



BLANDIN FOUNDATION™

**For immediate release
Statewide**

Contact

Becky LaPlant
218.327.8764

**Blandin Foundation announces Community Broadband Resource Program
Initiative will help rural communities connect to broadband's worldwide advantages**

Grand Rapids, MN—(February 15, 2008) Blandin Foundation is pleased to announce the Community Broadband Resource Program (CBR). This newly created program offers technical and business consulting services to rural communities interested in researching, developing or advancing broadband capacity. Participating communities receive services at no charge.

CBR is the most recent program addition to Blandin Foundation's Broadband Initiative, which also includes the "Get Broadband" and "LightSpeed" grant programs, the Blandin on Broadband blog and the Open Networks Feasibility Fund. The initiative is guided by a 16-member Strategy Board representing a broad range of private and public perspectives.

In designing this program, Blandin Foundation has applied its broadband experience gained from working with leadership in 29 rural communities.

Customized approach

"Blandin Foundation's Community Broadband Resource Program is unique in the state," says Bill Coleman, project leader for the program. "This program will be customized for each community because when it comes to broadband decision-making, we know that no two communities have the same set of challenges or priorities.

"While some communities may already have committed resources and know what they want to do, others may not really understand broadband capabilities and don't know where to start," Coleman says.

"Our job is to facilitate the good work that community leaders are capable of doing. We help identify and clarify key community priorities, involve project stakeholders and assist community leaders in developing their plans and understanding their planning needs--whatever would help them move forward to the next step."

How communities link up to Blandin Foundation's CBR Program

Community leaders who understand that ultra high-speed connectivity is critical for the future economic vitality of their community may apply for Community Broadband Resource Program assistance by downloading or completing the [application form](#) online at www.blandinfoundation.org. Applications will be accepted anytime between January 2008 and December 2009.

This program will provide, free of charge, up to 32 hours of high-level consulting services for 15 rural Minnesota communities. Services delivered will depend upon the needs of each community and could include technical assessments, establishing priorities, planning, market development and business expertise to help organize joint ventures with providers.

The community of Askov, in northern Pine County, has already received CBR assistance. In a meeting with city leaders, Coleman led discussion about the need to augment the area's technological capability and at the same time, enhance economic development efforts. Although the community has not yet decided which step to take toward technological improvement, Coleman will help them create a plan to inform the business community and residents about the power of broadband.

"Our Resource Program works most effectively when the broadband champions in a community can sit back and congratulate themselves for getting things done," Coleman says. "Success to me is getting them to a place where they can feel that congratulations are in order."

For additional information, visit the [Community Broadband Resource Program](#) web page on www.blandinfoundation.org.

Rural communities must not be left behind

As argued in Blandin Foundation's publication, [Live at the Speed of Light](#), rural communities without broadband access to the Internet are not just missing out on the new technology advances that broadband offers, they are falling behind in their ability to maneuver through life: to find jobs, acquire education and new skills, keep in touch with health care decisions, find products, communicate and discover what's going on in the world around them.

Broadband and its accessibility to information, communication and entertainment has literally reshaped the way most of us live.

"Blandin Foundation introduced the Broadband Initiative to help rural communities learn more about and invest in broadband," says Bernadine Joselyn, director of Public Policy and Engagement at the Blandin Foundation. "To survive and thrive in today's global economy, broadband must be as much a part of a rural community's infrastructure as any of its other utilities."

Joselyn notes that in 2003 when the Broadband Initiative was introduced, some 70 million American adults, according to a Pew Research Study, were checking the Internet. A year or so later, according to Morgan Stanley estimates, the one-billionth user went online. The next billion users are expected worldwide by 2015.

“So broadband access isn’t just ‘nice to have’ any longer. Because it’s an essential part of living, the Broadband Initiative is compelled to help Minnesota’s rural communities stay in the game,” she adds. “Blandin Foundation’s Community Broadband Resource Program is our “no wrong door” tool to help.”

About Blandin Foundation

Minnesota’s largest rural-based private foundation, Blandin Foundation (www.blandinfoundation.org) is located in Grand Rapids. Its mission is to strengthen communities in rural Minnesota, especially the Grand Rapids area, through grants, leadership development programs and public policy initiatives. Blandin Foundation helps communities provide choice and opportunity for all, particularly people facing social and economic challenges.

Sidebar: #1

Blandin Foundation’s Broadband Initiative was launched in 2003 to help rural communities optimize their use of broadband-based technologies to improve their capacities for economic global competitiveness. In partnership with others, the Blandin Foundation—through this Initiative—seeks to:

- Increase awareness about the need to enhance broadband telecommunications use and services.
- Increase rural business and residential use of broadband capacity.
- Increase public and private investment in rural broadband capacity.

The Initiative is guided by a Strategy Board consisting of senior representatives from all major stakeholder groups, including industry, local governments, associations, state government (executive and legislative branches) and research institutions.

Since launching the Broadband Initiative, Blandin Foundation has invested more than \$400,000, gained \$250,000 in additional gifts and leveraged more than \$500,000 in cash and in-kind matches from community grantees. The additional funding has helped promote market development and increased use of broadband-based technologies in 29 communities across rural Minnesota.

Sidebar 2:

Bill Coleman, president and owner of Community Technology Advisors Corporation is the project leader for the Blandin Foundation Community Broadband Resource Program. Coleman has blended economic and technology development strategies on behalf of communities for more than a dozen years. He published “A Community Guide to Telecommunications Development” for the Minnesota Department of Trade and Economic Development (now Department of Employment and Economic Development, DEED) and subsequently joined Onvoy, Inc. to

launch that company's Integrated Community Network's program, a rural market development effort deployed in Grand Rapids, northwestern and west central Minnesota.

Since forming his current company, Community Technology Advisors in 2000, Coleman has worked in seven states, assisting communities in identifying and addressing shortcomings in their telecommunications infrastructures, usages and services.

He began work as a consultant to Blandin Foundation in 2003 when he created the Minnesota Community Broadband Promotion Project, an initiative to encourage communities with fewer than 2,500 residents to increase the use of high-speed communications and information technology. This project was funded by Blandin Foundation and was the pilot project for the Foundation's future "Get Broadband" grants program. Since that time, Coleman has worked on a number of projects with the Blandin Foundation and was instrumental in designing and developing the Community Broadband Resource Program.

Coleman is the project leader for the Resource Program and provides the business management and technical expertise to the communities.

###