



March 9, 2016

Dear Legislator:

As a foundation dedicated to rural community vitality, Blandin Foundation knows that broadband is critical for everything we care about: economic development, leadership, educational opportunity, and social equity. For that reason, for the past decade we have devoted considerable resources to helping rural Minnesota communities have access to world-class broadband and the skills to use it.

At the November 2015 *Border to Border Broadband* Conference cosponsored by Blandin Foundation and DEED's Office of Broadband Development, more than 170 people from across Minnesota worked to create, and by consensus adopt, a broadband vision 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.

Since then, over 60 entities – including cities, counties, associations, development commissions and non-profits – have joined these broadband champions in formally endorsing the vision. Please find enclosed the still-growing [list of endorsing organizations to date](#).

As you consider the broadband choices being put before the legislature, we ask that you remember this vision, and its four key concepts:

Everyone – This includes all of us, everywhere. Urban, rural, suburban. Resident, student, business owner, worker, visitor.

Affordable – Price is important, but is only one component of affordability. Working from home, convenient completion of homework and online classes, and home tele-health all increase affordability.

World-class – High-speed, reliable and redundant networks are required to be competitive globally, regionally and locally. Both wired and wireless networks are necessary in today's connected world: wireless networks without wireline connections are like planes without airports.

Survive and thrive – Broadband is an essential service comparable to roads, clean water and electricity. The ability to retain and attract businesses and people is significantly affected by the availability and quality of broadband. How many young adults or adults of any age would choose a community or purchase a home that lacks quality broadband?

There are multiple paths available to achieve this vision. The private sector has made significant investments in broadband infrastructure in Minnesota. While we value how much these firms are doing to invest in the next generation of technology, it is clear – especially in our rural towns and countryside – that market forces alone will not attract the required capital investment to achieve this vision. Making sure everyone is connected is such a monumental task that we cannot let the provider community shoulder the burden alone; public sector participation is also needed.

Based on how the FCC defines broadband, 23.1 percent of Greater Minnesota households don't have access to broadband, compared to 1.8 percent without access in the metro area. Minnesota remains in the middle of the pack nationally in broadband rankings.

Rural leaders see the impact of broadband – or the lack of it – every day as they work to maintain the prosperity of their communities. The lack of quality broadband in towns and in the rural countryside has a crippling impact that cannot be overcome by traditional quality of life factors, tax incentives or economic development marketing. In a January 28 editorial, *The Albert Lee Tribune* said it well: "High-speed Internet access is something that is taken for granted in metro parts of the state. Don't forget about Greater Minnesota."

Blandin Foundation has a wealth of information on broadband that we share on our blog – <http://blandinonbroadband.org>. We encourage you to subscribe to this one-of-a-kind information source, and would be pleased to be a resource about Minnesota's broadband future for you and/or your constituents.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathleen Annette".

Kathleen R. Annette
President, Blandin Foundation