White Earth Blandin Broadband Community
Vision and Project Development Summary

Background and process:
In early 2020, White Earth Nation 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 White Earth Nation 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 September 16 through mid-October via online Zoom meetings with voting via SurveyMonkey.

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.
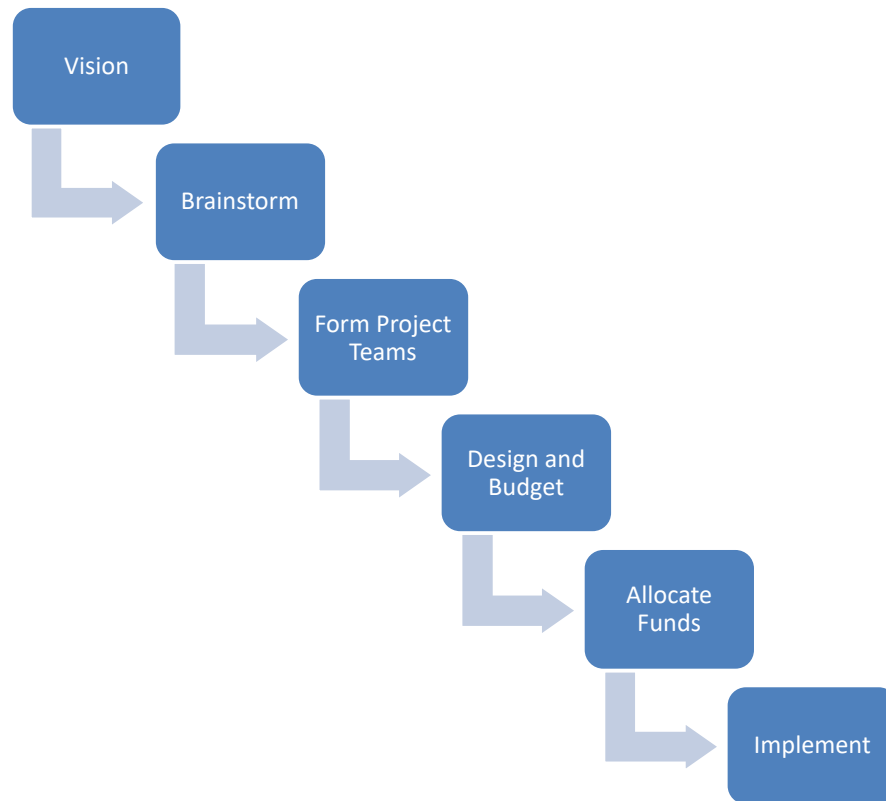
Prior to COVID-19, Blandin Foundation used a three-hour Vision Meeting to:
- review the Intelligent Community approach
- highlight and discuss assets and gaps for each of the six elements
- create a set of desired outcomes
- brainstorm project ideas, and
- prioritize project ideas through voting and 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

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The Vision Meeting occurred September 16 via Zoom. The Brainstorm Meeting was held September 23. The voting was open September 28 through October 18.

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 Community Broadband Program, list and discuss community assets and gaps regarding the six Intelligent Community elements (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 (www.intelligentcomunity.org) can be summarized as follows: Based 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:

https://blandinfoundation.org/content/uploads/White-Earth-Survey-Qs-1-6.pdf

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 benchmarking presentation, attendees were placed in Zoom breakout rooms according to registration preference. These groups delved more deeply into Intelligent Community element using the benchmarking discussion as a starting point. 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 information provides a summary of the findings, combining the community presenters and community discussion. Readers will note the community emphasis on broadband access, digital equity and workforce in the discussions and priorities.

The final pages of this report include the project ideas, the community voting totals and the names of the project volunteers. Thank you to all community members who participated in this project planning and especially to those who have committed to moving these ideas forward.
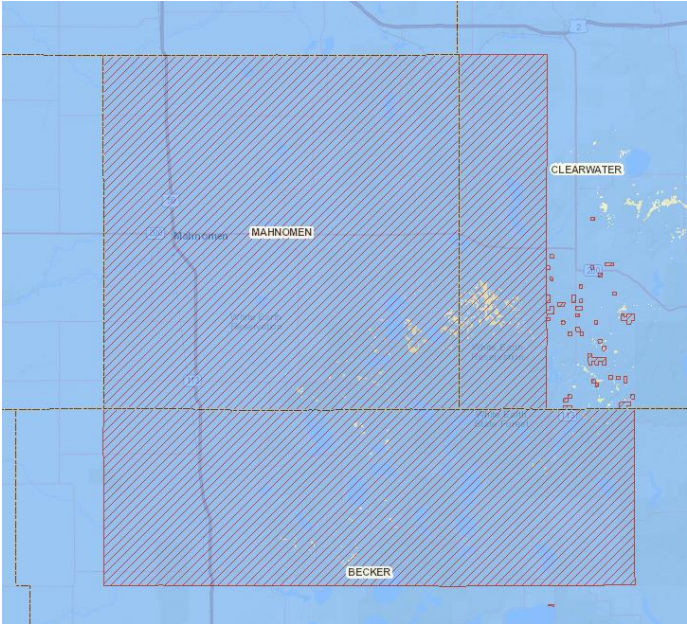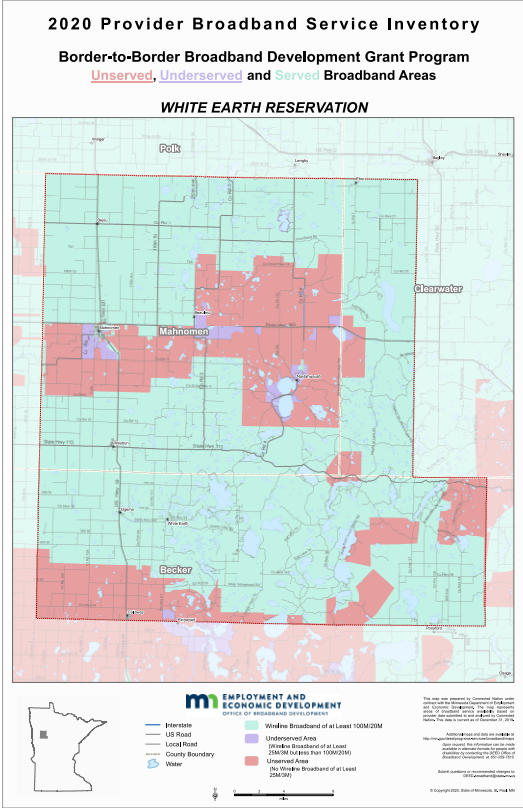
Broadband

This map illustrates the availability of broadband within White Earth Nation. 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 area considered a priority for the Minnesota Border to Border Broadband Grant program.

Community reaction to this map was generally skeptical that quality broadband is as widespread as this map displays.

Affordability is a critical issue for the White Earth Nation. Even if service is physically available, people with low incomes cannot afford to subscribe.

The map below illustrates provider reports of cellular coverage on the reservation. Again, skepticism was widely expressed about the availability of cellular data service.

Input from the Community Survey

- Satellite is very expensive and has high data plan costs
- We live one mile from Mahnomen and do not have access to quality Internet
- I use a cellular wireless hotspot with the highest data plan and still run out
- Poor broadband caused a learning nightmare
- Both wired and wireless services are poor
- Our Internet provider has fiber to our house; waiting impatiently for installation
- We rely on the internet to educate our young learners and it is hard to give them equal education when they live in an area where families either cannot afford it, or the area doesn't support a good connection.   Schools are supplying the laptops, but it doesn't help when students cannot connect to their school and teachers.
- Since the Pandemic, I do almost all my meetings online. Without the internet, I would not be able to conduct business on a daily basis. And my teenager would act like it is the end of the world.

Community Broadband Discussion

- Internet Providers on White Earth Reservation
    - 3 currently with service on the reservation
        - Century Link, Arvig, Garden Valley
    - There is a need to recruit other providers (don't focus on strictly on Arvig)
        - Co-op's typically wouldn't try to take on Arvig, but there have been discussions where co-ops near the reservation expressed initial interest. This conversation was related to spending CARES funding on broadband, but the short time frame made new projects impossible.
    - White Earth – perhaps finding a really good wireless company is a solution
        - Possibly form our own co-op, utility commission
        - Is there a possibility for the tribe to build our own fiber optic network, similar to Fond du Lac?
        - White Earth has applied for 2.5Ghz spectrum
            - Obtaining this will provide an asset to the tribe
            - Can use in conjunction with private company to form partnerships
- Broadband for all
    - This is a shared vision for the group but need to define who "all" is.
        - Is this broadband for tribal members living on the reservation or for all residents and businesses within the reservation?
    - Barriers for other companies to go up against Arvig
        - Garden Valley is very interested
        - Paul Bunyan doesn't have much interest
        - Possible wireless providers would include the cellular carriers, plus A Better Wireless in Fergus Falls, Midco from Fargo and Advanteum.

- Broadband access as a utility
  - Should internet be classified as a utility?
  - Is broadband now a need?
    - Broadband needs to be designated as a need (much like electricity, plumbing, roof over head, etc.)
- Define what is all (broadband for all)
  - Just reservation?
  - All native people?
  - Elders/youth/etc.
- Federal aid for Arvig
  - What does this entail? Current programs include the FCC's Alternative Connect America Fund and the Rural Development Opportunity Fund reverse auction
  - Can White Earth apply for federal aid?
  - What other opportunities are there for White Earth?
- Has the tribe talked with Arvig about collaboration?
  - Yes, the tribe has talked to both Garden Valley and Arvig
    - How can we help each other get projects done (time issues seem to be a concern)?
    - Both are willing to help
      - Problems exist – construction schedules have already been set, other priorities take precedent, COVID $$ timelines and completion dates
  - Leveraging sovereign rights?
    - Can we exercise our sovereign rights due to them burying their cables on our land, near our water, etc.
    - IT will connect with Land to discuss this further
- BIA has ideas how to leverage sovereign rights on their website (use BIA site as a resource)

Desired Outcomes

- Broadband for all
- Possible Tribal utility
- Possible partnership with a telephone cooperative

Knowledge Workforce

Input from the community survey

- Training is the key for many who are unemployed and need jobs
- WEN should start tribal grocery stores to serve residents and create jobs
- Most training is online
- Tribal government supports employees with time to study and financial support
- WEN offers many jobs to members
- We lack follow-through and steady employment; we have high turnover of employees
- Working and earning provides pride and self-esteem

Community Knowledge Workforce Discussion
- What routes do we have to educate?
    - Mass media includes radio – this can be a vital tool to educate
    - Establish an apprentice program
        - Need to have the ability to train and teach people
        - Many positions require college degree which limits workforce
    - There are other ways to gain knowledge beyond college
- COLA problems
    - Students are very visual and hands on – this can be an issue with distance learning
    - Instructors need to be creative
    - Main thing is getting access (limited connection, no connection) for the students
    - COLA supports apprenticeships for immediate employment after school
        - Allow students to receive credits for doing apprenticeships
- Funding from non-profits
    - Bring in trainers to train our people/workforce/students
    - Help to create business plans (need a person to do this full-time)
        - Economic Development presently has open position that fulfills this need
- White Earth needs to apply for additional funding

Desired Outcomes

- Apprenticeships
- Additional funding for workforce programs
- Additional trainers for entrepreneurship

Innovation

Community Presentation

Great Things
- COLA School
    - Has been able to start distance learning
        - Utilizing Google Classroom
        - Expanding the use of Chromebooks
        - Using ZOOM
            - Meetings
            - Teaching
- Pandemic Uses
    - Cell Phones and Laptops Deployed to various departments for contact with Tribal Members to obtain information and Services

Falling behind
- Many Areas have no connectivity for the internet or cell phones
    - Disadvantage for distance learning
    - Disadvantage for working from home

Community Innovation Discussion
- Does the tribe own an energy facility?
- George L. working with tribe on renewable energy
    - George has training for individuals with RREAL Solar
    - Tribe will be rolling out solar arrays which will bring training opportunities and jobs

The Economic Development Department assists with the following:
- New business start-up assistance
- Assist clients with locating financial support for your business re-location or branch expansion needs.
- Marketing and promotion consulting
- Proposal preparation, applications and technical support
- Liaison to government and other supporting agencies
- Technology Zone tax credits
- Consulting
- Courses at White Earth Community College
    - College Writing, Entrepreneurship, Economics, Public Speaking
- Utilizing the State of Minnesota Resources

Sustainability

Community Presentation

- The WETCC is a leader in sustainability practices and research – "green" campus, recycling, solar energy implementation, alternative cultivation methods (e.g. aquaponics), community garden
- White Earth RBC owns a wind turbine outside headquarters – is it functional and productive? Can that project be scaled up?
- White Earth Natural Resources manages our water quality, fisheries, wild game, wild rice, and forests to enable us to sustainably harvest, hunt and fish.
- White Earth Public Transportation provides affordable and efficient mass transportation through the use of propane powered buses

Input from the community survey

- Need more emphasis and education on this
- Alternative energy has been a priority
- Need to recycle at tribal buildings
- I am very thankful for the bus service
- Community mindset is a barrier to sustainable practices
- There is a need for and a clear opportunity to invest in renewable energy initiatives – wind and solar. W.E. can be a leader in green energy if we made it a priority.
- Current RBC sustainability initiatives are vague, don't often lead to anything lasting or impactful, and they lack community input
- It is costly for individuals or families to practice sustainability without greater support from the RBC
- Lack of sustainability education – community members are unsure how they can practice sustainability or what the benefits are
- Lack of broadband infrastructure increases our community's reliance on gasoline to drive great distances for work/school/business – not sustainable
- Mental telehealth services are offered, but poor Internet in homes hurts our ability to do so
- Poor home Internet stops me from selling my beadwork online
- IHS patient web site
- Microsoft Teams
- Social media use by entrepreneurs
- Every day, we have an opportunity to learn
- Tablets were provided to children, but many families do not have Internet

Digital Equity

Input from the community survey

- Phone and Internet are spotty throughout the reservation; many cell users buy minutes and data via phone cards
- Those without Internet must rely on monthly tribal newsletter rather than online info
- Multiple learners in a household require multiple devices and good Internet
- Lack of access hurts ability to access needed social services
- Internet is too expensive for our community
- Poor Internet limits so much of daily life

Community Digital Equity Discussion

- Connectivity gap is an issue
- Other reservations have partnered up with AT&T to build towers
    - White Earth has tried this with Verizon with no luck to this point
    - Other tribes radio stations have no cost to utilize towers
    - Fond du Lac has built their own fiber to homes on the reservation
        - Can White Earth follow this model
        - Utilize Fond du Lac as a resource
- White Earth has limited cell service
    - Dead spots throughout the reservation
    - George has installed a cell booster in his home
        - Not through the internet, works through cell towers
        - Uses little power, could be installed in rural locations and operate 24/7
- Equality vs. Equity
    - Equality is that everyone has the same; equity is that everyone has what they need.
    - Families struggling with kids in school, mental health, other dire needs
        - Some have access to equipment, but no access to internet

Desired Outcomes

- Use other tribes as model and resource
    - Fond du Lac for wireless and Fiber to the Home
    - Facilitating cell tower location to improve cellular service and enable fixed wireless
    - Eliminate cell phone dead spots
- Focus on equity so that everyone has what they need.
- Address school kids' equipment and connectivity need

Advocacy

Community Presentation

- Plan – Fluid and alive
  - Tell Stories, do not make Statements
- Go Digital
  - Establish social media pages – look to current social media pages, White Earth Nation, Niijii Radio
  - Establish an email list
  - Broadcast texting
- Create and distribute the campaign
  - Leverage established relationships – Relational Organizing
  - Target your outreach
  - Persuade through open ended questions creating meaning full persuasive conversation
  - Partner Up
  - Utilize multi – channel engagement – ie: digital, social media, and media
  - Use gamification to increase engagement and participation
- Drive meaningful Actions -
- Connect voters to lawmakers
- Stay on Top of the latest updates

Input from the community survey

- Provide free wi-fi and online schooling
- Start and build our own businesses; become more self-sufficient
- Emphasize education
- The beauty of our people
- Stronger community and recreation programs
- Work more effectively with city councils
- Treat all people with respect

Project Ideas, Votes and Volunteers

Categories: BB = Broadband | KW = Knowledge Workforce | IN = Innovation | DE = Digital Equity

Project	Category	Total Points	Team Members
8. Improve cellular service throughout the reservation via more towers and repeaters	BB	778	Mariah Tibbetts Tracey Stephanie Williams Maggie Sara Roy Margaret Rousu
16. Build fiber optic network throughout the reservation to serve all homes, government buildings, community centers and other entities	BB	750	Mariah Tibbets Stephanie Williams Brent Gish Maggie Sara Roy Nicole Hisgun Mitchell Berg
4. Provide computers/iPads or Chromebooks for youth who cannot afford it	DE	383	Mariah Tibbets Chelsea A Bush Pamela Aspinwall Autumn Auginaush Josey Keezar Carrie Bush
17. Ensure broadband for all that, at a minimum, meets the Minnesota broadband goal of 100 Mbps/20 Mbps	BB	315	Mariah Tibbets Brent Gish Nicole Hisgun Beverly St John Germaine J Riegert
2. Install and maintain Wi-Fi hot spots in every village and community center	BB/DE	293	Mariah Tibbets Tracey Autumn Auginaush Chelsea A Bush
14. Provide cell signal boosters to residents unable to obtain adequate cell service	BB/DE	229	Mariah Tibbets Patricia Porter Stephanie Williams James Jurina
5. Provide computers for tribal college students	DE/KW	205	Mariah Tibbets Autumn Auginaush Lorna LaGue
19. Teach young people to provide tech training to elders	DE/KW	181	Mariah Tibbets Autumn Auginaush Chelsea A Bush Germaine J Riegert Mary Riegert

Project	Category	Total Points	Team Members
3. Provide computers, Chromebooks or iPads for elders who cannot afford it	DE	173	Mariah Tibbets Chelsea A Bush Germaine J Riegert Pamela Aspinwall James Jurina
12. Create and maintain public computer labs with high-speed Internet	DE/KW	163	Mariah Tibbets Tracey Brent Gish Beverly St John
11. Create and support a community technology support position to help spur technology adoption and use	IN	130	Mariah Tibbets Germaine J Riegert Margaret Rousu Lorna LaGue Patricia Porter
18. Ensure every student has an appropriate device.	DE	113	Mariah Tibbets Brent Gish Tracey Lorna LaGue Autumn Auginaush Josey Keezar Pamela Aspinwall Chelsea A Bush
6. Provide training for elders on equipment and technology	DE	111	Mariah Tibbets Autumn Auginaush Lorna LaGue Pamela Aspinwall Mary Riegert
10. Do a feasibility study to understand technology and business alternatives for improving broadband infrastructure	BB	109	Mariah Tibbets Germaine J Riegert Kerry Claypool
1. Install and maintain open WIFI on all school buses and public transport	DE/BB	101	Mariah Tibbets Tracey Jenna Leadbetter
9. Conduct a community survey to establish technology needs and satisfaction with existing services	BB	56	Mariah Tibbets Margaret Rousu Lorna LaGue
13. Create a mobile computer lab that could visit villages and communities	DE	53	Mariah Tibbets Mary Riegert
7. Provide training for youth on equipment and technology	KW	36	Mariah Tibbets Autumn Auginaush Lorna LaGue Josey Keezar
15. Create and maintain a cellular data hotspot lending program	DE	21	Mariah Tibbets

Next Steps:

1) The report should be sent out to everyone in attendance 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.