



Application Instructions

Blandin Broadband Communities on the Iron Range

Issued: July 9, 2018 Due: September 28, 2018

Summary

C. K. Blandin Foundation seeks four rural Minnesota communities to participate in the Blandin Community Broadband Program's (BCBP) second cohort of *Iron Range Blandin Broadband Communities*. Selected through an application process, Blandin Broadband Communities (BBCs) define their technology goals, receive planning and technical assistance and have access to resources to implement projects designed to make progress on their broadband and community technology enhancement goals.

This special cohort of Blandin Broadband Communities on the Iron Range has been made possible through a partnership between Blandin Foundation and the Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation and St. Louis County. Communities must be located within the IRRR's service area¹ in northeastern Minnesota to be eligible to participate in this program.

The definition of "community" is flexible. Applications may be made by an individual city, a group of cities, a county, a tribal government, a self-defined region or community of interest. Applicants should be a unit of government. Preference will be given to applications that demonstrate partnership between multiple organizations/entities.

Background

Blandin Foundation stands with Minnesota's rural leaders and communities as they create and claim futures that are resilient, vibrant and connected. Abundant and robust access to the Internet (broadband) – and the digital literacy skills necessary to take full advantage of this access – are essential as rural communities seek to compete and thrive in a digitally connected world.

Since making rural broadband access and use a primary focus in 2003, Blandin Foundation has partnered with broadband champions in over 100 communities and organizations across the state to implement hundreds of community-based broadband projects with two core objectives in mind: sustainable broadband adoption and enriched quality of life and place.

¹ See <http://mn.gov/irrrb/about-us/who-we-serve/> for a map of IRRR's service area

Vision:

At the November 2015 *Border to Border Broadband: Better Together* conference, more than 170 people from across Minnesota worked to create, and by consensus adopt, a new vision for broadband for our state:

Everyone in Minnesota will be able to use convenient, affordable world-class broadband networks that enable us to survive and thrive in our communities and across the globe.²

Since then, nearly 100 organizations have formally endorsed the Vision³, and nearly 300 individuals and entities have 'liked' it on Facebook⁴.

Blandin Broadband Communities on the Iron Range

Once selected, Iron Range Broadband Community (IRBC) teams will receive planning and facilitation support, and the *opportunity* to apply for grant funding for locally developed projects that address community identified needs. IRBCs may apply for matching funding over a two-year period, with the average amount of grant support anticipated to be \$75,000 per community. In addition, communities will be able to apply for up to \$25,000 to conduct a Robust Network Feasibility Study which requires a 1:1 cash match. *Grant funding is not guaranteed.*

Significant commitment on the part of the IRBCs will be expected and required throughout the two-year grant period.

- Communities must commit to recruiting and supporting an inclusive community steering committee that reflects community composition. See attached *Guidelines for Building an Inclusive Steering Committee*.
- Steering Committee members must be able and willing to commit time and attention to planning and project development and management.
- Steering Committee members must participate in virtual and in-person meetings with other BBCs.

² To learn more about the Broadband Vision for Minnesota visit <http://broadband.blandinfoundation.org/resources/case-studies/minnesota-broadband-vision>

³ Minnesota Broadband Vision Endorsements: <http://broadband.blandinfoundation.org/resources/articles/minnesota-broadband-vision-endorsements>

⁴ I Endorse the Minnesota Broadband Vision on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/mnbroadbandvision/>

Principles for the Work

Intelligent Community Framework: Blandin Foundation and its broadband partners have had great success in organizing around the indicators and concepts developed by the Intelligent Community Forum.

The model to the right illustrates that on a base of broadband infrastructure and services, a community can build its workforce, support innovation and address digital equity through efforts sustainable over time. From those assets, a community can build an effective marketing message to both internal and external markets with the goal of retaining and attracting talent and investment.

To summarize, Blandin Broadband Communities are expected to work across all six components of the Intelligent Community framework though each community will determine its own set of priorities and develop projects that reflect these priorities.



Intelligent Community Indicators
The Virtuous Cycle
www.intelligentcommunity.org

Blandin Broadband Communities program application process

To be considered a qualified applicant, an organization must comply with all of the specifications and respond to all items listed within the application instructions. Eligible organizations are located in IRRR's service area⁵, serve residents of this geography, and be units of government, which includes school districts.

Evaluation Criteria:

Applications will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- The level of commitment and appropriate skills of the lead organization to manage the local program, and the ability to serve as the fiscal agent should grant funds be awarded.
- The level of demonstrated support from key community organizations, including local government, chamber of commerce and/or economic development groups, school districts, health care providers, library and others.
- The commitment of the lead organization to developing an inclusive process and representation on the project steering committee of underserved and underrepresented populations (see attached *Building an Inclusive Steering Committee*)
- A commitment to attend program-sponsored events.
- The level of past/current action and energy in community broadband-related community economic development activities.
- Demonstrated need for support and funding for broadband-related activities.

⁵ See <http://mn.gov/irrrb/about-us/who-we-serve/> for a map of IRRR's service area.

Response Instructions:

All Blandin Broadband Communities program applications should be prepared simply and economically, avoiding the use of elaborate promotional materials beyond those sufficient to provide a complete, accurate and reliable presentation.

Qualified community institutions and/or organizations should submit application materials via email (preferred) or mail to:

C. K. Blandin Foundation
Attn: Mary Magnuson
100 North Pokegama Avenue
Grand Rapids, MN 55744
memagnuson@blandinfoundation.org

Applicants are encouraged to contact Blandin Foundation with any and all questions regarding the Blandin Broadband Communities program. This includes transmitting draft version of applications for pre-submittal review. All inquiries should be directed to Mary Magnuson at memagnuson@blandinfoundation.org or (218) 327-8738.

Applications should be no longer than eight pages (excluding financial statements, other legal documents, and letters of support) and contain the following information:

1. Cover letter that introduces your organization, defines your 'community', and makes a strategic link between your community's technology aspirations and the goals of the Blandin Community Broadband Program.
2. Sponsoring Organization Information
 - a. Complete contact information, including organization name, primary contact name, title, address, email address, phone number, website address, and federal ID number.
 - b. Summary of organization's history, including the date established.
 - c. Summary of organization's mission and goals.
 - d. Brief description of the organization's key project staff, including qualifications relevant to the BBC program.
 - e. Description of organization's current programs or activities, including any service statistics and strengths or accomplishments. Please highlight new or different activities, if any, for this organization.
 - f. Description of parent organization, affiliated companies, strategic partners or joint ventures (if applicable). This should include: legal name, mission statement, services and programs, addresses, and staff contacts.

4. Ability to manage and lead a successful community broadband project
 - a. Describe the opportunities and challenges that exist in your community, and how they might be addressed through this program.
 - i. Define the geographical area of your community.
 - b. List and describe the local/regional organizations that have provided letters of support and participation.
 - c. List your community's economic development priorities and current efforts around these priorities.
 - d. Describe any work done previously or currently underway around the Intelligent Community Indicators:
 - i. Broadband infrastructure and services development
 - ii. Creation, attraction and support of knowledge workers (highly skilled, highly paid workers)
 - iii. Innovation (new industries, new companies, new practices to enhance competitiveness)
 - iv. Digital Inclusion (ensuring that all community members have computers, skills and connectivity)
 - v. Community marketing (efforts to attract investment and talent)
 - e. List and provide brief bios for members of the project's leadership team. Please make note of people representing underserved or underrepresented populations.
5. Letters of support and/or participation from local/regional organizations.
Attachments.

Submission of an application does not create any right in or expectation of a contract or obligation with the Foundation. The Foundation reserves the right to reject any or all applications, and the Foundation further declares that it will incur no financial obligation for any costs by any organization in preparation of applications.

Once selected, Blandin Broadband Communities are not guaranteed grant funding through the program.

More about the Blandin Broadband Communities program

Timeline

Application instructions released	June 18, 2018
Application deadline	September 28, 2018
Iron Range Broadband Communities selection notification	October 19, 2018
<i>Border to Border Broadband: Transforming Minnesota</i> conference, Madden's on Gull Lake	October 23-24, 2018
Community benchmarking	November/December 2018
Kick-off meeting with four communities	December 2018
Community planning commences	January/February 2019
Project application/approval	March/April 2019 June/July 2019 September/October 2019 December/January 2020
Review/update community plans	January 2020
Project evaluation	November/December 2020

Blandin Broadband Communities program applicants from the Iron Range are strongly encouraged to attend Blandin Foundation's annual conference, *Border to Border Broadband: Transforming Minnesota*⁶, on October 23-24 in Brainerd, Minnesota. All applicant communities will receive two free registrations to the conference. Travel and lodging expense will be the responsibility of the attendees.

Grant proposals will be developed by BBC steering committees and submitted to Blandin Foundation on a quarterly basis starting in March of 2019 as indicated above. However, recommendation for funding by the steering committee does not guarantee project funding. All grant funds should be spent within one year of the award date.

⁶ For conference details, visit <https://blandinfoundation.org/news-room/events/border-to-border-broadband-transforming-minnesota/>; contact Mary Magnuson memagnuson@blandinfoundation.org with questions.

Project Funding and Process

BBC steering committees will have several opportunities to recommend grant proposals to Blandin Foundation for funding. Grant proposals will be reviewed by Foundation staff and members of the Foundation's Broadband Strategy Board, a group of public and private leaders who advise the Foundation's broadband work. The Strategy Board will determine which applications are funded based on grant evaluation criteria⁷.

Community Project Grants: BBCs may apply for up to \$75,000 in community project grants that advance their BBC's technology goals.

Community Project Grants must demonstrate a cash or in-kind match of at least 25% of the total project cost. Projects that provide community-wide cross-sectorial benefits require 25% (1:3) match, and all equipment purchases require 1:1 *cash* match. Projects that demonstrate more than the minimum match required will be viewed favorably.

Robust Network Feasibility Fund Grants: Communities actively working to improve broadband networks and access are eligible to apply for up to \$25,000 through the Robust Network Feasibility Fund program. These grants require a 1:1 cash match and are designed to help a community better understand their technology and business model options to improve local broadband services.

Once again, being selected to participate in the Blandin Broadband Communities Program is not a guarantee of grant funding.

⁷ Grant evaluation criteria are listed in the grant application instructions, which will be released in autumn of 2018.

More about the application process

Disposition and Disclosure of Applications:

All Blandin Broadband Communities program applications will become the property of the Blandin Foundation.

Modification or Withdrawal of Applications:

Applications may be modified or withdrawn by written notice (e-mail notice acceptable) prior to the final review of the application by C. K. Blandin Foundation.

Reservation of Rights:

The Blandin Foundation reserves the right to:

- Accept or reject any and all Blandin Broadband Communities Program applications received, and to solicit new submittals.
- Waive or modify any irregularities in applications received after prior notification to the lead organization.
- Request the submission of application modifications at any time if deemed in the best interest of the Foundation.
- Consider application modifications received at any time if such changes are deemed in the best interest of the Foundation.
- Request clarification and/or additional information from the applicant during the evaluation process.
- Deny grant funding for projects chosen by a Blandin Broadband Community should that community not follow program requirements or if the projects forwarded to the Foundation for funding consideration do not meet the goals of the program or are not allowable costs for private foundations or IRRR.
- In the event of termination, enter into negotiations with other qualified firms that submitted applications, rather than redoing the application process for the project.

IRRR reserves the right to require signage/logo acknowledging financial assistance from the Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation.

For more information:

Mary Magnuson (program administrator), 218-326-0523 or broadband@blandinfoundation.org

Blandin Foundation website: www.blandinfoundation.org

Broadband: <http://broadband.blandinfoundation.org>

Grants: <http://grants.blandinfoundation.org>

Blandin on Broadband blog: www.blandinonbroadband.org

C. K. Blandin Foundation

C. K. Blandin Foundation is a private foundation based in Grand Rapids, Minnesota. The Foundation was created in 1941, and is Minnesota's largest rural-based and rural-focused foundation. The Foundation is funded through annual contributions from the C.K. Blandin Residuary Trust and earnings from its own investments. As of December 31, 2011, the net assets of the Foundation and the Residuary Trust were \$370 million.

The Foundation's mission "To strengthen rural Minnesota communities, especially the Grand Rapids area," and vision "To be the premier partner for building healthy rural Minnesota communities, grounded in strong economies, where burdens and benefits are widely shared," guide our three program areas, grant making, community leadership training and public policy. See www.blandinfoundation.org for additional information.

Blandin's Community-Based Broadband Programs

The Blandin Foundation has long believed that abundant broadband access and technologically literate citizens are essential ingredients for creating vibrant rural communities, and began its focused community work in 2005.

Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation

The Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation (IRRR) is a development agency located in Eveleth, Minnesota. IRRR's mission is to promote and invest in business, community and workforce development for the betterment of northeastern Minnesota.

IRRR provided a \$500,000 grant to partner with the Blandin Foundation on this project to increase broadband/technology enabled economic development across the IRRR service area in 2016; and continues to invest in the effort with an additional \$714,000 to continue this work with existing and new communities through 2020.



Blandin Broadband Communities: Guidelines for Building an Inclusive Steering Committee

Creating an inclusive steering committee is an important part of becoming a Blandin Broadband Community. Here are six things to do to help ensure that your steering committee is inclusive.

1. Know your community demographics and how your technology issues connect to various stakeholders (it is important to look at the current demographics of your community both in the census data but also at the MN Department of Education website). Know your community as a whole and how your efforts will impact the community.
2. Make sure you get representatives from your community's underrepresented populations for your leadership team. In addition to ethnicity, age and gender, consider residents who are unemployed and seeking employment, small main street businesses which have not yet adopted modern Internet-based technologies, and county government. This can be tricky if this is not a group you've worked with before. Here are some tips:
 - a. To avoid 'tokenism,' aim for including a minimum of 3 people from underrepresented populations on your team.
 - b. Include on your team a community leader who works with and already has established a trusted relationship with some or all of the minority or underrepresented populations you are targeting as members of the steering committee.
 - c. When recruiting people to represent a minority population, talk with a variety of sources to find leaders who are respected within the community you are reaching out to. For example, talk to union representatives, local businesses, churches, schools, or others familiar with the community.
3. Have a good job description which includes the expectations and time commitments of the steering committee members. It is really helpful to have a handout that includes your project's purpose and expectations that you can leave with possible steering members. Community members are busy people and knowing what they are signing up for is important in order to help maintain volunteers and momentum.
4. Look for steering committee members who are: credible, open-minded, passionate about the specific issue, and willing to work collaboratively.
5. Your steering committee should represent a broad network of individuals who have the ability to access information and resources needed to move your project forward.
6. When recruiting steering committee members, make sure to visit them face-to-face and not via email or letter. Creating a more personal invitation really reinforces that they (not just anyone) are valued and needed as members of the steering committee.