



State Broadband Expansion Grant Due March 17

Important Notes for Interested Parties

The State Broadband Expansion Grant Program aims to deploy high performance broadband in underserved areas of the State. On December 1, 2021 the Commission announced that it is now accepting applications for FY2022 Broadband Expansion Grants. This round will make available \$100 million for grants. Eligible applicants will demonstrate a clear and achievable plan to improve broadband communications services in one or more underserved areas in the State.

Different from previous grant rounds, this round will be funded with bond proceeds authorized by the Wisconsin Building Commission pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 13.48(30). As such, successful applicants are subject to the requirements of Wis. Stat. § 13.48(30).

The Commission has added additional information and a draft grant agreement to the Broadband Grants website for applicants to understand this change.

[Information about FY2022 Grant Agreements](#)

[DRAFT Grant Agreement FY2022 - Bonding](#)

Since the opening of the grant round, the Wisconsin Broadband Office has hosted a number of webinars, including a grant overview and how to map your broadband project. The webinars are available to view on the [Broadband grant website](#) and serve as an excellent resource for applicants.

February 15, 2022 was the last day for submitting questions and requests for clarification on the application. The Commission has added a [Frequently Asked Questions document](#) to the grant website that provides additional information and answers to submitted questions.

On February 22, 2022 the [Wisconsin Broadband Map](#) was updated to reflect the results of the most recent data collection and data submitted to the FCC. Applicants should make sure to use the most up-to-date version of the map when submitting their application.

Application Deadline: **Thursday, March 17, 2022, 4 p.m. CT**

[How to apply and more information](#)

Request for Comment on Middle Mile

Public Service Commission of Wisconsin Requesting Comments on Middle Mile

The Commission is committed to expanding broadband service in unserved and underserved areas of the state. To assist in the deployment of expanded service, the Commission directed staff to investigate how to best support and coordinate the construction of middle mile fiber routes, and prepare informational recommendations for the Commission. The Commission requests comments from interested parties on the topic of construction of middle mile broadband infrastructure. The Commission is interested in how to evaluate middle mile proposals in grant programs and also how to structure the grant awards to best reinforce existing routes or build out new middle mile routes to reach areas that currently have inadequate broadband service.

Comments Due: **Thursday, March 31, 2022 1:30 p.m. CT**

[Notice of Request for Comment](#)

Federal Broadband Updates

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

The White House has released a "[Guidebook to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Governments, and Other Partners](#)." The guidebook provides a nice overview of each broadband related program in the law including brief descriptions and eligible uses for each program. The broadband section begins on page 385.

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 loans only to **support the** construction, improvement, or acquisition of facilities and equipment to deploy robust, high performance broadband capable of 100/100 Mbps.

Applications are open and the deadline has been extended to March 9, 2022.

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. As of [February 14, 2022](#) the following winners have been *authorized* for funding in Wisconsin: Baldwin Telecom, Inc., Bruce Telephone Company, Inc., Cuba City Telephone Exchange Co., La Valle Telephone Cooperative, Inc., Lakeland Communications Group, LLC, Richland-Grant Telephone Cooperative, Inc., and Somerset Telephone Co. Inc.

The following winners are *ready to authorize in* Wisconsin: Charter Fiberlink CCO, LLC; Marquette-Adams Telephone Cooperative, Inc.; and Reedsburg Utility Commission.

Emergency Connectivity Fund

The FCC continues to review and approve [Emergency Connectivity Fund](#) applications. Schools and libraries in Wisconsin have requested \$82,990,397. As of February 23, 2022 \$70,774,613 has been approved. More than \$12 million in Wisconsin requests are still pending review. The FCC has extended the deadline to use committed ECF funds to June 30, 2023. Across the nation, total commitment to date will support over 11,000 schools, 900 libraries and 130 consortia for over 10 million connected devices and over 5 million broadband connections.

NTIA Tribal Connectivity Program

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has made 8 Tribal Connectivity awards as of February 22, 2022. Two of the eight awards impact Wisconsin. [Lac Courte Oreilles, Stone Lake, \\$442,734](#) The proposed planning study will complete a detailed feasibility analysis and broadband design to determine the best way to provide broadband services to its government facilities, business enterprises, and its unserved housing units located on the Reservation. [Sokaogon Chippewa, Crandon, \\$452,162](#) The Broadband Use and Adoption project will cover the costs of broadband internet services for all Mole Lake Reservation households (approximately 500 Tribal members), including upgrades to service (faster connections) and new modems and routers as needed.

NOW HIRING! The Federal Broadband Grants team is hiring a Grants Specialist Advanced and a Program and Policy Analyst Advanced. Position descriptions can be found [here](#).

Affordable Connectivity Program Resources

The Public Service Commission is working to help build awareness about the [Affordable Connectivity Program](#), a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) program. The new long-term benefit will help to lower the cost of broadband service for eligible households struggling to afford internet service.

The \$14 billion Affordable Connectivity Program provides a discount of up to a \$30 per

month toward broadband service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for qualifying households on qualifying Tribal lands. The benefit also provides up to a \$100 per household discount toward a one-time purchase of a computer, laptop, or tablet if the household contributes more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase through a participating broadband provider.

As of February 22, 2022 Wisconsin has 177,892 households enrolled in the program. The FCC has developed an [Outreach Toolkit](#) for organizations to use in promoting the program. If you would like to request printed outreach materials you can email ACPinfo@fcc.gov and request materials. The Commission has developed a 2-page resources that is linked below.

ACP Resource

Digital Equity and Inclusion Updates

Nonprofit Access Grant Program

The program enables nonprofit groups to apply for partial funding of programs or projects that will facilitate affordable access to telecommunications and digital inclusion activities. The project must assist low-income households, people with disabilities or customers in areas of the state that have relatively high costs of services in obtaining affordable access to a basic set of essential telecommunications services. The Commission may award up to \$500,000 in grants under this program on a fiscal year basis.

Application Deadline: **Tuesday, March 1, 2022, 4 p.m. CT**

[How to apply and more information](#)

National Digital Inclusion Alliance - Digital Navigator Corp Opportunity

National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) received a multi-million grant to create a Digital Navigator Corps. The funding will be used to build and advance local digital inclusion work and to strengthen the digital equity model in *rural and Tribal communities*. Digital Navigators are trusted guides who assist community members in internet adoption and the use of computing devices. NDIA will partner with 18 sites, including a minimum of six sites in Tribal communities and Indian Country. These sites will get our support and funding in launching multi-year digital navigator programs – including in training, outreach, and data collection

[Learn more, sign up for webinars and application updates](#)

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 Affordable Connectivity Program and learning from other members. If you are interested in joining the stakeholder group please [email](#).

Governor's Task Force - Next Meeting

The March meeting of the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access is scheduled for Wednesday, March 9, 2022 from 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. The Task Force will continue work on preparing their annual 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.

Worth Reading:

A Roadmap for Affordable Broadband

From the Measuring the Effectiveness of Digital Inclusion Approaches (MEDIA) Project at the USC University of Southern California, *A Roadmap for Affordable Broadband: Lessons from the Emergency Broadband Benefit* the finding outline a number of opportunities to improve outreach efforts and ease enrollment procedures for key groups of low-incomes households.

[Download the Policy Brief](#)

Webinar of Interest: Broadband's impact on telemedicine, education and economic development

On Thursday March 17, 2022 Alliant Energy Virtual Speaker Series will host a webinar on: "*Broadband's impact on telemedicine, education and economic development*" For those with reliable and affordable broadband, it's easy to access telemedicine and educational opportunities, and to improve one's economic opportunities. For those without access to affordable, reliable internet service, the challenge to participate in those simple activities severely impacts one's livelihood. These disparities were made even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Panelists – David Schneider, Gene Dalhoff and Steve Goldberg – will shine the spotlight on ways to overcome the obstacles brought to light during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Register](#)

Grant Recipient Corner: State Broadband Grants Project Status Reports

All **State** grant Agreements require recipients to file periodic project status reports, either an [interim](#) or a [final](#) report. Most grant recipients will file multiple interim reports and all grantees should file only one final report for each project. This article is about those interim and final reports, as there is some confusion over the final report.



Interim reports are due periodically throughout the performance period defined in your grant Agreement. Refer to your Agreement for details on *when* to file your interim reports (and final reports too).

Applicants define a project schedule in their application. File your final project status report and email your final payment request when you reach those project milestones and know the final project expenses. Sometimes a recipient incurs all budgeted project expenses before meeting all scheduled milestones. In these cases, recipients can send a payment request to draw down all available grant funds. However, we only release the amount of funds provided for in your grant Agreement (up to 90% of grant funds for some awards, 80% for others).

Remember to file all project status reports on [ERF](#), the Commission's electronic records filing system. If you have any questions about project status reports, please contact [Dennis Klaila](#).

Grant Recipient: Best Practice for Tracking Property

As a best practice, and to facilitate proper tracking of property,

recipients should tag any piece of equipment (including supplies such as computing devices that are attractive due to their use of potential value and easily pilferable due to their size). Tags should consist of a physical label with an inventory number and should not be easy to remove. The tag should also indicate the funding source (i.e., the federal or state program name) and name of the entity that holds the title to the property.



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](#)

[Join Our Mailing List](#)