



Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities initiative Fact Sheet

Overview

Blandin Foundation submitted in August 2009 an application to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration for federal Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP) funding. The project, Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities (MIRC), creates a coalition of state and county agencies, state colleges and universities, rural communities, and others. MIRC is the only statewide applicant for this funding.

This grant energizes and expands the work of 19 organizations throughout rural Minnesota communities over the next two years to make more and better use of broadband. The coalition will implement projects that increase public access to broadband, support market development and foster broadband adoption. Together, these efforts are designed to nurture a broadband “culture of use” in communities across the state.

Total cost of the MIRC’s proposed projects is estimated at more than \$6.3 million. MIRC members would contribute \$1.3 million in resources as a match toward the effort.

Goal

Harness the power of the Internet to get people back to work, tap into the global marketplace and enhance quality of life for rural residents.

The Issue

Vital rural communities are connected rural communities. 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 five Intelligent Community Indicators developed by the Intelligent Community Forum – including broadband connectivity, knowledge workforce, digital inclusion, innovation, and marketing and advocacy.

Targeted populations: 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 create information portals as well as 11 “demonstration communities” with local leadership focused on broadband as a critical infrastructure in the global economy.



Market development approaches will include education, training, technical assistance and barrier removal.

- Enhance public access at workforce centers to training and online learning
- Deliver e-entrepreneurship / training and technical support to small businesses in critical industries for rural Minnesota
- Support community broadband initiatives in:
 - Community planning
 - Market development
 - Application development
 - 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
- Minnesota Workforce Council Association
- PC's for People
- Association of MN Counties
- 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

For More Information Contact

Blandin Foundation

218.326.0523

www.blandinfoundation.org