



Governor Evers Announces \$100 Million for Next Round of State Broadband Grants

Governor Tony Evers announced that the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC or Commission) will make available \$100 million for the next round of the State Broadband Expansion Grant Program. The funding comes from the 2021-2023 State Biennial Budget signed by Governor Evers, which provides \$129 million over the biennium for expanding high-speed broadband internet to unserved and underserved areas. The application to apply for the next round of grant funding will be available on the [PSC's website](#) on December 1st.

"I want to thank Governor Evers for signing a budget that invests \$129 million for the expansion of broadband internet in Wisconsin. This amount of funding demonstrates his commitment and dedication to connecting all of Wisconsin to this essential service," said PSC Chairperson Rebecca Cameron Valcq. "As we continue to push towards the goal of getting all of us connected, the PSC will utilize these dollars effectively and efficiently while maintaining our high standards of accountability and transparency."

The State Broadband Expansion Grant Program aims to deploy high performance broadband in underserved areas of the state. Since the inception of the program in 2014, 268 grants have been awarded and have connected or are in the process of connecting over 20,000 businesses and 296,000 homes to high-speed broadband internet service. The full press release is available [here](#)

Broadband Expansion Grant Webinar

The Wisconsin Broadband Office will host a *Broadband Expansion Grant Information and Overview* webinar on **Wednesday, December 8, 2021, at 2:00 p.m.** Registration is available below. For those who cannot attend, a recording of the webinar will be made available on the Wisconsin Broadband Office webpage. The Wisconsin Broadband Office will also host outreach workshops in communities throughout the State. Subsequent webinars and information on in-person workshops will be posted on the [Wisconsin Broadband Office grants webpage](#).

[December Webinar Registration](#)

Federal Grants and Funding Updates

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

Upon President Biden's signature, the [Infrastructure Act](#) will become the largest public investment in broadband deployment ever! Over the next six months, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) will create the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program (BEAD) to support projects to construct and deploy broadband networks. Congress has allocated \$42.5 billion for the program which will prioritize the expansion of broadband in rural areas through states. An additional \$2 billion in funding is provided for both USDA ReConnect and Tribal Connectivity. Additional funding has been allocated for affordability, digital inclusion programs, and middle mile.

USDA ReConnect Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Utilities Service (RUS) announced more than \$1 billion in funding to promote broadband access in rural, Tribal and socially vulnerable communities through the [ReConnect program](#). The program will offer eligible recipients a mix of grants, grants and loans combined and just loans to support the construction, improvement, or acquisition of facilities and equipment to deploy robust, high performance broadband capable of 100/100 Mbps.

The USDA Broadband ReConnect Loan and Grant Programs have many similarities to the PSC's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Broadband Access Grants. Earlier this year, the Commission received 242 grant applications requesting more than \$440 million for projects but could only fund up to [\\$100 million](#) through ARPA. With many promising projects still to be pursued, the PSC encourages ARPA applicants not selected for funding to apply for the USDA ReConnect grants and other upcoming state and federal funding opportunities. *Applications will be available starting November 24, 2021.*

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](#). This guide 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.

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.' On [November 10, 2021](#) authorized for funding, with Bruce Telephone Company, Inc., Cuba City Telephone Exchange Co., La Valle Telephone Cooperative, Inc., Somerset Telephone Co., Inc. and Richland-Grant Telephone Cooperative are ready to authorize.

Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program

National Telecommunications 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 and applications are due **December 1st** [Application and Notice of Funding Opportunity](#).

UW Extension Hosts Broadband Summit



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

On Tuesday November 16th, 2021 from 9:00 a.m. - noon, UW Extension is hosting a virtual Broadband Summit. The Wisconsin Broadband Summit is organized by UW Extension, and the Commission is a sponsor. The summit's goal is to help Wisconsin communities enhance broadband access by:

- understanding the importance of broadband to economic development,
- exploring models for active networking and leadership development,
- accessing and applying mapping, data, and survey research techniques, and
- learning about available funding options.

[Agenda and Registration](#)

Digital Equity and Inclusion Updates

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

The Infrastructure Act is an investment in broadband deployment and it is also an investment in digital equity and digital inclusion programs. The Act provides \$14.2 billion to create a longer term, \$30 per month voucher program to assist low-income Americans to pay for internet service modeled on the Emergency Broadband Benefit. The Act also allocated \$2.75 billion for digital literacy and inclusion programs including state planning and Capacity Grants.

FCC Emergency Connectivity Fund

The FCC's Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) is a \$7.17 billion program to help schools and libraries provide the tools and services their communities need for remote learning. Funding can be used to purchase laptops and tablets, Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, routers, and off campus broadband connections. The application period for the second wave closed October 13th. Wisconsin schools and libraries have requested \$138,026,828 in ECF funds. As of November 5th Wisconsin has received **\$53,986,165** and 333 applications have committed funding. The FCC continues to review applications and will continue to announce future funding commitments.

FCC Emergency Broadband Benefit

Wisconsin has **134,771** households enrolled in the [Emergency Broadband Benefit \(EBB\)](#) program as of November 8th, 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 the free and reduced price meal program during the 2021-2022 school year. Of the \$3.14 billion in total program funding nationally, \$2.28 billion in funding remains. With the passing of the Infrastructure Act this benefit will become the permanent Affordable Connectivity Program.

Digital Equity and Inclusion Stakeholder Group

The State of Wisconsin Digital Equity and Inclusion Stakeholder group meets monthly to inform the state Digital Equity and Inclusion Plan and work to strengthen the digital equity ecosystems in the state. In addition, the group has been discussing developing a digital navigator model, how to increase participation in the Emergency Broadband Benefit and learning from other members. If you are interested in joining the stakeholder group please [email](#).

Worth Watching: Broadband for Everyone: What will it take?

On Tuesday, November 9, 2021, PSC Chairperson Rebecca Cameron Valcq joined experts and policymakers for a live panel discussion on broadband solutions for Wisconsin. The event was hosted by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin, and the O'Brien Fellowship in Public Service Journalism at Marquette University. Additional panelists included:

- Shirley Bloomfield, CEO of NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association;
- Keith Gabbard, CEO of Peoples Rural Telephone Cooperative (McKee, KY.);
- Barry Orton, Professor Emeritus University of Wisconsin-Madison;
- Jim Paine, Mayor of the City of Superior;
- Vicki Robinson, General Manager for Microsoft Corp.'s Airband Initiative;
- Jim Tuckwell, Chairman of the Vilas County Economic Development Corp

Watch

Worth Reading: No Home Left Offline



Education
SUPERHIGHWAY

The national non-profit EducationSuperHighway published a new report [No Home Left Offline: Bridging the Broadband Affordability Gap](#). The report shines a light on the need for affordable internet and the way that both access and cost are barriers to home internet access. The report indicates that the broadband affordability gap makes up 49% of [Wisconsin's digital divide](#) and illustrates how the affordability gap disproportionately impacts low-income, Black and Latinx Americans. Give it a read.



WISCONSIN
Broadband Coverage Data Collection

Coverage data due from Providers on December 1st!

EMAIL PSCBroadbandData@Wisconsin.gov FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO SUBMIT DATA

Grant Recipient Corner: ARPA Grant Agreements

The PSC is working to get grant agreements out to ARPA Broadband Access grant recipients as quickly as feasible. Commission Staff currently anticipates agreements will be sent in late November. Commission Staff ask that recipients promptly respond to questions and thoroughly review the grant agreement before signing.



WBO 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](#)

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