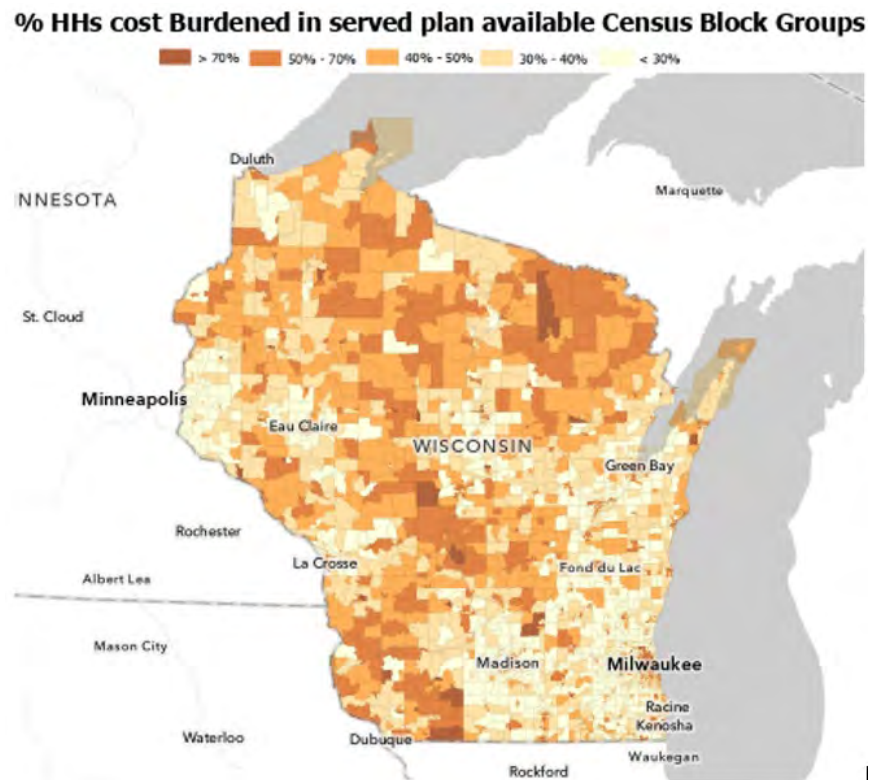
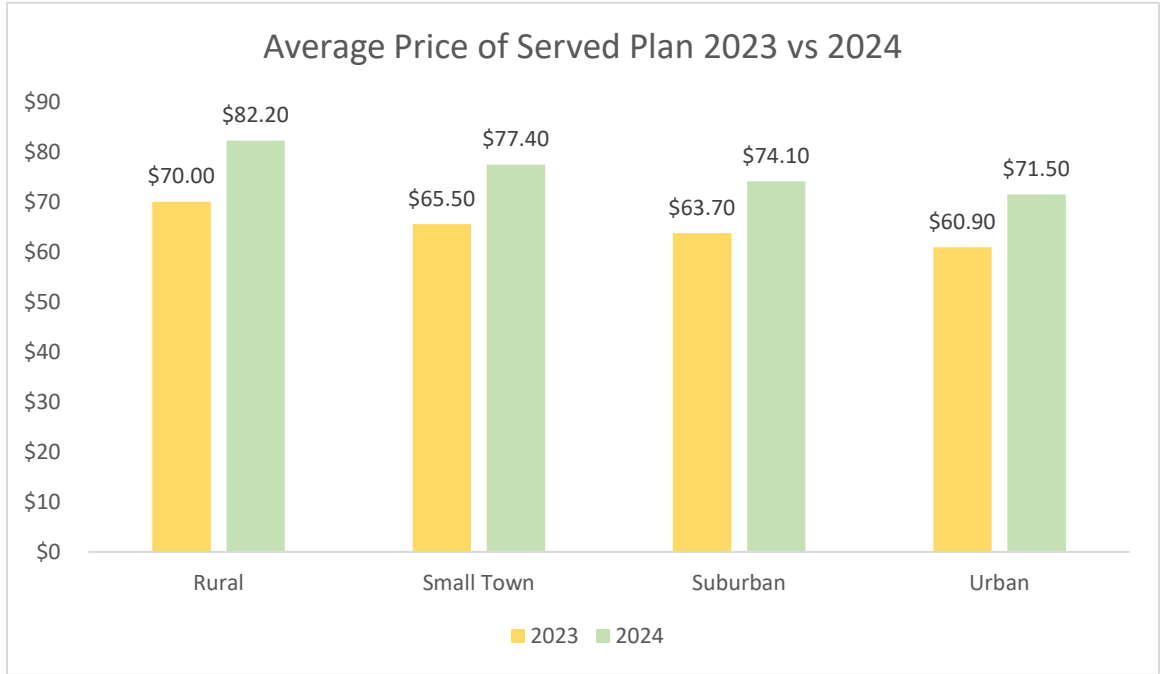


Figure 6 shows the proportion of households that are cost burdened across Wisconsin. As seen in the map, cost burden is not exclusively an urban or rural issue, and there is significant variability throughout Wisconsin because of varied internet service provider pricing and incomes in different areas of the state.

The average price of broadband in Wisconsin rose significantly in 2024, up approximately 17% in urban and rural areas. Table 3 shows how broadband pricing varies between geographies, with rural areas facing the highest average price for a served broadband plan.

Table 3



The Affordable Connectivity

Program (ACP), funded through the IIJA and administered by the FCC, offered a \$30 monthly discount for eligible households and up to \$75 for qualifying Tribal lands. In Wisconsin, 427,000 households — about one in six Wisconsinites — enrolled in ACP out of an estimated 875,000 eligible households. However, the program ended in May 2024 when its \$14.2 billion budget was fully exhausted. Despite advocacy from Governor Evers, PSC Chair Strand, and other Wisconsin officials, no replacement program or extension funding has been enacted by the federal government. The lack of a replacement introduces significant uncertainty for affordability efforts moving forward, highlighting the importance of addressing affordability in state-level broadband planning.

The Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (TBCP) may play a critical role in affordability and access for Tribal communities. The TBCP provides direct grants to tribal governments for broadband deployment and adoption activities, including affordability requirements. Tribal Nations in Wisconsin have applied for grant funds through this program and received funding to address access and affordability gaps, however, continued funding and coordination are essential as the Tribal specific benefits of the ACP are no longer available.

The FCC’s Lifeline Program and PSC’s complementary [State Lifeline Program](#) continue to offer monthly subsidies for certain phone and data services. Households are eligible if their income is below 135% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) or they participate in qualifying federal assistance programs. In Wisconsin, approximately 122,000 households currently participate in both Lifeline programs – about 19% of those eligible. While helpful, these programs serve only a fraction of those in need and offer limited direct customer support compared to the now defunct ACP.

[A recent study by the Brattle Group](#) finds that the economic benefits of ACP outweigh its costs. These benefits occur largely in the education and healthcare sectors. ACP funding improves students’ ability to access broadband, which thereby improves educational attainment and subsequently benefits the students’ lifetime earnings. By improving access to telehealth, ACP generated an estimated \$28.9-\$29.5 billion in annual healthcare cost savings.



## ADOPTION

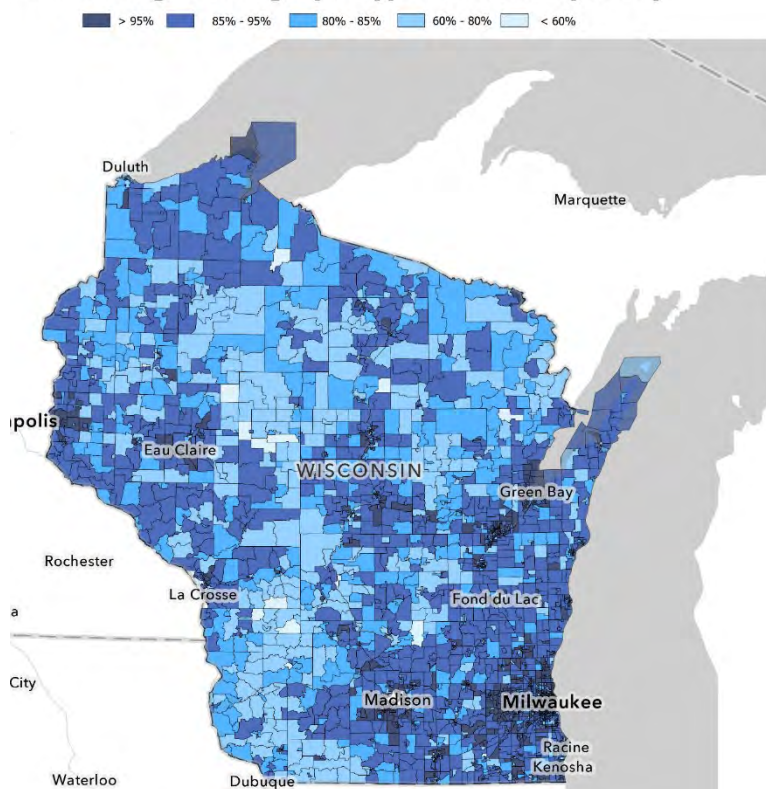
A key tenet of digital equity is broadband adoption. Broadband adoption refers to the residential subscribership to high-speed internet access. Broadband adoption is achieved when people are connected to the internet using appropriate devices and have the skills and information specific to their needs. Choosing not to subscribe to internet services is one of the reasons broadband adoption gaps exist. Adoption gaps are also caused by affordability, digital readiness and a user's need for internet at home.

The U.S. Census Bureau regularly conducts the [Computer and Internet Use Survey](#). The most recent survey data shows that national internet adoption rates have continued to rise, with 89.7% of households having a broadband internet subscription. In Wisconsin, the adoption rate stands at 89.2%, slightly below the national average, but an increase from 87.7% in the previous year. The survey also shows that Wisconsin still lags the national average for households with a computer, at 94.0% in

Wisconsin compared to 94.8% nationally. This is a 1.1% improvement in households with a computer in Wisconsin from the previous year. It is important to recognize that the braiding of state and federal funding, along with the continued efforts of digital equity practitioners, has been key to the increased success of broadband adoption in Wisconsin, and that supporting these efforts must continue to close the digital divide. Figure 7 shows the variability in household adoption rates across Wisconsin.

Figure 7

### % HHs Digital Usage (all types of subscriptions)



# IN PROGRESS: STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING FOR INFRASTRUCTURE, ADOPTION, & EQUITY

Both state and federal funds play a key role in ensuring internet for all in Wisconsin. While the Wisconsin Broadband Office prepares to award federal BEAD program funding in 2025, it continues to administer a high volume of grant awards, which are quickly connecting new households. As noted previously, approximately 262,000 locations are still unserved in Wisconsin. However, an estimated 104,306 of those locations are already planned to be built with new fiber service under state or federal funding awards.

The accelerating deployment progress across Wisconsin is undoubtedly driven by significant state and federal investments in broadband grants from recent years. Table 4 shows locations that are “in progress” of receiving built internet of at least 100/20 Mbps speeds under a state or federally funded grant and not already served as of December 31, 2024. These in-progress investments lay the path for future connectivity for many locations. However, planned funding does not always translate into completed construction and recipient defaults on federal funding awards and stalls in program implementation under BEAD may result in significant shortfalls and delays in connectivity.

State-administered programs represent a relatively small proportion of locations in Table 4 because construction continues at a brisk pace. As households are connected, they are no longer included in the table. In 2021 and 2022, the Commission awarded a historic total of \$225 million in grant funds, which have largely completed construction by the end of 2024, increasing availability of fiber service to approximately 63,000 locations since the last report. Remaining locations in progress are primarily from the \$16.6 million State Broadband Expansion Grant round awarded in 2023 and the \$43.2 million Capital Projects Fund Broadband Infrastructure round awarded in 2024.

Table 4

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Program Name</u>	<u>Locations in Progress</u>
<b>Public Service Commission of Wisconsin</b>	State American Rescue Plan Act Broadband Access	3,118
	State Broadband Expansion	11,029
	State Capital Projects Fund Broadband Infrastructure	8,269
<b>Federal Communications Commission</b>	Connect America Fund Phase II	3
	Enhanced Alternative Connect America Cost Model	31,358
	Rural Digital Opportunity Fund	51,739
	Telephone Loan Program	238
<b>National Telecommunications and Information Administration</b>	Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program NOFO 1	1,774
	Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program NOFO 2	615
<b>U.S. Department of Agriculture</b>	Community Connect Grant Program	915
	Rural EConnectivity (ReConnect) Grant and Loan Program	3,738
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>104,306</b> <b>(Unique Locations)</b>
<i>Note: Due to instances where multiple awards affect a single location, the table total does reflect the sum of all in progress awards.</i>		

## IMPACT OF STATE-ADMINISTERED FUNDING

Since 2019, the Commission has awarded 262 grants totaling \$201 million through the state-funded Broadband Expansion Grant Program for projects to build broadband infrastructure in Wisconsin. Additional state-administered federal funding has supported an additional 125 grants, totaling \$148 million. Combined, these grants supported new or improved broadband service to over 410,000 homes and businesses in Wisconsin.

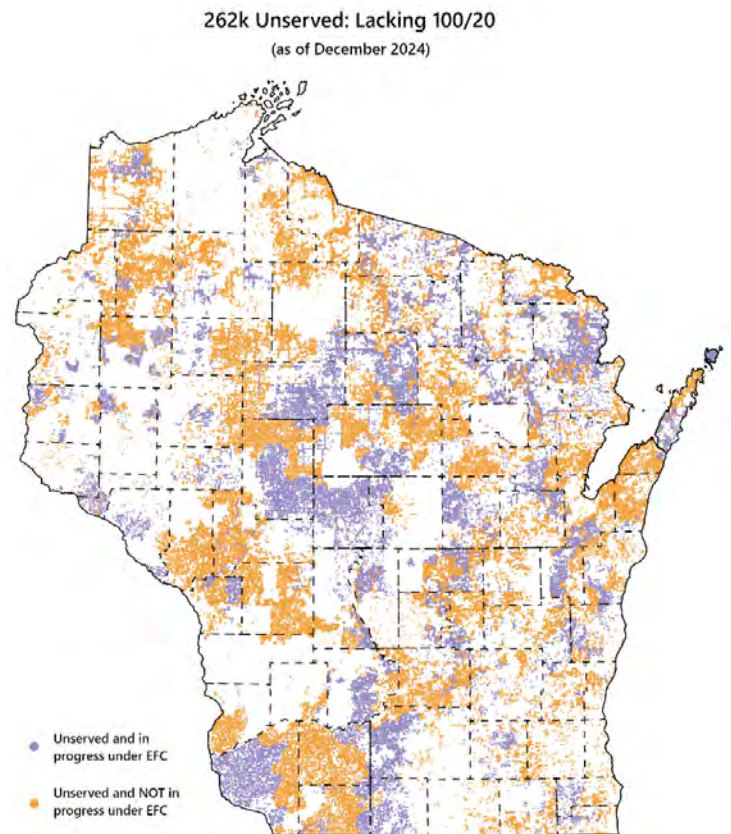
The two largest grant rounds in Wisconsin history were awarded in 2021 and 2022, totaling \$225 million in funding. Most of these projects have been completed and closed, leading to an estimated 63,000 locations gaining access to fiber under state-administered grants in the past year. From July 2024 through June 2025, a total of 58 projects closed under the State Broadband Expansion Grant Program and 47 closed under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Broadband Access Program. Combined, these completed projects have impacted approximately 174,500 locations, consisting of 63,000 locations with new last-mile fiber

connections, 89,000 locations with new or improved fixed wireless service, and 22,000 locations with improved middle mile infrastructure. The Commission also continues to administer the 28 projects awarded under the Capital Projects Fund (CPF) Broadband Infrastructure Program in 2024. As of writing, two CPF projects have completed construction, and nine other projects are over 90% completed.

As of June 2025, approximately 90 grants totaling almost \$138 million remain open and in progress, which includes 55 grants for over \$83 million that are planned to be complete by December 31, 2025. Another 35 state-administered grants totaling approximately \$54 million are scheduled to remain in progress into future years. As seen in Figure 8, an estimated 22,000 locations that lack access to 100/20 Mbps service remain in progress under state-administered awards.

As projects supported by previous grant rounds reach completion in Wisconsin, upcoming federal investments under the BEAD program are coming to the grant forefront to continue pursuit of internet access for all. However, despite the transition to federally funded broadband grants, state funds continue to form a critical foundation to the long-term success of broadband expansion in Wisconsin. In light of the uncertainty regarding federal deployment timelines and the likelihood that the funding levels and structure of the BEAD program will leave some households unable to access high-speed, future proof internet, the Task Force considers state funding essential to ensure all Wisconsinites can access high-speed internet and ensure Wisconsinites are not being left behind. As the 2025-2027 state budget process progresses, the Task Force continues to strongly recommend additional state funding for broadband expansion efforts to ensure robust,

Figure 8



timely deployment of needed broadband infrastructure and to meet the state's ambitious goals of getting all Wisconsinites connected to high-speed broadband service in this decade. The Task Force recommends and is aligned with the Governor's proposed budget that additional investments in the state Broadband Expansion Program are needed to meet the state's broadband needs that will not be addressed with federal funds. The Task Force sees state funding as critical to fill gaps caused by federal funding programs and to upgrade the deployment of short-term infrastructure to ensure high-speed, future proof internet for all Wisconsinites. On June 17, 2025, the Wisconsin Legislative Joint Committee on Finance voted against any additional state funding for the State Broadband Expansion Grant Program during the 2025 – 2027 biennium.

## **CAPITAL PROJECTS FUND DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY AND NAVIGATORS PROGRAM**

In September of 2024, the Commission awarded \$27.8 million in federal funds through the [Capital Project Fund Digital Connectivity and Navigators Program](#) to promote digital connectivity by both deploying computing devices, such as computers, laptops, and tablets, for eligible households to access and through promoting the installation of Wi-Fi equipment in eligible multi-dwelling unit (MDU) buildings. Both approaches include a provision for digital navigation services to ensure Wisconsinites can make full use of the internet for work, education, health monitoring, and other essential activities. This is the largest allocation of adoption-focused funding to date in Wisconsin. Of the eleven awarded projects, two are MDU Wi-Fi projects and all include a form of digital device deployment and digital navigators. The grant program is expected to deploy over 52,000 devices to eligible households and provide Wi-Fi access to 33,000 households across the entire state.

## **BROADBAND EQUITY, ACCESS & DEPLOYMENT (BEAD) PROGRAM**

Throughout 2024-2025, the WBO continued to take steps to prepare for and implement the federal BEAD Program. In 2024, the Commission transitioned from planning and outreach to implementation of the approved challenge and subgranting processes. From April 29, 2024 to August 20, 2025, as outlined in the approved [Initial Proposal Volume One](#), the Commission implemented the BEAD Challenge Process to validate and ensure locations lacking access to high-speed broadband were made eligible for BEAD funding. The WBO processed thousands of challenges from local governments, internet service providers, and community organizations. The challenge process concluded in August and on November 19, 2024, NTIA approved [Wisconsin's Challenge Process results](#), establishing 206,715 broadband serviceable locations (BSLs) eligible for BEAD funding.

On July 29, 2024, NTIA approved Wisconsin's [Initial Proposal Volume Two](#), which outlines the subgranting process for the BEAD program. The subgranting process began with the opening of the Letter of Intent (LOI) Phase for applicants intending to participate in grant rounds one and two. The LOI requires entities interested in applying for BEAD funds to demonstrate they have the managerial, operational, technical, and financial capabilities to construct and maintain BEAD funded projects. The Commission approved [31 entities](#) to proceed onto the subgranting rounds. Next, on February 14, 2025, the Commission opened the [Alternative Technology LOI Phase](#) for entities not approved through the LOI phase for round one and two and that are interested in applying for BEAD funds in round three for projects utilizing alternative technologies, such as unlicensed fixed wireless and satellite technologies. [Five entities](#) that were approved through the LOI phase for rounds one and two were also approved for alternative technology application submission in round three.



On January 13, 2025, the Commission opened round one of the BEAD subgranting process, then [closed round one on February 25, 2025](#). Following the closure of round one, Commission staff completed their review of the 425 received applications requesting a cumulative total of \$2.98 billion in BEAD funds representing 95% of BEAD-eligible locations, and notified applicants of the [preliminary BEAD round one award results](#). On May 7, 2025, the Commission [opened BEAD grant round two](#) and provided a summary of remaining eligible BEAD project units. Following the closure of round two, 98% of all eligible locations received an application. After round three, the PSC will finalize its allocation of funding to all eligible locations through negotiations with BEAD participants to fill any gaps between projects and remaining straggler locations. Finally, preliminary allocation of funding will be made available for public comment, then submitted to NTIA.

In April, NTIA issued a [Notice of Programmatic Waiver](#), which granted all states a 90-day extension for the submission of their BEAD Final Proposal. The extension was provided while the current administration considers updated guidance to “to remove unnecessary rules and mandates, to improve efficiency, take a more technology-neutral approach, cut unnecessary red tape, and streamline deployment.” It is anticipated that the extension will allow additional time for any necessary changes to Wisconsin’s subgranting process that might result from new requirements. Wisconsin’s deadline to submit the BEAD Final Proposal has been extended from July 28, 2025, to October 26, 2025.

On June 6, 2025, NTIA released the [BEAD Restructuring Policy Notice](#). The policy notice modifies and replaces certain requirements outlined in the NOFO. Some BEAD requirements in the NOFO that were removed by NTIA include those related to labor, employment, workforce development, climate resilience, local government coordination, and affordability plans. NTIA has also taken a new technology neutral approach to the BEAD Program. Where BEAD had previously made fiber technology a priority project for subawards, the policy notice modified priority projects to now include other technologies, such as unlicensed fixed wireless and low earth orbital (LEO) satellite services. All available broadband technologies may receive a BEAD priority project subaward as long as the technology meets the 100/20 Mbps and 100 millisecond latency speed requirements, meet quality network requirements, and scalability to meet 5G and future wireless services. BEAD awardees will have four years to get BEAD eligible locations broadband service.

Meanwhile, the policy notice requires the Commission to rescind Wisconsin’s two previous BEAD grant round subawards and conduct a “Benefit of the Bargain” grant round. The Benefit of the Bargain grant round will be conducted to reflect the changes of the NOFO as noted in the policy notice. The Commission opened the new BEAD Letter of Intent (LOI) Process for potential new applicants on June 17, 2025. The Benefit of the Bargain grant round will open in July. The policy notice has given states and territories 90 days from the release of the notice to submit their BEAD Final Proposal. This means the BEAD Final Proposal deadline date to NTIA has been changed from October 26, 2025, to September 4, 2025.

## **FEDERALLY ADMINISTERED FUNDING PROGRAMS**

As shown below in Table 5, federal funding administered by the FCC, NTIA, and U.S. Department of Agriculture continue to serve an important role in filling broadband access gaps in Wisconsin. Across these programs, approximately 87,000 locations that lack 100/20 Mbps service remain in progress and in plans to construct service to using federal funds. The federally funded programs include:

- E-ACAM: Enhanced Alternative Connect America Cost Model Program, administered by FCC. More information: <https://www.usac.org/high-cost/funds/enhanced-acam/>



- RDOF: Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, administered by FCC. More information: <https://www.usac.org/high-cost/funds/rural-digital-opportunity-fund/>
- ReConnect: Rural EConnectivity Grant Program, administered by USDA. More information: <https://www.usda.gov/sustainability/infrastructure/broadband/reconnect-loan-and-grant-program>
- Community Connect, administered by USDA. More information: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/community-connect>
- TBCP: Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program, administered by NTIA: <https://www.ntia.gov/page/tribal-broadband-connectivity-program>

Funding administered by federal agencies is expected to impact a significant share of remaining unserved locations in Wisconsin. It should be noted that not all state or federally funded projects are fully completed as proposed and that locations thought to be in progress may need additional funding in the future. For example, Wisconsin defaults from RDOF recipients resulted in over \$200 million in funding being withdrawn and planned construction cancelled for over 100,000 locations.

## RECENTLY AWARDED FEDERAL FUNDS

Since the last Task Force report, several grant awards have been made to support locations in Wisconsin under USDA and NTIA grant programs, as listed below.

Table 5

Program	Agency	Recipient	Amount	Locations Planned	Project End
<a href="#">Community Connect</a>	USDA	Chibardun Telephone Cooperative, Inc (Mosaic Technologies)	\$4,342,937	530	2029
<a href="#">Community Connect</a>	USDA	Chibardun Telephone Cooperative, Inc (Mosaic Technologies)	\$4,346,908	521	2029
<a href="#">ReConnect</a>	USDA	Bloomer Broadband	\$9,229,418	505	2029
<a href="#">Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program</a>	NTIA	Oneida Nation of Wisconsin	\$6,641,618	956	2027

## TRIBAL BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM

Tribal Nations in Wisconsin have had significant success securing funding under the federal [Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program \(TBCP\)](#) administered by NTIA. TBCP has made \$3 billion of funding available to federally recognized Tribes for broadband deployment and other critical needs, such as telehealth, distance learning, digital inclusion, and affordability. There were two separate rounds of TBCP; round one occurred in 2021 and round two's application window closed March 22, 2024. With approximately \$1.7 billion in funding committed to date, 10 of the 11 federally recognized Tribes in Wisconsin have received a TBCP round one award, totaling more than \$37 million, as seen in table 6. Some Tribal Nations of Wisconsin also applied for round two of TBCP. In December 2024, NTIA awarded Oneida Nation a TBCP round two award of \$6,641,618 to deploy fiber to households across and near the Oneida Nation. NTIA continues to review other pending TBCP round two applications for Tribes in Wisconsin.

Eight Tribal Nations in Wisconsin also used \$167,504 of [US Treasury CPF for Tribal Governments](#) funds towards broadband initiatives-infrastructure deployment, feasibility studies, and subsidy programs.

Table 6

<b>Federally Recognized Tribes located in Wisconsin</b>	<b>Tribal Broadband Connectivity Grant Awards</b>
Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians	\$500,000
Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	\$442,734
Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	\$25,660,167
Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin	\$500,000
Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	\$8,047,002
St. Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin	\$302,032
Forest County Potawatomi Community	\$125,232
Oneida Nation	Round 1: \$498,217, Round 2: \$6,641,618
Sokaogon Chippewa Community	\$452,162
Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians	\$499,571
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$43,668,735</b>

Even with significant investment in Tribal broadband infrastructure, adoption and planning efforts and gaps in broadband service and adoption remain. It is important to note that in preserving tribal sovereignty, some Tribal Nations have committed both private and federal investments and partnerships for broadband expansion to their communities. BEAD protects tribal sovereignty as Tribal Nations are eligible to be BEAD applicants and Tribal Consent is required for BEAD projects to be approved for construction or traversing Tribal lands. Three Tribal Nations in Wisconsin are approved to apply directly for BEAD funding and all will have the right to say who has permission to access their lands. The Commission continues to engage Tribal Nations of Wisconsin on support for broadband availability and adoption efforts and share with them the latest eligibility, progress, and funding available.

## **WISCONSIN UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND (USF) PROGRAMS**

The [Universal Service Fund](#) was created to promote and assist with availability and affordability of telecommunications services in Wisconsin. Companies providing certain telecommunications services in Wisconsin are required to contribute to USF. The Commission administered the following programs funded by USF in 2024: Lifeline Program, Lifeline Outreach Grant Program, Nonprofit Access Grant Program, and Telemedicine Grant Program.

The Wisconsin [Lifeline Program](#) provides a discount, complementary to the federal Lifeline Program, to eligible low-income households on essential telecommunications services through a network of Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETCs) across the state. Depending on the type of service, the Wisconsin Lifeline Program provides a discount up to \$9.25 per customer bill. Added to the discount provided by the federal program, the highest total monthly discount each customer can receive is up to \$18.50 for the Standard Lifeline Benefit and \$59.50 for the Enhanced Tribal Benefit. As of December 2024, the Wisconsin Lifeline Program had a utilization rate of 19% of the estimated eligible subscribers.

The [Lifeline Outreach Grant Program](#) assists low-income customers with obtaining affordable access to essential telecommunications through the Lifeline Program. The Lifeline Outreach Grant has two tracks: 1) conduct outreach to increase awareness of the Lifeline benefit program and assist eligible individuals with enrollment; and 2) conduct research to identify barriers faced by low-income communities to access the Lifeline program and develop tools or strategies for reaching out to those communities. Last year, the Commission awarded funding to four nonprofit organizations and one county, totaling \$239,597, to improve outreach and raise awareness of the Lifeline Program. This year, the Commission received more applications and funding requests for this program compared to its four previous years. The request can be attributed to customer needs in services after the ending of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). Five applicants were awarded, totaling \$250,000 in funding.

The [Nonprofit Access Grant Program](#) provides funding to 501(c)(3) nonprofit groups to assist customers that are low-income, disabled, or reside in an area of the state with a relatively high cost of services in obtaining access to a basic set of telecommunications services. Last year, the Commission awarded \$500,000 to eleven nonprofit organizations to help provide access to telecommunications services for low-income households and persons with a disability. This year, the Nonprofit Access Grant application window closed on March 26, 2025. Nineteen applications with a total grant request of \$1,039,126.89 was received. In May 2025, the Commission awarded Nonprofit Access Grant funding to fourteen applicants, totaling \$500,000 in funding.

The [Telemedicine Grant Program](#) supports the purchase of specialized telecommunications equipment designed to promote technologically advanced medical services, enhance access to medical care for certain areas of the state, and serve underserved populations and/or persons with disabilities. Last year, the Commission awarded \$741,570 from the grant to help eight nonprofit medical clinics purchase medical telecommunications equipment.

The [Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program \(TEPP\)](#) supports the purchase of specialized telecommunications equipment for people with hearing, speech and mobility disabilities through a voucher program. Applicants apply for and are issued vouchers depending on their disability and use the vouchers to purchase equipment through a network of authorized vendors. Voucher amounts are based on average costs of specialized equipment commonly used by people with different types of disabilities. Customers may apply for a new voucher to purchase updated equipment once every three years. Last year, TEPP funded \$760,360 and processed 1,011 vouchers.

The TEPP Outreach grant program is an annual, non-competitive program funded at \$350,000, which is split evenly between the eight Wisconsin Independent Living Centers (ILCs) located throughout the state. These eight ILCs are experts in assistive technology and have equipment try-out centers to assist customers in finding what specialized telecommunications equipment best suit their needs.

# PROGRESS UPDATE: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PRIOR YEARS

The 2025 Task Force Report builds upon the work and success of previous reports. As BEAD programs are now being implemented, it is important to see how previous recommendations influence Wisconsin's implementation of the program. As such, the Task Force believes recommendations and themes from previous years are still pertinent today and will continue to revisit, revise, and track their goals and progress as needed.

## AFFORDABILITY

Prior recommendations had emphasized the continued importance of affordability of service as a foundation to ensuring all Wisconsinites benefit from broadband. Affordability recommendations included increasing public-facing resources on affordability programs and opportunities for consumers, increasing enrollment in existing affordability programs, and publishing statewide data on attainment of affordable internet across Wisconsin. Since the last report, the following progress has been made on the Task Force's affordability recommendations:

- The WBO launched a new [Wisconsin Broadband Almanac](#), which provides the metric of “cost burden” to demonstrate the proportion of Wisconsinites who face broadband prices that are not affordable based on their income. The Almanac seeks to educate the public on affordability gaps across Wisconsin and reasons why cost burdened households are not able to access broadband.
- In the absence of the Affordable Connectivity Program, which ended in May 2024, the Commission and its partners continue to provide information on alternative affordability options for consumers, including maintaining the [Internet Discount Finder](#) tool and sharing the [Digital Resource Navigator from 211 Wisconsin](#).

## ADOPTION

The Task Force had recommended increasing access to internet enabled devices, providing educational resources to improve users' ability to use devices and access internet resources, and building networks of trusted digital navigators and digital equity practitioners to improve opportunities for underconnected communities to access the internet. Task Force recommendations had also emphasized accessible, first-language, culturally responsive and community-based technical support. Since the last report, the following progress has been made on the Task Force's adoption recommendations:

- In September 2024, the Commission awarded \$27,883,323 to [eleven recipients](#) for the [Capital Projects Digital Connectivity and Navigators \(DCN\) Program](#) to deploy approximately 52,000 devices and provide Wi-Fi internet to approximately 34,000 households in multi-dwelling unit locations. The DCN program pairs device and MDU Wi-Fi deployments with trusted digital navigators to eliminate barriers to adoption and ensure devices are used to meet user needs, including for telehealth, education, and work opportunities. Several DCN recipients are providing navigator assistance in multiple languages,

including Wisconsin Literacy Inc. (Spanish, Arabic, Burmese, Dari, Hmong, Rohingya, Swahili, and Ukrainian), DANenet (Spanish) and City of Racine (Spanish).

- As was previously discussed, the Commission had been implementing the [Digital Equity Act](#), including opening the [Wisconsin Digital Equity Capacity Grant \(DEC\)](#) on March 6, 2025, which made available \$9.5 million to implement the [Wisconsin Digital Equity Plan](#). DEC would have offered subgrants under two tracks: (a) the Digital Navigators Track to expand current and/or support new digital navigator staff, programs, and projects that serve the covered populations, and increase internet adoption, digital skills and related digital opportunities within local communities; and (b) the Digital Equity Coalitions Track to expand and support current and new local digital opportunity groups that raise awareness, identify community needs, and increase the network of people, programs, and services that increase digital opportunity. On May 9, 2025, the program was terminated by the U.S. Department of Commerce.
- The University of Wisconsin, Division of Extension, started the [Wisconsin Digital Navigator Network](#) in late 2024. The Wisconsin Digital Navigator Network brings together agencies, nonprofits, community leaders, and others working on digital skills and literacy education and device distribution to increase internet adoption for Wisconsin's covered populations.

## **CASE STUDY: United Way of Greater Chippewa Valley Digital Inclusion Partnership (CHIP DIP)**

### **Background**

United Way of Greater Chippewa Valley's (UWGCV) mission is to improve lives and build stronger Chippewa Valley communities by bringing resources together to advance the common good. In 2022, UWGCV began providing programming related to digital equity and inclusion of all Chippewa Valley residents with support from PSC grant funding and other local funding sources. UWGCV coordinates an internal Digital Navigators program, as well as leads a recently established digital inclusion coalition that supports Chippewa and Eau Claire Counties. The Digital Navigators program has served target populations: aging individuals (ages 60 and above), veterans, and individuals who live in covered households (150% below the poverty line).

### **Chippewa Valley Digital Inclusion Partnership (CHIP DIP)**

UWGCV's newest collaborative impact initiative is Digital Access & Engagement. In partnership with Chippewa and Eau Claire Counties, local broadband committees, senior and community centers, libraries, Literacy Chippewa Valley, Chippewa Valley Technical College and other community-based partners, UWGCV is working to bridge the digital divide in the Chippewa Valley. CHIP DIP works on community projects to improve access to affordable and reliable broadband internet, computerized devices, digital literacy training and tech support. Currently, CHIP DIP has identified areas of need and is working on our path forward to most effectively serve the Chippewa Valley.

Some challenges UWGCV face are the limited number of classes they can teach and one on one sessions they can offer with their digital navigator due to staffing and budget constraints. Device distribution is available but the cost to UWGCV per device has increased. To address that issue, UWGCV orders devices in bulk to make sure there is enough for classes and the community and to meet their budget needs. In the absence of the Affordable Connectivity Program, UWGCV plans to use CHIP DIP's collaborative efforts to create resources for the Chippewa Valley as the group is no longer able to steer folks towards a reduced cost internet connection or other income-based/or government funded paths. UWGCV Digital Literacy Programs launched in January 2024. Classes have been held at local senior centers, libraries, and veteran recovery home. There have been 90 participants, 168 devices distributed, and an additional 21 devices distributed at a Homeless Connect Event.





## PLANNING

The Task Force had identified planning as a key tool in ensuring universal broadband access. Its recommendations have emphasized better data collection and sharing, providing resources to local governments to support planning efforts, and supporting partnerships between local governments and internet service providers. Since the last report, the following progress has been made on the Task Force's planning recommendations:

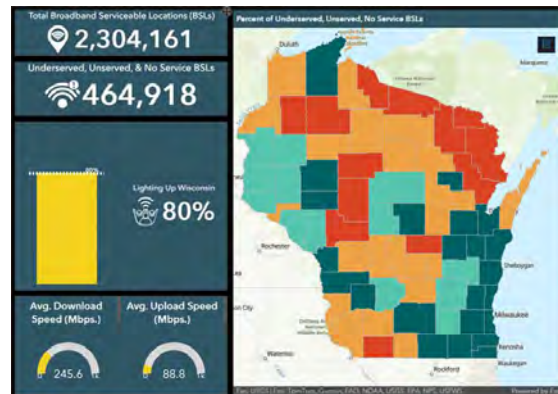
- The WBO published its [Wisconsin Broadband Almanac](#), which, in addition to the previously described cost burden data, provides statewide and local summaries of key broadband access, affordability, and adoption data to empower local planning efforts and improve public information on broadband. The WBO also updated its [County Profiles](#) to show deployment progress by county.
- The Commission provided funding to support the development of the [UW Extension Broadband Toolkit](#) and the [Office of Rural Prosperity Broadband Toolkit, which the](#) Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation made available earlier this year. Both resources are continually updated with information and best practices for implementing broadband deployment at the local and regional levels.
- The Commission operated its BEAD subgranting process, which included the opportunity for local government to endorse applicants for BEAD funding. In total, fifty-two county boards carefully reviewed possible ISP partners and chose to formally endorse specific providers in public meetings. Endorsements provided improved scores on applications and ensured shared decision-making in the BEAD process, emphasizing the importance of local community participation to ensure the success of broadband deployments.
- The Commission continued to administer the BEAD [Local Planning Grant Program](#), which allocates funding to Counties, Regional Economic Development Organizations (REDOs), and Tribal Nations to increase local capacity in planning for broadband deployment. The grants have enabled outreach activities, data collection, needs analyses, and other planning in anticipation of deployment under the BEAD program. Planning also supported the BEAD Challenge Process to ensure all locations in need of service were included in the BEAD awarding process.

## CASE STUDY: Wisconsin Broadband Almanac

In 2025, the WBO released the Wisconsin Broadband Almanac, which provides access, affordability, and adoption data in both statewide summary statistics and detailed breakdowns at the community level. Users can dive in to a detailed analysis of specific counties and municipalities by using the [County-Community view](#), linked in the [Statewide Almanac](#).

The Almanac serves as a tool for sharing Wisconsin's progress towards their goal of achieving internet for all Wisconsinites through changes to locations served status, and the completion of state and federal grants. Also, within the Almanac, statistics focusing on internet usage and communities that are burdened by cost help provide insights to the impacts Wisconsinites are experiencing in their communities, a valuable resource for community planning and measuring progress.

Figure 9



## CASE STUDY: Office of Rural Prosperity Toolkit

In February 2025, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), Office of Rural Prosperity, released the [Connecting Wisconsin: A Broadband Toolkit for Rural Economic Development](#). The toolkit aims to create a more connected future for everyone in Wisconsin and address forward thinking strategies on how broadband development can impact strong rural economic outcomes so that rural Wisconsin communities don't get left behind. The toolkit provides a roadmap to assist regional planners in Wisconsin's rural areas and Tribal Nations with developing robust broadband infrastructure. The Rural Broadband Toolkit provides step-by-step guidance on planning and implementing regional broadband projects, case studies on success stories from rural communities that have successfully enhanced their broadband infrastructure, information on grants and financial assistance available for broadband initiatives, and technical assistance on tips and best practices for overcoming common challenges in broadband deployment.



## PERMITTING

The Task Force had recommended support and coordination in permitting to streamline the process and reduce barriers to construction through technical assistance, advocacy, and communicating key tools necessary for efficient permit planning and compliance processes. Since the last report, the following progress has been made on the Task Force's permitting recommendations:

- Commission staff worked with NTIA on BEAD permitting and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements, developing web tools and check lists to streamline the process for awardees. Staff collaborated with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), the Wisconsin State Historical Preservation Organization (SHPO), and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) to create webinars to explain BEAD requirements. Such webinars are available on the [PSC YouTube page](#).

### CASE STUDY: National Environmental Policy Act Implementation

PSC staff have worked diligently to prepare for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements associated with BEAD funding. NEPA requires agencies to document potential environmental impacts when a federal investment occurs that disturbs land, such as construction under the BEAD program.

NTIA and the PSC have joint authority for ensuring NEPA compliance for BEAD funded projects in Wisconsin. As such, staff at both agencies have worked together to ensure timely communication regarding NEPA for Wisconsin projects. Additionally, PSC staff have worked with staff from the State Historic Preservation Office, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Forest Service, and other agencies to develop tools for inter-agency communication.

With the assistance of other key state agencies, the PSC also published a [NEPA for BEAD and State Permitting Resources Webinar](#) in March 2025 to provide basic NEPA environmental review information to BEAD applicants.

PSC staff created an Environmental Impacts and Documentation Screening (EIDS) Instructions and Questionnaire document to efficiently gather information on environmental impacts from subgrantees for each BEAD project. PSC staff will be using this document, as well as GIS tools, photos and site plans, to make determinations on environmental impacts.



## INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

The Task Force had recommended maximizing funding for broadband expansion by increasing state funding and braiding funding with other federal programs, like BEAD, as well as local, private, and philanthropic sources. Task Force recommendations also encouraged state funds to fill gaps left by federal programs in areas with unreliable technology, defaulted projects, or unserved areas with slower speeds than advertised. The Task Force also supports low-interest loans and line extension funding to help providers reach more

unserved communities. Since the last report, the following progress has been made on the Task Force’s infrastructure funding recommendations:

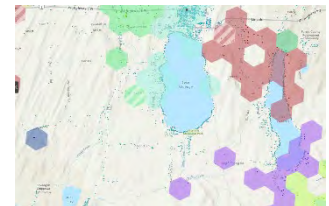
- The Commission continued to implement BEAD, including operating a challenge process to establish the list of locations eligible for BEAD, conducting prequalification to determine entities eligible to participate in BEAD.
- The BEAD program subgranting process is well underway with robust participation and submitted applications from the first two rounds covering 98% of eligible locations.
- In 2024, the PSC awarded \$41.9 Million to twenty-eight projects through the [PSC Capital Projects Fund Broadband Infrastructure](#) Program with projects closing in late 2026.
- The WBO continues to administer existing [State Broadband Expansion](#) and [ARPA Broadband Access Grants](#), with a majority already completed or expected to be completed by the end of 2025.
- In his 2025-27 state budget proposal, Governor Evers included \$400 million for broadband expansion grant funding. The Legislative Joint Finance Committee voted against this additional funding in June.
- UW Extension continues to support local governments in finding alternative financing mechanisms and opportunities to fund broadband deployment.
- USDA awarded grants to several Wisconsin providers under its Community Connect and ReConnect Programs.

### CASE STUDY: BEAD Project Units Map

As part of the BEAD application process, the WBO created “project units”, which are a group of broadband serviceable locations (BSLs) near each other that are eligible for BEAD funding. Establishing project units allowed for applicants to submit proposals to build the same groups of locations, making their applications comparable to each other. Further, project units ensure that no locations are left behind because all locations in proximity to each other are included. Meaning, applicants cannot pick and choose only the lower-cost locations to serve with their application.

Project units were designed to be relatively small, geographically dense groups of locations to ensure that providers have sufficient flexibility in designing their network proposals. Further, project units do not cross certain “hard boundaries”, such as county borders, Tribal Lands, and certain railroads and water bodies. The [Wisconsin BEAD Project Units Map](#) depicts project units that BEAD applicants will bid on and the locations within them. The project units are groups of location points, and the map overlays a colored hexagon to show a generalized area of each unit. Striped hexagons denote that there are two project units within that area. It is important to zoom into the BSL point on the map to identify the project unit to which a BSL belongs.

Figure 10



## TRIBAL NATIONS

The Task Force had recommended supporting Tribal Nations in Wisconsin through technical assistance in broadband planning, resources deployment, funding, and participating in BEAD as well as communicating the urgency of BEAD timelines. The Task Force also encouraged coordination with Tribal Nations and neighboring local governments and ISPs. Since the last report, the following progress has been made on the Task Force's Tribal recommendations:

- The PSC and UW Extension communicated regularly with Wisconsin Tribal Nations, including participating in an annual consultation to share information on broadband updates, funding opportunities, and technical assistance.
- Through consultations, workshops, technical assistance, data sharing, and regular communication, the PSC coordinated with Tribal Nations during its implementation of the BEAD process. This resulted in approvals to apply for BEAD funding for Bad River, Sokaogon, and Lac du Flambeau. Tribal Consent has been emphasized and BEAD project proposals that are on or traverse Tribal lands will not be awarded without Tribal Consent.
- UW-Extension held a Tribal Broadband Workshop hosted by the Sokaogon Chippewa Community on November 12, 2025, with the PSC, NTIA, and USDA presenting on grant program updates and Extension presenting on strategies. Nine out of the eleven Tribal Nations Representatives attended the workshop.

## WORKFORCE

The Task Force had recommended investing in workforce development by funding training and credentialing programs to ensure a skilled broadband workforce, while partnering with employers, educators, and community organizations to build local talent pipelines, retain workers, and create quality broadband-related jobs across Wisconsin. Since the last report, the following progress has been made on the Task Force's workforce recommendations:

- The Commission had allocated BEAD funding to the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) to develop and provide broadband related occupational education and training across the state. The targeted occupations include broadband installation technicians, service technicians, telecommunication specialists, fiber and wireless technicians, trenchers, radio frequency and field engineers, utility construction technicians, software developers, network and system administrators, technical support specialists and cybersecurity professionals. Per the NTIA's June 6, 2025, BEAD Restructuring Policy Notice, all previously approved non-deployment activities in the BEAD program have been rescinded and this funding has been paused.
- Consistent with Wisconsin's approved Initial Proposal, additional points were awarded to BEAD applications that included direct hire and locally hired workforces, and BEAD will require ongoing documentation of awardees workforce data, including reporting on directly employed workforce and recruitment of Wisconsin residents. Per the NTIA's June 6, 2025, BEAD Restructuring Policy Notice, fair



labor practices, including direct hire and locally hired workforce provisions, have been removed from BEAD scoring criteria.

## **GRANT ADMINISTRATION**

The Task Force had recommended providing technical assistance to grantees related to meeting compliance and reporting requirements and widely distributing informational materials and technical assistance opportunities. The following progress has been made on the Task Force's grant administration recommendations:

- WBO staff continued to offer technical assistance for PSC broadband grant programs, supporting grantees through required progress reporting, direct communication via email, phone, and grant inboxes, as well as webinars and office hours to share information and resources.
- The Commission continued to invest in and refine its Grants System, which allows for a one-stop shop for all grant reimbursement, reporting, documentation, and management needs. In the past year, the Commission launched a new reporting module and streamlined document management tools.
- The WBO continues to update and maintain the [Broadband Grant Footprint](#), which depicts in-progress and completed broadband grants administered by PSC.

# TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

## DEPLOYMENT

The Task Force affirms its previous recommendations for additional investment of state funding to expand broadband access to Wisconsinites. The Task Force heard from several presenters on this topic, discussing prior grant awards and projects and future needs. The presenters demonstrated how critical state broadband funding was to successful broadband projects. The Task Force also heard from residents who lack service, but whose neighbors across the street or at the end of the road have access.

BEAD will provide a once-in-a-generation funding source to address broadband connectivity. These dollars are critical for eligible entities to continue to reach homes and businesses that are the hardest and most expensive to serve in the state. However, a strained supply chain stretches limited public investment even more thinly and threatens the ability to achieve the Task Force goals. While a complex and challenging issue, finding ways to combat supply chain and inflation issues was a large point of discussion for the Task Force.

The Task Force recognizes that BEAD will be a significant contribution to connecting Wisconsin residents, but it remains the case that additional state funding will be needed to reach internet for all. Recent defaults of federal funding awards, withdrawals of previously awarded state grant projects and the potential for future changes in funding commitments leaves risk that not all locations in Wisconsin will be connected without additional state funding. State grant funding has a proven record of successful deployment in shorter timelines than federal funds, as reflected in the recent completion of projects awarded \$225 million in grant funding in 2021 and 2022. Further, the significant investment of BEAD will not be sufficient to deploy future proof fiber internet to all locations, and further state investments may be necessary to ensure high-speed, long-term reliable internet service for all. Even though Governor Evers 2025-27 state budget proposal to invest \$400 million into the Broadband Expansion Grant Program was cut by the Wisconsin Legislative Joint Finance Committee, the Task Force still strongly recommends additional state funding investment is needed.

### **Continued Investment in State Broadband Programs**

- Invest additional state budget funding for broadband expansion to ensure all Wisconsin residents have access to high-speed internet. Prioritize the deployment of fiber technology where practicable and other quality technology solutions in harder to reach areas.
- Where feasible, strategically braid state broadband expansion funding with private, local and federal funds to support broadband deployment and prioritize fiber including in more remote and less resourced areas of Wisconsin.
- Provide technical assistance to local and tribal governments and continue to explore cost effective ways to fund broadband expansion for communities facing high buildout costs.

## Permitting

- Support efficient, transparent, and consistent permitting processes by providing technical assistance to BEAD awardees and ISPs. Publish up to date permitting guidance, web maps, and tools.
- Foster early and ongoing communication between ISPs and permitting authorities at all levels of government to streamline and expediate permitting processes. Consider adopting legislation similar to Broadband Forward! certification model that details reasonable costs and automatic approval of permits after a designated time period.
- Explore the creation of a broadband permitting toolkit that has resources for permits that may be required for the construction of broadband projects and specific resources for BEAD awardees. The toolkit should include detailed information from permitting agencies on typical challenges in their permitting process.

## Grant Administration

- Continuously improve, implement, and streamline broadband grant administration, reporting, reimbursement, contracting, and compliance processes while ensuring efficient, accountable and timely deployment of public funding. Provide technical assistance and resources to assist recipients with compliance and reporting.

## PARTNERSHIP

Over the past two years, in anticipation of BEAD implementation, the Commission and its partners have ramped up coordination and communication with stakeholders across Wisconsin. Local, regional, and Tribal governments have undertaken robust planning, along with state and federal agencies, internet service providers, regional economic development organizations, and community anchor institutions. Developing partnerships creates trust among stakeholders involved and empowers those stakeholders to leverage resources from one another in deployment of broadband. Wisconsin has seen past broadband programs success due to partnerships. The Task Force has made past collaboration and coordination recommendations to continue strengthening partnerships and facilitating deployment. The Task Force believes these partnership recommendations will lead to a more efficient and streamlined deployment that mitigates delays in BEAD and forms a sustainable model for future broadband implementation in Wisconsin.

## Broadband Facility Locating

- Collaborate with infrastructure owners, Diggers Hotline, ISPs, and utility locators to streamline locating processes and ensure timely locates to avoid delays in broadband deployment and construction.
- Increase the availability of design and engineering information to affected entities for grant-funded broadband deployment projects to expedite locating for broadband deployment, including BEAD awardees.
- Make public funding and training available for locators to mitigate potential locate workforce shortages during BEAD construction.

- Establish a compliance system to hold telecommunications utilities and ISPs accountable for failure to complete locates within required time.

## **Workforce and Training**

- Collaborate with stakeholders – such as workforce development groups, labor organizations, technical colleges, and tribal governments and state agencies – to address broadband workforce needs for BEAD and other broadband expansion efforts. Foster partnerships between these stakeholders and ISPs to align workforce development efforts with broadband infrastructure needs.
- Invest in and support comprehensive, statewide workforce development efforts, youth apprenticeships, worker training programs and awareness campaigns, to ensure a sufficient, skilled workforce for broadband deployment, operation, and maintenance by allocating funding and offering technical assistance to workforce development organizations.

## **Tribal Coordination**

- Support Tribal Nations in Wisconsin by providing funding and technical assistance for deployment of broadband infrastructure and improving digital adoption.
- Continue to encourage and support coordination with Tribal Nations that are considering and developing partnerships with neighboring local governments and ISPs.
- Develop processes to facilitate collaboration between Tribal Nations and BEAD awardees during permitting and historic preservation reviews. Maintain ongoing communications with Tribal Nations in Wisconsin to ensure consultation and Tribal consent is being sought for grant funded projects on or traversing Tribal lands prior to the awarding of funds.

## **FUNCTIONAL ADOPTION**

The fact that access to broadband infrastructure alone is not enough for Wisconsin residents and communities to realize the digital opportunity benefits from broadband has been a significant point of discussion for the Task Force for many years. Access to affordable broadband service is critical to a more equitably connected Wisconsin. The end of the federal Affordable Connectivity Program is a significant loss for many Wisconsinites that relied on the program for affordable access. The Task Force recommends advocacy to restart this federal program and/or create a successor program. The cost of service will continue to be a barrier to internet for all and the Task Force recommends Wisconsin continue to take steps to increase affordable service for state residents.

The Task Force also discussed the need for additional digital navigation and digital skills program and service to ensure that all residents have the confidence, skills, and capacity to use the internet for their everyday lives. By investing in resources now to promote internet adoption and affordability Wisconsin will be able to make the best use of current broadband and be prepared for our more connected future.

## **Affordability**

- Advocate, develop, and implement state-level solutions to maintain broadband affordability for low-income households following the end of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).

- Maintain a list of resources and tools for households impacted by the end of ACP to assist them in accessing affordability internet service.
- Expand the availability of the Lifeline Program to more households by providing incentives to encourage internet service providers to become eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs).
- Continue to research, measure, and refine a standardized affordability threshold for internet service in Wisconsin. Publish data and reports on the attainment of affordable broadband across Wisconsin based on the threshold.

## **Digital Skills and Literacy**

- In the absence of federal funds, continue funding and support for digital navigation, adoption, and literacy initiatives to provide Wisconsinites with access, skill development, and assistive technologies for better quality of life. Share information on best practices from those initiatives. Ensure community organizations, anchor institutions, local governments, philanthropic groups, and other entities engaging in digital skills and literacy work are aware of and pursuing available funding opportunities.
- Continue to improve access to technical support and digital skills education that is relevant for all Wisconsin residents, such as alternative language offerings. Develop, disseminate, and support best practices and trusted resources and supports to increase confidence in accessing the internet and online services safely.
- Strengthen partnerships between state, Tribal, and local governments, along with schools, libraries, educational and workforce organizations, internet service providers, and digital inclusion organizations to increase broadband adoption, especially in rural areas, by addressing barriers such as digital skilling and building trusted relationships.

## **Preparing for our Digital Future**

- Prepare for the development of new technology resources and tools, including chatbots and generative artificial intelligence. Integrate these tools into digital skills education to ensure that any publicly funded broadband deployments will meet Wisconsin future technology needs.
- Improve digital literacy and cybersecurity awareness by educating and empowering Wisconsinites to use digital skills and artificial intelligence responsibly, effectively, and in ways that improve their lives.
- Support the [recommendations](#) and efforts of the [Governor’s Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence](#).



# CONCLUSION

The 2025 Task Force Report details great progress on past recommendations and improving metrics from previous reports on broadband infrastructure expansion and adoption. Each report builds upon the work and success of previous reports. It is key to remember this when looking at the year-to-year work of the Task Force. As such, the Task Force considers previous years' recommendations and themes still pertinent today. The Task Force will continue to revisit, revise, and track the Task Force's goals and progress as needed.

Four main themes and focus areas emerged from Task Force discussion on recommendations: Deployment, Partnership, Functional Adoption, and Preparing for our Digital Future. While these areas and recommendations are separated in the report, it is critical to recognize that these areas of focus are interconnected. This report should be considered and viewed in its entirety. Connecting these areas of focus will be critical to accomplishing Wisconsin's goal of universal broadband access, affordability, and adoption.

In Governor Evers' May 13, 2025, letter to the Department of Commerce, he writes, *"Access to affordable high-speed internet is no longer a luxury in the 21st century—it is a necessity. Here in Wisconsin, we have been working diligently to close the digital divide that has long held our workers, families, and communities back... our work is far from finished. Thousands of Wisconsinites still need access to reliable, affordable, and efficient high-speed internet."*

Wisconsin continues to move forward in BEAD implementation. The Task Force recognizes that federal funds alone will not solve internet access issues for Wisconsinites. The Task Force continues to strongly recommend additional state funding for broadband expansion efforts to ensure robust, timely deployment of needed broadband infrastructure, and new funding programs to increase broadband adoption and digital literacy to meet the state's ambitious goals of getting all Wisconsinites connected to high-speed service this decade. This year the Task Force revisited its mission outlined in Governor Evers' Executive Order 80 and reintroduced each other on the different backgrounds, expertise, and perspectives each member brings to this Task Force. Molded from a diverse group, the Task Force believes that adoption of the recommendations in this year's report will lead to closing the digital divide and achieving Internet for All Wisconsinites.