



Blandin Foundation™  
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Red Wing 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 Red Wing 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.

Red Wing 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, Chisago County, Redwood County, Renville/Sibley Counties, Martin County, Nobles County, and Carlton 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 Red Wing 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.

Red Wing was included in the charter family of US Ignite communities as the result of the gigabit-enabled network provided by Hiawatha Broadband Communications. US Ignite is an organization started at the White House to foster the creation of next-generation Internet applications that provide transformative public benefit. Red Wing has made the most of this momentum by developing programs that focus on innovation.

Leading the Blandin Broadband Community work is Red Wing Ignite, a nonprofit organization that brings innovation to reality. They create an innovative environment for businesses to thrive. Together, with community and business leaders, Red Wing Ignite will continue to develop ways to adopt broadband and change the way the communities live, learn and work.

Neela Mollgaard, the Executive Director of Red Wing Ignite said, “The support of the Blandin Foundation is affirmation of the critical role Red Wing Ignite is playing to ensure that rural America benefits and leads in innovation. We are grateful to be joining the efforts of the Blandin Foundation.”

“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 Red Wing 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 public planning meetings.

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PHOTO CAPTION: Leaders from 10 rural Minnesota communities gather to accept the invitation to become a Blandin Broadband Community.

#### Pictured

Front row (L to R): Anna Gruber, Stacey Stockdill, Melissa Radermacher, Eva Wilson (all representing Region 5), Nancy Hoffman (Chisago County), Connie Christenson, and Brenda Nyberg (both representing Carlton County)

Middle row (L to R): Steven Pierce (Martin County), Jennifer Russell (Central Woodlands), Pam Mahling (Region 5), Julie Rath, Jim Salfer (both representing Redwood County), Sally Fineday, Tony Mayer, and Sandy Voigt (all representing Region 5)

Back row (L to R): Mark Erickson, Jacob Rieke (both representing RS Fiber Cooperative), Dan Weber (Sherburne County), Tom Johnson, Rod Sankey (both representing Nobles County), and Scott Adkisson (Red Wing)

**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](http://www.blandinfoundation.org). Information about the Blandin Broadband Communities Program: URL

**Red Wing Ignite:** In June 2012, Hiawatha Broadband Communications nominated Red Wing to be a US Ignite community. Hiawatha Broadband Communications offers a high-speed fiber-optic network to Red Wing area homes and businesses. A year later, Red Wing Ignite was created to leverage the gigabit technology, US Ignite partnership and the communitywide enthusiasm for technology and innovation. For more information about RWI:

<http://www.redwingignite.org/>

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