

Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities Fact Sheet

Overview

In March 2010, Blandin Foundation was awarded a \$4.86 million federal Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) grant on behalf of rural Minnesota communities. The project, Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities (MIRC), is a multi-sector, comprehensive approach to sustainable broadband adoption. The initiative expects to reach each of Minnesota's 80 rural counties through education, training, technical assistance, and by removing barriers to broadband adoption. The U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) Center at the University of Minnesota, Crookston will help track the impact of the project,

MIRC partners anticipate training as many as 2,500 individuals in computer literacy, online education, and workforce development, and plan to distribute a minimum of 1,000 refurbished computers to low-income rural Minnesota residents. Funding will support the implementation of institutional broadband applications for schools and health care facilities to help increase broadband adoption, and feasibility studies for municipal and regional broadband planning.

Total cost of the MIRC initiative is \$6.38 million. MIRC partners will contribute \$1.3 million in resources as match.

Goal

Help create technologically and economically vital rural communities, competing and thriving in the broadband economy, with sustainable broadband adoption, job growth, and wealth creation.

The Issue

A significant gap exists between rural and urban adoption rates in Minnesota – in both business and home environments. This gap is compounded by rural demographic characteristics including an aging population, lower per capita income, and lower educational attainment. Given the importance of high bandwidth technologies and services and their effective use to economic competitiveness and quality of life, this gap is a critical challenge for the future vitality of Minnesota's rural places.

Strategy

MIRC strategies will draw on Intelligent Community Indicators and an array of broadband demand development approaches including education, training, technical assistance and barrier removal. Targeted populations are rural Minnesota residents who are unemployed and seeking employment, small main street businesses that have not yet adopted modern Internet-based technologies, county governments working together to implement technology plans, as well as 11 "demonstration communities" where local leadership has recognized broadband as a critical infrastructure in the global economy.



- Enhance public access at workforce centers with increased access to training and new online learning opportunities
- Generate a sustainable community response for helping businesses use the internet more effectively.
- Deliver e-entrepreneurship / training and technical support to small businesses in critical industries for rural Minnesota
- Support community broadband initiatives in:
 - Community technology planning
 - Reducing the 'digital divide'
 - Creating a 'culture of use'
 - Feasibility studies
- Support communities and critical institutions in the promotion and implementation of high-value broadband applications in health care, education, government and business.

About Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities

MIRC leadership comes from the Blandin Foundation, a private foundation based in Grand Rapids, Minnesota and the state's largest rural-based, rural-focused foundation. MIRC partners include:

- Regional Development Commissions
- University of MN Extension
- MN Learning Commons
- MN Renewable Energy Marketplace
- MN DEED Workforce Centers
- PC's for People
- University of MN – Crookston
- Intelligent Community Forum
- Broadband Demonstration Communities:
 - Benton County
 - Cook County
 - Grand Rapids Area
 - Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
 - Stevens County
 - Thief River Falls
 - Upper MN Valley RDC
 - Willmar
 - Windom
 - Winona
 - Worthington

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