



## Chisago Lakes Area Broadband Community Vision and Project Development Summary

### Background and process:

In early 2020, Chisago Lakes Area was selected as one of five new Blandin Broadband Communities working in partnership with the Foundation to expand broadband access and to increase technology adoption. Each community will receive up to \$75,000 to allocate to technology projects using the Intelligent Community approach as the guiding framework.

Blandin Foundation has worked with over 40 communities – cities, counties, tribal governments, school districts and regional entities on this program over the past decade.

This report documents the discussion and decisions made by the Chisago Lakes Area community through their Blandin Broadband Community Vision and Project Development process, including the Vision and Brainstorm meetings and an online voting process. The process occurred June 19 through June 24 via online Zoom meetings with voting via Survey Monkey. Approximately 45 people participated, representing key sectors of the community, including business, education, health care, government and residents.

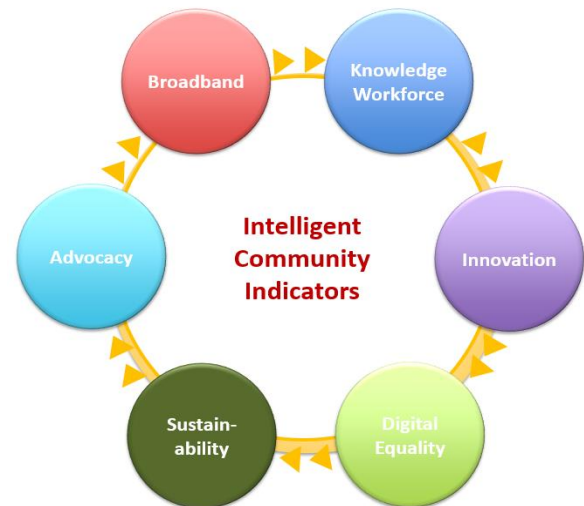
Thank you to the Steering Team that helped to design, plan and implement this process which needed to be moved online due to COVID – 19 health protocols. The Steering Team managed the invitation process and encouraged participation. Their work will continue on to turn project ideas into actual projects with project leaders, teams, goals, strategies and budget.

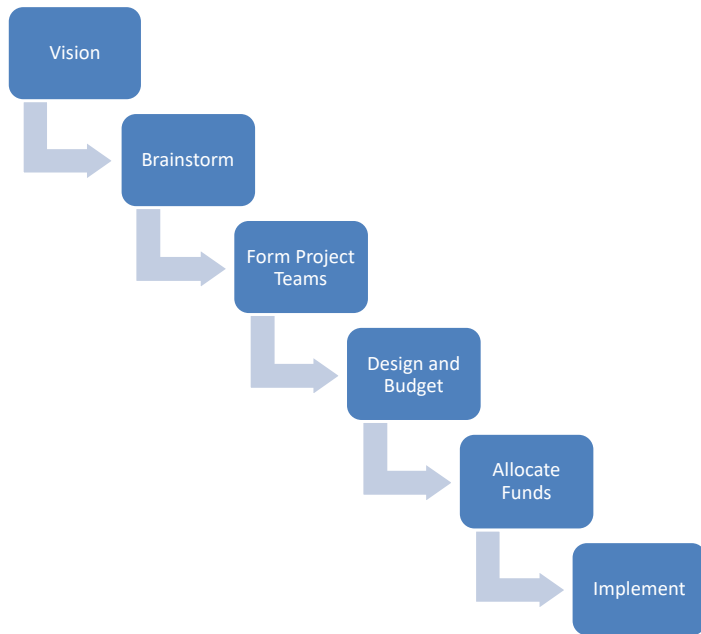
Prior to COVID-19, Blandin Foundation used a three-hour in-person Vision Meeting to:

- review the Intelligent Community approach
- highlight and discuss assets and gaps for each of the six elements
- create a set of desired outcomes
- brainstorm project ideas, and
- prioritize project ideas through voting and volunteering.

The new process is executed over a two to three-week process:

- Online survey focusing on each of the Intelligent Community elements
- Vision Meeting with discussion of assets and gaps and development of desired outcomes
- Brainstorm Meeting to generate project ideas
- Online community voting to prioritize projects
- Online process to recruit project volunteers





The Vision Meeting occurred June 19 via Zoom with 45 attendees. The Brainstorm Meeting was held June 24 with 35 participants. The voting was open June 29 through July 10; 25 community members took part in that process.

The next steps will be for the project teams to formalize project proposals for consideration by the Steering Team which will prioritize projects and allocate Blandin Foundation grant funds.

This report summarizes this process to date.

## Vision Meeting

The purpose of the Vision Meeting is to familiarize community members with the Blandin Broadband Community program, list and discuss community assets and gaps regarding the six Intelligent Community elements ([www.intelligentcommunity.org](http://www.intelligentcommunity.org)) and to develop a consensus on the community's desired outcomes from their participation in the Blandin process.

In essence, the Intelligent Community method ([www.intelligentcommunity.org](http://www.intelligentcommunity.org)) can be summarized as follows: on a base of broadband infrastructure and services, a community can work to support the creation, attraction and support of a knowledge workforce; spur the adoption of innovation throughout the community; adopt sustainability practices and address digital inclusion. With these activities, a community can create both internal and external marketing and advocacy messages to attract people and investment.

Blandin Foundation consultant Bill Coleman teamed with local leaders to describe the Intelligent Community framework to all participants. Coleman provided general background information and local leaders provided their more knowledgeable local perspective. Selected highlights from the pre-registration community survey were included in the presentation. Complete responses to the open-ended survey questions can be found online here:

All of this information was used as a community conversation starter at the Vision Meeting and will be used as a tool to measure progress over the two-year Broadband Community program.

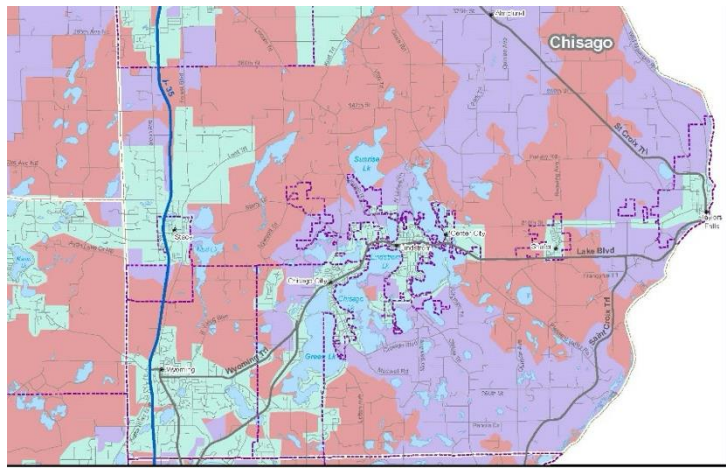
Following the ICF presentation, attendees were placed in Zoom breakout rooms to delve more deeply into their Intelligent Community element. Attendees brought their own personal experience and nuanced knowledge to the discussion. Each of the groups were charged with and accomplished the following tasks for their assigned Intelligent Community element:

- a) Build on the list of Assets and Gaps/Barriers presented by the community presenters
- b) Create a list of Desired Outcomes

The following summary includes information from community presenters, the community survey and the community discussion of the Vision meeting. Full results from that survey can be found at <https://blandinfoundation.org/content/uploads/Chisago-Lakes-Survey-Qs-1-6.pdf>

## Broadband

This map illustrates the availability of broadband within Chisago Lakes Area. Areas in red are considered unserved (broadband services of less than 25 Mb/3 Mb). Areas in purple are considered under-served (services between 25 Mb/3 Mb and 100 Mb/20 Mb). Areas in green are considered served (services in excess of 100 Mb/20 Mb). Unserved areas are considered a priority for the Minnesota Border to Border Broadband Grant program.



Frontier Communications and MidCo are the two primary broadband providers in Chisago Lakes. MidCo serves urbanized areas only; Frontier covers the entire area. Here are some key county statistics:

- 100 Mb/20 Mb coverage: 71%
- 25 Mb/3 Mb coverage: 83.85
- Chisago County ranks 52<sup>nd</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup>, respectively among counties in these categories.

There has been strong community organizing and broadband planning in Chisago Lake and Franconia Townships with both townships submitting unsuccessful applications for state broadband grants.

The following perspectives were harvested from the pre-registration survey for the Vision meeting.

- 23 of 41 responses said their broadband was slow and/or unreliable.
- Slow unreliable interrupts/stops: ecommerce buying and selling, working from home, school homework, security system, streaming.
- Many stressed that they must have Internet for work and personal life.
- Midco customers are happy with service.

The information below came from the small group breakout discussion:

Assets	Barriers / Gaps
Communities work together to solve issues.	Density requirements reduced to allow better access in rural area.
Ability to access local ecommerce	Bandwidth caps and cost may become an issue.
Cellular/Wireless availability	Last mile issues for end users 20 users per trench mile.
Good fiber backbone	Throttling of internet based on usage in home

Assets	Barriers / Gaps
Midco provides quality access with multiple choices for internet access.	Limited companies will bid to put in new fiber in our area due to cost limitations.
	Shared internet creates limited access for multiple users.

Participants were asked “If we are truly successful in this initiative over the next 18 months, what will be different?” “What are we trying to accomplish?”

Desired Outcomes
Affordable/Consistent internet access.
Plan from existing providers for future internet expansion.
Bring fiber to the premise in Franconia and Chisago Lakes Township
Advocacy and education in our area to understand the importance of high speed internet in our area.
Have a single solution for all telecommunications. (bundled services)
Matching funding to allow lower density numbers to provide internet to our rural areas.
Cost sharing between township/city/county/state

## Knowledge Workforce

The information below is taken from the community survey:

- Highly skilled workforce; many of which commute to the Twin Cities
- Using this workforce within Chisago Lakes would provide great benefits
- Workforce is now trying to work from home; rural broadband services not up to the requirements
- Distance learning hindered by inadequate broadband

The information below came from the small group breakout discussion:

Assets	Barriers / Gaps
Higher learning Institutions: Pine Technical Community College in Pine City; Anoka Community College in Cambridge; Century College in White Bear Lake	Lack of knowledge with new technology- Gap with knowledge and comfort to use platforms
City of Lindstrom has an internship program- not technical based currently	Lack of facilities/agencies-training programs for use of Technology in the region for various populations. Example need for ongoing certifications with first responders
Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce- Regional in Chisago County. Other Cities have their own Chamber of Commerce	Internet access/connection a barrier for online education - Example colleges and school systems. Another Example, students not having access to internet

Assets	Barriers / Gaps
Community Education Programs	Lack of funds/access for equipment to do work. - Example, School aged children and families do not have computers, iPads, etc.
East Central Regional Library	
Central MN Jobs and Training Services- Workforce Center and The Career Force Center- Contact: Rebecca Perrotti	

If we are truly successful in this initiative over the next 18 months, what will we have accomplished in Knowledge Workforce?

Desired Outcomes
Everyone has access to affordable-reliable internet to complete work, Example, School aged children, college students, local businesses and staff
Local employers/schools/colleges/community members have training available to sufficiently do their work. Example, a training center/ Partnership with Community Education and /or East Central Regional Library to ensure ongoing Tech. Education is available. (More agencies are offering online education. Such as Local PD other First Responders, County, Education provider/leaders...)
All First responders have access to computers and technology and the training to use it.
All students have a device to access and complete schoolwork online.
Engage the East Central Regional Library to ensure they have adequate technology/Devices and training to serve the region.
Older adults will be engaged and involved in the needs in the community and workforce. Develop training that is targeted to older adults that will assist them to engage in the newer technology.

## Innovation

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These comments are reflective of the input from the community survey:

- COVID 19 has changed that we work and do business
- Education system immersed in technology
- Social media is very important to reach customers, especially for small businesses in the current pandemic environment
- Great Internet bandwidth is required to support
  - Business
  - Education
  - Telehealth

The information below came from the small group breakout discussion:

Assets	Barriers / Gaps
Slow.... But we have something.	Consistent service
Cell Phones plans. (Not great - data caps)	No choices (frontier only in this area).
5G options? Today fix? Fast fix.	Lost connection - even during zoom meeting
	International classes - different times of day requirements
	Not able to meet/seminars/in person.
	Kids missing classes.
	Kids not able to take summer or school year classes
	Teachers - learning to teach online classes.
	Unknown - school year plan.
	Vendors for virtual meetings

If we are very successful on **Innovation**, in the next 18 months, we will achieve or make significant progress on the following desired outcomes:

Desired Outcomes
Meet state goals - as soon as possible.
Technology solutions - community
Technology center.
Business networking - on what is working best.
Applying tech within schools/beyond schools
Training in proper software usages. Training is key.
Resource page to help businesses & schools
Sharing resources

## Digital Equity

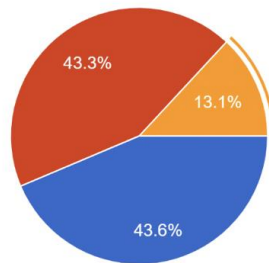
### Local Presentation:

In a May 2020 survey of CL students, the school district gathered the following information:

- 52% used MidCo
- 37% used Frontier
- 2.5% of students used cellular services
- 1.5% used satellite.

Access to devices (Technology). Please choose one answer.

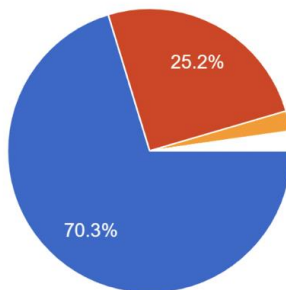
3,053 responses



- My child has access to their own computer or Chromebook.
- My child has access to a device that is shared with other family members.
- My child does not have access to a device

Internet access at home Please choose one answer

3,053 responses



- Yes, we have reliable Internet services.
- Yes, we have access to Internet but o...
- No, we do not have access to Internet.
- Hot spot Internet only available when...
- Scheduled for internet 3/23
- We have internet but it is a little spotty...
- We have reliable internet to view text...
- Unreliable hot spot from phone

▲ 1/8 ▼

### Community Survey Results:

- Students with access to technology and broadband at home have an advantage with the resources available to them. This provides more time and information to students to connect with peers, as well as their teachers.
- Good access means you can and will be able to access online programming, further skill development, and during times like we are experiencing, being safe at home doing your job.
- Some local residents are unable to access internet on constant basis and go use the library parking lot wifi to do office work
- Many students are not able to use both video and audio at same time in meetings and not able to watch videos in efficient manner (slow and disruptive). Those that can solve challenge with investments have an advantage. Those with limited flexibility will have access limitations.

- Our elderly and veterans in the community have been affected the most. Many are limited, based on their residence, with a dependable company to provide high speed internet that works.
- The digital divide is REAL here! We have many residents who are able to connect without issue and many who have little to no internet access on a regular basis.

The information below came from the small group breakout discussion:

Assets	Barriers / Gaps
East Central Regional Library	Telehealth / telemedicine is a new need. Broadband almost becomes a health and safety discussion.
<p>People - willingness for people to come to the table and talk. Small business owners, community people coming together to talk. Our people are invested in the community (kids, businesses, etc). Initiative to help out.</p> <p>Huge volunteer spirit in the Chisago lake area and people are willing to work to make this a great place to live.</p> <p>I agree that people are working to make things great in Chisago Lakes</p> <p>I think adding the 5 communities in some way that they are distinct and own their own history but also come together when needed as the Chisago Lakes Area.</p>	<p>Digital equity and equity in general - Chisago Lakes has work to do in this. Yes, every student is above average in Chisago Lakes, but we are not Lake Wobegon. We are responsible as a community to produce global citizens that understand the perspectives of others not often heard in our community.</p> <p>Access to equipment.</p>
Chisago Lakes School District - communities rally behind the schools and are involved.	Education to use technology
Community Ed and community leaders (Age Well Coalition) - an asset for educating people to help them use different tools.	We also have students & adults that are homeless or have insecure housing that equipment and internet access is difficult or impossible.

If we are very successful on Digital Equity in the next 18 months, we will achieve or make significant progress on the following desired outcomes:

Desired Outcomes
A training and support program in place for everyone who wants to use technology and broadband.
Make equipment and Internet accessible / affordable for all.
Coaches available to help those who need assistance.
Identify areas of need . We want better for all.
A plan to support all students and families into Fall 2020.



## Advocacy

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### Local Presentation

- Chisago Lakes is home to a wide variety of people. We can ensure that all people are heard and accommodated through:
  - Demographic Information
  - Feasibility Study for current broadband
- Communication is key! Making sure that community members understand the long-term goals and making sure that information is thorough but also understandable.

### Community Survey

- Our assets:
  - the beauty of the area, lakes and parks
  - strong sense of community
  - excellent schools, churches and health care services
  - friendly and caring people,
  - Metro proximity
  - We work together to get things done
- Gaps
  - expanded and user friendly bus/transportation
  - affordable housing
  - better food access

The information below came from the small group breakout discussion:

Assets	Barriers / Gaps
Beauty of the area, lakes and parks	Expanded and user-friendly transportation/busses
Strong sense of community	Affordable housing
Excellent schools, churches and health care services	Better food access
Friendly and caring people	Additional access points for our lakes (City administrators are working to improve access to the lakes for residents that don't live on the lake)
Metro proximity	More businesses in our community
Work together to get things done	Broadband for incoming residents/businesses is more important than ever
Tourism - a lot of recreational opportunities	Marketing retail and restaurants more broadly
Uniqueness - live on lakes and be in town (100's of houses) which is an amazing quality	Lack of technology availability: 400 families in our district don't even have a computer
Cities are connecting and we are becoming Chisago Lakes - life is great on highway 8! Strengthens community and attracts businesses	Public safety - getting information out to the public. People flood cell towers and broadband system with emergencies. Firstnet will be available for first responders their system wouldn't crash, but the general public isn't part of that

Assets	Barriers / Gaps
Creative business owners - COVID has reinvigorated businesses and energized marketing	Visitors are impacted by our lack of cell tower coverage and internet - this impacts people's desire to live in the community
Established marketing for tourism - this is unique to Chisago Lakes	

If we are very successful on Advocacy in the next 18 months, we will achieve or make significant progress on the following desired outcomes:

Desired Outcomes
Appeal to wide variety of people - demographics; regardless of socio-economic background, sexual orientation, race, religion, you feel welcome
Internet any time any place they need it
Ensure we have a broad enough infrastructure so we can inform the public of emergencies and keep safe

## Brainstorm Meeting Summary

Chisago Lakes Area stakeholders met on June 24 to create a list of prospective projects that would lead to the desired outcomes established during the Vision meeting. Approximately 35 people attended this meeting. The participants were separated into discussion groups and spent about 30 minutes discussing project ideas. When this task was accomplished, the participants reconvened as a single group to list project ideas. Once all project ideas were captured, the project voting procedure was explained.

A small work group reviewed the project ideas and engaged to combine and clarify project ideas which were then imported into an online survey tool. The web link was promoted to attendees and more generally across the community for voting. Each participant had one dollar to allocate among their favorite projects so as to indicate their support. Voters also were able to volunteer for one or more projects thus creating immediate project teams.

The project ideas, voting summary and project teams are shown below.

Project	Total Points	Team Members
1. Implement a comprehensive communications campaign around broadband and why it's needed. Include mailings, social media and newspaper/newsletter articles to reach everyone - Advocacy	331	Leilani Freeman Katie Werman Roche Sheila E Thelen Chris DuBose Bridget Hoolihan Jim Gillach Cory Spencer Stephanie Haggerty

<b>Project</b>	<b>Total Points</b>	<b>Team Members</b>
26. Support 1:1 student device initiatives in schools - Knowledge Workforce	282	Katie Werman Roche Eric Simmons Dave Ertl Dean Jennissen
5. Solicit new broadband providers - Broadband	260	Nancy Hoffman Chris DuBose Stephanie Haggerty
3. Create local broadband maps that illustrate actual broadband internet availability - Advocacy	250	Lou Ann Mattson Sherry Stirling Marlys Dunne Eric Simmons Dialyn Thelen
6. Acquire mobile cellular infrastructure; Central communications center, infrastructure that can be deployed like mobile cellular towers - Broadband	240	Chris DuBose Cory Spencer Marlys Dunne
13. Provide technology equipment checkout at schools and libraries, such as Chromebooks, iPads, 3D printers, etc.) - Innovation	225	Carla Lydon Dave Ertl
7. Require that all new housing developments include fiber (dig once) - Broadband	201	Cory Spencer Katie Werman Roche
2. Conduct a Chisago Lakes Area community broadband market study - Advocacy	155	Jim Gillach Noel Stensrud Lou Ann Mattson
8. Create and maintain a map of public Wi-Fi hotspots for visitors and families in need- Broadband	110	Ian Lexvold Eric Simmons
20. Provide broadband in low-income housing - Digital Equity	100	Eric Simmons Julie Redpath
10. Provide public Wi-Fi in parks, farmers' market, senior centers- Broadband	95	Eric Simmons Daniel Lydon Natalie Matthewson
14. Offer community ed courses on technology - Knowledge Workforce	76	Bridget Hoolihan
28. Utilize Pine Tech technology interns - Knowledge Workforce	75	Marlys Dunne
21. Create and maintain one or more Technology Centers for access, training, demonstration, and collaboration - Innovation	70	Katie Werman Roche

<b>Project</b>	<b>Total Points</b>	<b>Team Members</b>
17. Facilitate volunteers to teach seniors how to use devices and social media, etc. - Digital Equity	66	Natalie Matthewson Ian Lexvold Katie Werman Roche Tracy Quarnstrom
12. Provide mobile hot spots for checkout at public library - Broadband	63	Carla Lydon
15. Provide training and equipment for older adults to support applications like telehealth - Digital Equity	60	Natalie Matthewson
16. Provide community ed classes on internet safety for senior citizens - Digital Equity	46	Natalie Matthewson
18. Install and maintain computer workstations in senior apartments and centers - Digital Equity	45	Natalie Matthewson
19. Deploy school buses or other portable Wi-Fi to lower income areas - Digital equity	45	Tracy Quarnstrom Carla Lydon Eric Simmons
22. Create virtual meeting room(s) for community use - Innovation	40	Carla Lydon Natalie Matthewson
23. Provide e-commerce consulting assistance to businesses - Innovation	40	None
24. Provide online and on-site training for small business owners to increase online presence - Innovation	40	None
4. Ensure that all industrial parks and business sites have excellent broadband - Advocacy	35	Ian Lexvold Nancy Hoffman
9. Provide technical support and financial incentive to private businesses to offer Wi-Fi at their buildings - Broadband	15	Eric Simmons
27. Create and host virtual manufacturing tours - Knowledge Workforce	15	Nancy Hoffman Marlys Dunne
11. Create a mesh-network - or wireless line-of-sight network - Broadband	10	Sherry Stirling
25. Enable and promote community members to teach seminars and classes remotely - Innovation	10	Natalie Matthewson

Chisago Lakes Area might consider consolidating the project ideas into categories. If so, the information below groups projects by focus activity.

**Broadband Infrastructure**

Projects 1, 5, 3, 2, 11

**Digital equity**

Projects 13, 20, 12, 18, 19,

**Knowledge workforce**

26 (this could start in digital equity too),

**Improve wi-fi coverage**

Projects 8, 10, 9

**Community/older adult training**

Projects 14, 17, 15, 16, 25

**Economic development**

23, 24, 4

**Other**

6. Acquire mobile cellular infrastructure (public safety)

28. Utilize Pine Tech interns could be a strategy to support many different projects

21. Tech Centers 22 virtual meeting rooms

27. Virtual manufacturing tours

**Next Steps:**

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- 1) The report should be sent out to everyone who participated in either the Vision or Brainstorm meetings and other key stakeholders. Additional project ideas are welcome and people not in attendance should be welcomed to propose projects or volunteer to be on a project team. Steering team leaders may want to recruit leaders for those projects without volunteers or try to identify other projects that might want to incorporate all or a portion of the project concept.
- 2) Blandin consultants will schedule a project development meeting shortly to assist team members begin to develop their proposals. Groups are free to begin their work immediately.
- 3) Don't forget to create a project team to implement the PCs for People distribution of 50 desktop computers.
- 4) The Project Teams are charged with developing the project, with the lead organization writing and submitting the joint community application. Projects proposals will first be submitted to the Steering Committee for review by a date to be determined. The Steering team will prioritize the applications as necessary. The Steering Team may provide feedback for strengthening selected projects through combining projects, enhanced collaboration or other strategies.
- 5) Once a slate of projects is finalized, the project descriptions with budgets, including a combined project summary budget should be submitted to Blandin Foundation for administrative approval.
- 6) Some projects may need to be withheld to await Round Two Blandin Broadband Community Grant funding or may be recommended to pursue other sources of funding.