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STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Chisago County selected as a Blandin Broadband Community

Two-year partnership provides planning, technical and financial support to help county meet its digital technology goals

Brainerd, Minn. (November 20, 2014) – Blandin Foundation announced today that Chisago County leaders were successful in their application to become a Blandin Broadband Community, one of only 10 selected in the state. The announcement was made today in Brainerd, before more than 140 participants in the *Border to Border Broadband: No Community Left Behind* conference, co-sponsored by Blandin and Connect Minnesota.

The Blandin Broadband Communities program is an intensive, two-year partnership between Blandin Foundation and selected rural Minnesota communities. The program provides planning, technical and financial support to communities that demonstrate the determination to bring the benefits of a broadband-enabled economy to their communities.

Chisago County is one of ten new rural Minnesota communities that will join nine previously-named Blandin Broadband Communities in the state. Other Blandin Broadband Communities announced today are the Central Woodlands (east central Minnesota), Resilient Region 5 (north central Minnesota), Sherburne County, Carlton County, Redwood County, Renville/Sibley Counties, Red Wing, Nobles County, and Martin County.

“At Blandin Foundation we recognize that broadband access – and the skills to use it -- are essential to expanding opportunity for all. Thanks to community leaders in Chisago County and in the other communities with whom we partner, Minnesota is making important strides toward ensuring that rural places and the economically and socially disadvantaged are not left behind,” said Bernadine Joselyn, Director of Public Policy and Engagement.

Communities were selected based on demonstrated commitment to work together across sectors to set and meet information technology goals and bridge digital divides.

The BBC program will benefit across the entire county for the residents, communities, and businesses. Chisago County anticipates the program benefiting job seekers and students as well as marketing the community and providing businesses with technology assistance for a competitive business climate.

Chisago County Board of Commissioner Chair Rick Greene stated that the County is so pleased to be selected to be a Blandin Broadband Community. Broadband is a very important topic for Chisago County. It is essential for economic development and for the future workforce.

Leading the Blandin Broadband Community work is the Chisago County Housing Redevelopment Authority/Economic Development Authority. Together, with education, nonprofit and business partners throughout the county, the HRA-EDA will rally local leaders to develop a sustainable model for broadband access and use in Chisago County.

“It takes strong local leadership and commitment from whole communities to tackle the tough issues related to Internet access and use,” said Dr. Kathy Annette, Blandin Foundation CEO. “We’re honored to stand with Chisago County as they design and claim a vibrant, connected future.”

Next steps in the Blandin Broadband Community partnership include assessing the community’s current broadband access and adoption and, in early 2015, a series of planning public meetings.

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PHOTO CAPTION: On behalf of Chisago County leaders, Nancy Hoffman accepts an invitation to become a Blandin Broadband Community.

About Blandin Foundation: Blandin Foundation works for vibrant rural Minnesota communities by investing in community leaders and working with partners to expand opportunity for all residents. Located in Grand Rapids, Minn., it is one of only a handful of foundations in the U.S. focused exclusively on rural communities and the largest rural-based private foundation in Minnesota. Information on Blandin Foundation grant-making, leadership development programs and public policy initiatives: www.blandinfoundation.org. Information about the Blandin Broadband Communities Program: URL

About Chisago County Housing Redevelopment Authority/Economic Development Authority: Chisago County HRA-EDA exists to improve the commercial and industrial tax base within the County with an emphasis on assisting existing businesses; and vigorously marketing the County to attract new business development. More at <http://www.chisagocounty.org/countyhraeda.htm>

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