$100 Million Investment of Federal Funding for Broadband Access

Gov. Tony Evers announced on Tuesday, May 18th that the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) will launch a round of broadband expansion funding with $100 million in funding from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). This is the initial batch of federal funds to be dedicated to expanding high-speed broadband internet across the state. Funding will be awarded by the PSC based on a model similar to the successful Broadband Expansion Grant Program.
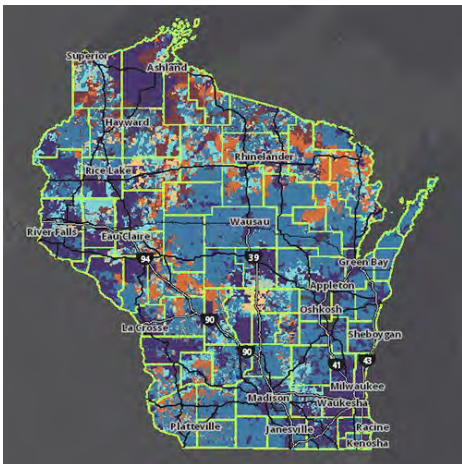
Applications and information will be available June 1, 2021 and due on July 27, 2021

Under U.S. Treasury guidance for the ARPA funds, eligible broadband projects are expected to:

- Serve unserved or underserved households and businesses.
- Be designed to deliver upon project completion internet service that reliably meets or exceeds upload and download speeds of 100 Mbps or at least 100 Mbps download and at least 20 Mbps upload if it not practicable to deliver the higher upload speeds due to geography, topography, or excessive costs.
- Prioritize projects that deliver a physical broadband connection that achieve the last mile connection.
- Prioritize affordability options.
- Prioritize investments in fiber optic infrastructure where feasible.
- Avoid investments in locations that have existing agreements to build reliable service of at least 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload by December 31, 2024.

Full Press Release

Wisconsin Broadband Map 2021: New Features

For those not familiar with the Wisconsin Broadband Map (WBM), this interactive tool, prepared by Wisconsin Broadband Office (WBO), serves two functions. First, it displays areas of advertised internet access in Wisconsin, which helps to understand the current internet coverage in the State by type of technology and provider, with coverage data based on 2020 access data submitted from internet service providers and from the FCC's form 477. Second, this map displays areas related to the Wisconsin Broadband Expansion Grant program to identify grant eligible and priority areas.

To support the Governor's Ever commitment to make 2021 the **Year of Broadband Access** and to align the map with the State Broadband plan, the WBM was revamped on May 12, 2021. Regarding the coverage depiction, two new features were added. 1) The *Fixed Internet Speeds* new layer is active

by default once opening the map, which shows all in one the download AND upload speeds for both Wireline and Fixed Wireless technologies. The new layer supports the familiar four independent layers for each fixed terrestrial technology speed, which are still available. 2) The second new coverage feature is a *new set of categories and colors* to displays internet speeds; first is the addition of two separate speed categories, the *100+ Mbps Download / 20+ Mbps Upload* (in dark purple), and the *No Known Internet Coverage* (in dark red), which displays areas with no internet infrastructures other than satellite, and areas with sparse or no population. The colors representing the very low speed categories colors are now displayed in tan and bright orange using a 5 Mbps cut-off.

Regarding the Broadband Expansion Grant Guideline content, two new features were added; the former eligibility single layer is now displayed into three separate layers by status. And the grant eligibility color scheme now uses a red color scheme. We hope the revamped WBM will provide a more consistent color scheme, a better understanding of the internet coverage in the State, and a simplified usage of the map for the public and the Commission.

A High-Speed Future: Evaluating the Broadband Expansion Grant Program

The Wisconsin Broadband Office had the unique opportunity to work with a group of graduate students from the La Follette School of Public Affairs for their capstone project. The Wisconsin Broadband Office asked the students to determine the economic and social impacts of the Broadband Expansion Grant Program in Wisconsin. This analysis was conducted by examining the spread of grant funds throughout Wisconsin, the types of technologies employed in these funded projects, and the equity and access made available to residents in terms of geographic and social distinctions. In performing this evaluation, the student team conducted stakeholder interviews, conducted two surveys, and analyzed PSC and Census data.

This study was done in partnership with the Wisconsin Broadband Office, however the data, research and recommendations are the independent work of the students under the guidance of Professor Timothy Sneeding and not the work of the Wisconsin Broadband Office or the Commission.

Kudus and gratitude to report authors Sawyer Boldt, Andrew Busker, Riley Fink, Matthew Hansen, Cayla Leikin and Krinjal Mathur.

Full Report   **Policy Brief**

Emergency Broadband Benefit has Launched

The FCC's Emergency Broadband Benefit program started enrolling households on May 12th – it's the new benefit program to help families and households struggling to afford internet service. The program provides up to $50 per month towards broadband service for eligible households ($75 on qualifying tribal lands), and in some cases up the opportunity to purchase a device for a small co-payment.

Consumers can enroll in one of three ways: (1) by contacting a participating provider, (2) enrolling on-line at GetEmergencyBroadband.org, or (3) by calling 1-833-511-0311 for a paper application. Get more consumer information here. Find a list of participating Wisconsin providers here.

Broadband providers can still enroll to participate in the program. The FCC has also made

an [outreach toolkit](#) available. Find additional webinars, including an [ASL video](#) explaining the program, on the FCC's [Emergency Broadband Benefit](#) page.

The benefit is temporary and will end when program funds are exhausted, or six months after the Department of Health and Human Services declares an end to the pandemic, whichever comes first.

Federal Funding Information - **Updates**

Consolidated Appropriation Act, 2021

Tribal Broadband Connectivity Grants, National Telecommunication and Information Administration, $1 billion for tribal governments and organizations to expand broadband adoption and deployment on tribal lands, as well as to support distance learning, remote work, and telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic. This grant is not open yet, it will have a 90 day application period.

NTIA Tribal Broadband Connectivity Webinar Schedule
June 16 & 17 and July 21 & 22 at 1:30 p.m. CT
[Registration](#)

Broadband Infrastructure Deployment Grants, National Telecommunication and Information Administration, $300 million for state-and-provider partnerships to support broadband infrastructure deployment to areas lacking broadband, especially rural areas. This grant is open for applications. Grants will be awarded to partnerships between a state, or political subdivisions of a state, and providers of fixed broadband service. NTIA's Broadband Infrastructure Program was established by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. In the priority order defined by the Act, NTIA will accept applications for projects that are designed to:
1. Provide broadband service to the greatest number of households in an eligible service area;
2. Provide broadband service to rural areas;
3. Be most cost-effective in providing broadband service; or
4. Provide broadband service with a download speed of at least 100 Mbps and an upload speed of at least 20 Mbps.

Grants are due August 17, 2021
Application and Notice of Funding Opportunity

NTIA Broadband Infrastructure Deployment Webinar Schedule
June 9 &10 and July 14 & 15 at 1:30 p.m. CT
[Registration](#)

Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program, National Telecommunication and Information Administration. $285 million for Historically Black College and Universities, Trial Colleges and Universities, and Minority Serving Institutions to help students and communities get connected to the internet through affordable broadband service.

NTIA Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program Webinar Schedule
May 26 & 27, June 23 & 24 and July 28 & 29 1:30 p.m. CT
[Registration](#)

American Rescue Plan Act

Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund, Department of the Treasury, $10 billion for capital projects directly enabling work, education, and health monitoring, including remote options, in response to the public health emergency. [Statement of purpose and process.](#)

Emergency Connectivity Fund. Federal Communication Commission, $7.2 billion for E-Rate support to reimburse schools and libraries for provision of eligible equipment and advanced telecommunications and information services during the pandemic, including for locations other than schools and libraries.

Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, $219.8 billion for states, $45.6 billion

for rural community development block grants, $19.5 for rural areas and $65.2 billion for counties, allowable use including for investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure. Interim final guidance and fact sheet.

NTIA Seeking Merit Reviewers

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce is soliciting experts to evaluate grant proposals for three broadband connectivity programs that will award over $1.5 billion to further national broadband goals and assist with COVID response and recovery efforts.

BroadbandUSA posted a notice on its website announcing a need for merit reviewers for NTIA's new grant programs. Each grant application for NTIA's programs will have a merit review. They are seeking reviewers with broadband deployment, use, and adoption experience and expertise. We hope some individuals from Wisconsin will serve on the merit review panels. Individuals interested in applying to be a merit reviewer or who have questions should email resumes and questions to grantreviewer@ntia.gov.

Call for Reviewers

Governor's Task Force Next Meeting

The May meeting of the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access is scheduled for Wednesday May 26, 2021 from 9:00 a.m. - noon. The Task Force will continue work on preparing their inaugural report on Broadband Access to the Governor and Legislature which is due by June 30th.

The meeting will be posted on the PSC calendar and the agenda will include information for the public to listen. The meeting is available in Spanish, Hmong and American Sign Language.

WBO E-Newsletter

The Wisconsin Broadband Office will send out regular communication to internet service providers, grant applicants and broadband stakeholders. We aim to be relevant and share timely information from our office.

Please reach out if anyone from the Wisconsin Broadband Office can be of assistance. Email Us