

**Blandin Community Broadband Program**

**Robust Network Feasibility Fund grant application instructions**

Since 2007, the [Robust Network Feasibility Fund (RNFF) grant program](https://blandinfoundation.org/programs/broadband/robust-network-feasibility-fund-grants/) has provided matching funds to eligible applicants to support the implementation of feasibility studies designed to provide factual information about market demand, technology alternatives, deployment and maintenance costs, network operations and marketing.

The goals of the RNFF program are to:

1. Stimulate the development of state-of-the-art broadband networks in rural Minnesota.
2. Assist communities obtain factual information on technology alternatives, costs and market opportunities.

Feasibility Studies should:

* Identify whether and how a Robust Network can be successfully deployed and operated in a community or combination of communities through examination of the following factors:
  + What is the competitive environment?
  + What is the market demand?
  + What are the best technology options?
  + What are the best operations, management and ownership choices?
* Observe, document and share best practices and lessons learned so as to assist other communities engaged in broadband discussions and decision-making.

**Funding**

The Foundation will accept applications for up to $25,000. All Robust Network Feasibility Fund grant funds must be matched on a 1:1 cash basis. Additional in-kind contributions are welcome and will be considered as an indicator of organizational support for the project.

### Uses of Funds:

Robust Network funds may be used to pay the organization(s) that conduct the feasibility study and for local expenses incurred through the study process, including meeting hosting, information gathering, and publicity.

**Evaluation Criteria:**

To maximize the effectiveness of the program, **the Foundation strongly encourages communities considering applying for Robust Network Feasibility study funds to first participate in its Community Broadband Resources Program[[1]](#footnote-1)**, or can demonstrate they have created and utilized a multi-sector, broadband steering team/advisory group to complete initial assessments and developed a sense of vision and purpose. Applying for both of these programs simultaneously is allowed; with the community completing its Community Broadband Resources activities in advance of selecting a feasibility study consultant.

Specific attention will be paid to:

* Community support for the project – including participation in CBR or equivilant community engagement effort.
* Geographic benefit – projects with county or regional scope are stongly favored over projects with a smaller scope.
* The identified RFP process for selecting a qualified vendor or the qualifications of personnel/organizations already selected to conduct the study
* Contractual deliverables (outcomes) of the study
  + Market survey and analysis
  + Preliminary engineering and deployment cost estimate
  + Revenue projection and pro forma financials
  + Operating strategy

**Network Requirements:**

The Robust Network Feasibility Fund is technology-neutral. Proposed Networks must be able to provide Internet service at a minimum of the State of Minnesota broadband goal of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload to every premise in the community, and must be able to support broadband service scalable to 100 Mbps download and upload. *(Exceptions to the speed requirements can be made for wireless network projects.)* Network ownership can be private, public or a private-public partnership. Services must be provided in accordance with the FCC definitions of a non-discriminatory network.

**Response Instructions:**

Application materials should be prepared simply and economically, avoiding the use of elaborate promotional materials beyond those sufficient to provide a complete, accurate and reliable presentation. Visit the [Robust Network Feasibility Fund grant webpage](https://blandinfoundation.org/programs/expanding-opportunity/broadband/robust-network-feasibility-fund-grants/) for grant application deadlines.

Applicants should contact Blandin Community Broadband Program administrator Mary Magnuson ([memagnuson@blandinfoundation.org](mailto:memagnuson@blandinfoundation.org) or 218/327-8738) with any questions regarding application, including transmitting draft versions of proposals for pre-submittal review, and for guidance on the online application form.

Application materials not submitted online may be emailed to [grants@blandinfoundation.org](mailto:grants@blandinfoundation.org).

**Online grant portal instructions:**

All applicants are encouraged to submit grant applications via the portal.

1. We recommend you use this document to draft your responses to the application questions, and then copy and paste your responses into the application portal.
2. To access the Robust Network Feasibility Fund grant portal, click <https://blandinfoundation.force.com/grants/FGM_Portal__CommunitySignin?retUrl=/apex/FGM_Portal__CommunityApplication?id=7013m000001ZYXn> If this is your first time applying via the portal, click “New Portal User? Register Here!” If you have applied via the portal previously, you may log in as normal and skip step 3.   
   *The portal is NEW as of February 2021! If you have not applied for a grant since February 2021, you will need to register.*
3. Fill in the grantee registration information as prompted. If the grantee is using a separate fiscal sponsor, create the account under the grantee organization. You will be asked for fiscal sponsor information later.
4. Once you’ve completed registration, you will be asked to verify your account via email. Once you’ve verified your account, you can log in.
5. Most of the questions are on the first tab, “Project Poposal.” You’ll notice some of the questions are worded differently on the portal than they are on the application instructions, which is due to space limitations on the portal.
6. The second tab is for your fiscal sponsor information. If not using a fiscal sponsor, leave blank.
7. You have the option to upload up your attachments on the budget tab. The attachments are described in detail under section V below.

If you have any questions about the portal, contact Mary Magnuson at [memagnuson@blandinfoundation.org](mailto:memagnuson@blandinfoundation.org).

**Application Form:**

Please use the following outline as a guide to your proposal narrative. Take the space needed to tell your story, but try not to exceed 5-10 pages, excluding attachments. Applicants are strongly encouraged to [apply online](https://blandinfoundation.force.com/grants/FGM_Portal__CommunitySignin?retUrl=/apex/FGM_Portal__CommunityApplication?id=7013m000001ZYXn).

**Proposal Overview**

Project Name: *(For example, “XYZ County Feasibility/Engineering Study” or “XYZ County Community Survey”)*

Duration of project (start date – end date):

**Organization Information**

Name of organization:

Legal name, if different:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Employer Identification Number (EIN):

Phone:

Website:

Name of CEO/Exec Dir.:

Title:

Phone:

Email:

Name of contact person regarding this application:

Title:

Phone:

Email:

Is your organization an IRS 501(c)(3) nonprofit? **Yes / No**

If no, is your organization a public agency/unit of government? **Yes / No**

If no, list name for fiscal agent:

Fiscal agent address:

Fiscal agent’s EIN:

**Budget Summary**

Fiscal Year of Organization (month – month):

Total project budget: $

Total dollar amount requested of Blandin Foundation: $

Total annual organization budget: $

**Project Summary**

Please provide a 1-2 paragraph description of your project

**Proposal Narrative**

1. Organization Information
   1. Brief summary of organization history, current mission, activities, and accomplishments.
   2. Is your organization best positioned to do the proposed work? Are there opportunities to work together with other organizations for increased impact?
   3. Describe what steps your organization takes to include a broad range of perspectives from the community you seek to serve, such as board and staff members from diverse backgrounds.
   4. Identify specific steps your organization takes to improve organizational effectiveness.
2. Purpose of Grant
   1. Background
      1. Describe how your proposal fits the goals and evaluation criteria of the RNFF grant program (listed above.)
      2. What organizations and individuals are involved in planning and implementing the project? Would this project benefit from any new/diverse perspectives?
      3. What key relationships critical to the success of this project are in place, or under development?
   2. Implementation
      1. What are the goals of your project?
      2. What strategies and activities will be employed to achieve these goals?
      3. Who will carry out these activities? Do they have the requisite skills and experience?
      4. What are long-term strategies (if applicable) for sustaining this effort?
3. Assessment
   1. Describe what success looks like and how you will measure success (use goals and metrics wherever you can.)
   2. How will you know you’ve reached your project’s goals?
   3. Give specific examples of how your project/program contributes to a healthy rural community.
   4. Explain the process that will be used to measure and document whether progress is being made toward achieving your project’s goals.
4. Budget and Sources of Funding
   1. Provide a brief statement of the amount and type of resources that will be needed to see this project through, and steps you are taking to mobilize the necessary resources.
5. Attachments (please attach the following):
   1. A copy of your organizational budget.
   2. Project budget; please submit a **detailed** project budget including both sources of income for the project (indicate if these funds have been secured or are pending) as well as major expense categories. Be certain to include cash and in-kind matching contributions to the project. Feel free to attach a narrative explaining your numbers if necessary.
   3. Most recent financial statement, from a formal audit if available, showing actual expenses. This information should include a balance sheet, a statement of activities (or statement of income and expenses) and functional expenses. If a formal audit is available, please include the management letter. This audit may be submitted electronically by providing a link to this information.
   4. Brief description of key staff, including qualifications relevant to the specific request. Also provide information on the number of staff and volunteers in the organization.

Should your application be funded, you will also be required to submit an IRS Form W9: <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw9.pdf>. You may choose to submit it at the time of your application by emailing it to [Mary Magnuson](mailto:memagnuson@blandinfoundation.org?subject=Grant%20application%20W9).

1. Community Broadband Resources provides up to 32 hours of technical assistance to communities seeking to improve their technological vitality, including preparing a community to successfully complete and implement the results of a feasibility study <https://blandinfoundation.org/programs/expanding-opportunity/broadband/community-broadband-resources-program/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)