Record Number of Broadband Grants Received

The Public Service Commission received 241 applications totaling more than $438 million for the first round of broadband funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The funding for the grants was made available by Governor Tony Evers and applications were due on July 27th.

Internet service providers, telecommunications utilities, cooperatives, local governments, and for-profit and non-profit organizations were eligible to apply for grants. The Commission will review and approve projects this fall for projects that will be completed by December 31, 2024. In addition to following federal guidance from the U.S. Treasury Department, the PSC will evaluate broadband projects based on applicant capacity, capability, performance, planning, project budget, proposed matching funds, and the proposed service area's existing broadband service needs. Funds will be disbursed through a reimbursement process similar to the current process for the state Broadband Expansion Grant Program. All the applications are publicly available on the Commission's electronic record system (erf) under the docket 5-BF-2022.

Broadband Office staff wanted to give kudos to the all the ARPA grant applicants that submitted geo-spatial files of their proposed projects. Data submissions from applicants increase accuracy and save time.

Simple Application Map

Wisconsin Emergency Management
Improving Coordination with ISPs and Telecom Providers

Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) is seeking to partner with internet service providers and telecommunication carriers to improve the State's response to a variety of emergencies. The goals would be for the State's Emergency Operations Center to have better situational awareness regarding internet and telecommunication access and outages. Such a partnership would also give providers a pathway to tap into state and private sector resources during disasters to restore service.

Staff at WEM is interested in creating a group that shares information and resources similar to the successful partnership with electric utilities. If you are an industry representative and interested in more information please contact Paul Hughes, WEM Communications Officer or Drew Werner, Critical Infrastructure Planning Specialist

Federal Grants and Funding

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 open for applications, grants are due **September 1st**
Application and Notice of Funding Opportunity

NTIA Tribal Broadband Connectivity Final Webinar
August 24, 2021 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.
This grant is open for applications, grants are due **December 1st**
Application and Notice of Funding Opportunity

NTIA Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program Webinar Schedule
September 22 & 23 at 1:30 p.m. CT
9/22 Registration,
9/23 Registration

Broadband Coverage Data Collection Starts Sept. 1

Starting September 1st, the Wisconsin Broadband Office will again be accepting voluntary submittals of broadband coverage data from Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in the state. Coverage data will be used to provide more accurate and timely updates to the Wisconsin Broadband Map; to create a better representation of internet service across Wisconsin; and lead to more accurate analyses of broadband deployment. We urge all providers in the State to submit coverage data.

A survey will be sent by email to all known internet service providers in the state collecting contact information, information about the type of data and additional information about programs for low income costumers.

The voluntary broadband coverage data collection will be open for 90 days for this round. The data collection period will end December 1, 2021. Questions about coverage data collection can be emailed to: PSCBroadbandData@wisconsin.gov.

Digital Equity and Inclusion Updates

Emergency Broadband Benefit
Wisconsin has 95,437 households enrolled in the benefit program as of August 20, 2021. Almost 20% of likely eligible households are enrolled. Please continue to spread the word about the benefit to eligible households. Find information, resources and enrollment from:
PSC Emergency Internet website,
FCC Back-to-School Campaign tool kits,
online enrollment

Wisconsin Digital Equity Stakeholder Group
The State of Wisconsin Digital Equity and Inclusion Stakeholder group has been meeting monthly to inform the state Digital Equity and Inclusion Plan and to do work to strengthen the digital equity ecosystems in the state. The group has been discussing developing a digital navigator model, how to operationalize the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access report equity recommendations and getting quality devices to stay in the state.
If you are interested in joining the stakeholder group please email: Alyssa Kenney.

Let's Broadband Together
Consumer Reports, along with a coalition of partners, is embarking on an ambitious project called Let's Broadband Together to investigate the state and cost of internet access in the United States. Consumer reports is asking the public to become a member, complete a speed test, share their internet bill and answer a few questions about their

broadband service. The data collected will allow Consumer Reports to make recommendations so that more people have greater access to fair, affordable, reliable internet service.

AmeriCorps VISTA Digital Literacy Program Proposals Request
Literacy Minnesota seeks proposals from nonprofits, public agencies and Tribal Nations anywhere in the United States interested in hosting one or more full-time AmeriCorps VISTA members with our Literacy Leadership program's Digital Literacy cohort in the 2021-22 program year. A Literacy Leadership VISTA enables your organization to turn a dream project into a reality, and to expand, improve or launch new digital literacy programs and services for individuals from low-income households and communities. Literacy Leaders receive a modest living allowance, Education Award, healthcare allowance, training and professional development, and other benefits. Application due October 1. Contact Meghan Paul-Cook for more information.

Grant Recipient Corner: ERF or Email?

"ERF" is the term used by PSC Staff that stands for the PSC's Electronic Records Filing System, and we use it as a noun and a verb. Among other things, this system allows members of the public to submit and obtain information. In the realm of broadband grants, it is the system that grantees should use to file their project status reports – think of it as keeping the public up-to-date about your project. Always file your project status reports, whether interim or final, on ERF.

The quickest way to get to ERF from the PSC's Homepage is to scroll to the bottom and click on the "ERF Upload" button. Once you get to the ERF homepage, note that there is also a Help button in the lower right corner if you need it.

For your reimbursement requests, email PSCBroadbandGrantReimbursement@wisconsin.gov along with your support documents. (Please do not upload them to ERF.) When they are received in this email box, they are assigned a weekday log date and grant specialist to process them. Feel free to reach out to reimbursement staff at the above email address if you have questions about this article!

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