



Commission Awards \$100 Million for ARPA Broadband Grants

On Thursday, October 14, 2021, the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin announced the recipients of the ARPA Broadband Access Grants through funding made available by Governor Evers in May 2021. The Commission awarded \$99,932,502 for 83 projects that will expand fiber broadband internet to more than 28,426 residential and 1,490 business locations that are currently unserved and underserved. The projects receiving awards are located in 40 counties and 3 Tribal lands. The grant awardees will provide matching funds of \$101,942,388. The grants are expected to connect nearly 30,000 locations with new fiber broadband service.

Earlier this year, Governor Evers declared 2021 as 'The Year of Broadband Access,' and allocated \$129 million in state funding over the next two years for the Broadband Expansion Grant Program. "The lack of broadband access in our state makes essential services and resources out of reach for many Wisconsinites, which made the pandemic nearly unmanageable," said PSC Chairperson Rebecca Cameron Valcq. "I am grateful Governor Evers continues to provide state and federal resources for broadband access. These projects put Wisconsin one step closer towards closing the digital divide."

- [Read the full press release](#)
- [See the list and brief description of grant awardees](#)
- [See the map of grant awardees](#)

For newsletter readers looking for more information and analysis related to the ARPA Broadband Access Grants, staff suggest reading the two Commission memos and checking out the Wisconsin Broadband Office's Complex Application Map.

- [Memo discussing eligibility and priority](#)
- [Memo discussing merit and funding](#)
- [Complex ARPA Application Map](#)

MAPPING BROADBAND in Wisconsin

On October 14th, the Commission announced

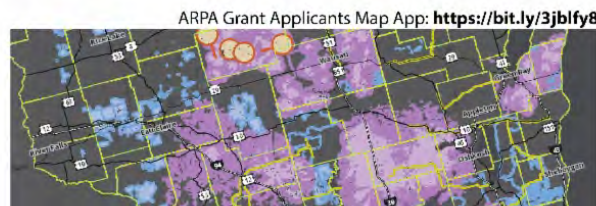
83

ARPA Grant Recipients!

Learn more about the awardees and other proposed ARPA projects on the PSC website!



ARPA Grant Awardees Map: <https://bit.ly/3ITE3UG>



ARPA Grant Applicants Map App: <https://bit.ly/3jblfy8>



Worth Reading: Broadband Affordability Resources



The National Governors Association released a new white paper on [Broadband Affordability Resources](#). This paper details strategies for Governors but would be useful for other elected officials, policy makers and internet service

providers. The paper details programs to make broadband more affordable and close equity gaps that were highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic crisis. Wisconsin's efforts and leadership in this area are highlighted in the paper. While it is important to expand broadband infrastructure and serve more communities, affordability of sufficient internet service remains a significant barrier to closing the digital divide.

This paper examines the following strategies to improve broadband affordability:

- Provide direct customer assistance
- Incentivize affordable rates through grant programs
- Expand service options
- Invest in infrastructure and community anchor institutions

Broadband Affordability White Paper

Federal Grants and Funding Updates

FCC Emergency Connectivity Fund

After a successful first wave of funding, the [FCC announced additional ECF funding](#) to aid in connecting students, school staff, and library patrons to devices and broadband connectivity they need to support their off-premises educational needs. Funding can be used for the purchase of laptops and tablets, Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, routers, and broadband connections. The application period for the second wave closed October 13th. In the first round of funding Wisconsin schools and libraries requested \$66,626,909. As of October 12th Wisconsin has received \$49,272,359. The FCC continues to review applications and will announce future funding commitments in coming weeks.

NTIA Broadband Infrastructure Grants

The U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) published the proposed service areas for the Broadband Infrastructure Program and invited providers to submit information about broadband service they offer in those areas between October 4th and October 19th. An [excel file](#) of all the proposed census blocks is now online.

FCC Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) Funding Authorizations

The FCC continues to review long-form applications of winning bidders in the [RDOF Auction 904](#) on a 'rolling basis.' To date, Baldwin Telecom, Inc. has been *authorized* for funding, with Bruce Telephone Company, Inc., Cuba City Telephone Exchange Co., La Valle Telephone Cooperative, Inc., and Somerset Telephone Co., Inc. *ready to authorize*. A significant portion of RDOF winning bidders in Wisconsin have yet to be ready to authorize or authorized for funding.

BroadbandUSA Interactive Funding Guide

You can find more information on federal broadband grants and digital equity funding opportunities with BroadbandUSA's new [interactive federal funding guide](#), which provides a starting point for users to explore federal broadband funding options based on selected criteria, starting with the type of recipient followed by desired program purpose.

Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program

National Telecommunication and Information Administration (NTIA) [Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program](#) has \$285 million for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and Minority Serving Institutions to help students and communities get connected to the internet through affordable broadband

service. This grant is now open for applications, with applications due December 1st
[Application and Notice of Funding Opportunity](#)

FCC Emergency Broadband Benefit

Wisconsin has **124,437** households enrolled in the [Emergency Broadband Benefit \(EBB\)](#) program as of October 18, 2021. In Wisconsin, more than 20% of likely eligible households are enrolled. The FCC expanded the program eligibility to include households approved to receive benefits under free and reduced price meal program during the 2021-2022 school year. Of the \$3.14 billion in total program funding nationally, \$2.54 billion in funding remains.

Alliant Energy Webinar on Utilities and Broadband

On Wednesday November 3rd, from noon - 1:00 p.m. Alliant Energy is hosting a webinar. The guest speaker will discuss how utilities can help residents throughout the state gain access to broadband internet.

Aryeh Fishman, Associate General Counsel Regulatory Legal Affairs at Edison Electric Institute, will provide an overview of why utilities are getting involved in broadband. He will discuss the critical role of utilities in expanding access to broadband and digital opportunity in some of the Midwest's most underserved communities. Mr. Fishman will discuss:

- Why utility companies are well-positioned to help close the digital divide
- Increasing access to broadband and making it universally available to all consumers is critical to the country's re-emergence from the pandemic
- Why partnerships between ISP, telecoms and utility companies are a win-win for all consumers
- What does the industry need in order to become successful fiber providers

[Register](#)

WI Emergency Management and ISPs

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.

Grant Recipient Corner

Project Status Reports due November 1, 2021

Project Status Reports are due on November 1st for all currently open grant rounds, including FY2020 and FY2021.

There are two types of project status reports, an *interim project status report* and then a *final project status report*. If your project is ongoing and/or will continue to request reimbursement, submit an interim report, If your project is complete and you are

requesting your final reimbursement at the same time, please complete a final project status report. Forms are linked above and can be found on the Broadband Office grant [webpage](#).

Please keep in mind, always file your project status reports on [ERF](#), the Commission's Electronic Records Filing system, under the docket for when the project was awarded funding, [5-BF-2019](#), [5-BF-2020](#), or [5-BF-2021](#). Be sure to give it descriptive words like the project and recipient name that help identify the grant to which it pertains.

And, always file your reimbursement requests (with support documentation) at PSCBroadbandGrantReimbursements@wisconsin.gov.

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](#)