



## **Robust Broadband Networks Feasibility Fund**

### **Request for Proposals**

**Re-issued: April 2009**

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This Request for Proposal (RFP) is an invitation by the Blandin Foundation (Foundation) to qualified community institutions and/or organizations to request financial assistance to support research that determines the feasibility of geographically based Robust Broadband Networks. Robust Broadband Networks are defined by the Blandin Foundation for purposes of this RFP as communication networks that make available symmetric broadband service of at least 50 megabits per second to every premise within a market area and conform to the FCC definitions of providing services on a non-discriminatory basis. Applications that engage multiple public and private sector partners and/or communities are encouraged.

Funds are currently available for rural Minnesota communities in 28 southwest Minnesota counties including: Chippewa, Kandiyohi, McLeod, Meeker, Nicollet, Renville, Sibley, Lac Qui Parle, Lincoln, Lyon, Redwood, Yellow Medicine, Brown, Cottonwood, Jackson, Martin, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Rock, Watonwan, Blue Earth, Faribault, Freeborn, LeSueur, Rice, Steele, and Waseca.

Submission of a proposal does not create any right in or expectation of a contract with the Foundation. The Foundation reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, and the Foundation further declares that it will incur no financial obligations for any costs by any company in preparation of proposals. Applications can be submitted at any time from April 1, 2009 until May 1, 2010.

Qualified community institutions and/or organizations may submit their proposal responses to:

**Bernadine Joselyn, Director, Public Policy & Engagement**  
**Blandin Foundation**  
**100 North Pokegama Avenue**  
**Grand Rapids, MN 55744**

Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact Bill Coleman at 651.491-2551 or [bill@communitytechnologyadvisors.com](mailto:bill@communitytechnologyadvisors.com) with any questions regarding this RFP; this includes transmitting draft versions of proposals for pre-submittal review.

## **Background**

### **Brief Description of the Foundation**

Blandin Foundation is a private foundation based in Grand Rapids, Minnesota. The Foundation was created in 1941, and is Minnesota's largest rural-based and rural-focused foundation. The Foundation is funded through annual contributions from the C.K. Blandin Residuary Trust and earnings from its own investments. At the end of 2004, the net assets of the Foundation and the Residuary Trust were approximately \$410 million.

The Foundation's mission "To strengthen rural communities in Minnesota, especially the Grand Rapids Area," and vision "Healthy rural communities grounded in strong economies where the burdens and benefits are widely shared," guide our three program areas, grant making, community leadership training and public policy. See [www.blandinfoundation.org](http://www.blandinfoundation.org) for additional information.

### **The Blandin Broadband Initiative**

The Blandin Broadband Initiative is designed to catalyze broadband investment and use, raise awareness about the value of broadband and encourage public and private investment in rural broadband capacity. Expanding the use of broadband technology increases the potential to retain jobs in rural areas, grows new markets for business, strengthens health care, enhances educational access and improves the quality-of-life.

The Blandin Foundation launched the Broadband Initiative in 2003. A Strategy Board was convened and identified the need to increase broadband use as an urgent goal of first priority. Responses by the foundation's Broadband Initiative have included the *Get Broadband* community grant program, the *LightSpeed* grant program, and *Community Broadband Resources*. Over 35 communities have participated in these programs to date.

The Strategy Board also created a vision of ubiquitous ultra high-speed broadband across Minnesota, which the Foundation has been actively promoting.

*To ensure a high quality of life and a globally competitive future for its citizens, businesses and communities, Minnesota is committed to making the necessary investment to become a world leader in the universal deployment and use of ultra high-speed next generation broadband.*

There are many challenges to attracting the investment necessary to build globally competitive ultra high-speed broadband networks. As long-term infrastructure, networks require significant upfront investment which can be challenging for smaller rural markets to support. In addition, incumbent providers are understandably interested in maximizing the return on investment from their existing networks. This RFP is designed to help support those rural communities interested in exploring options for bringing more robust communication capabilities to their residents.

## **Goals**

1. Identify whether and how a Robust Broadband Network can be successfully deployed and operated in a community or combination of communities.
  - a. What is the competitive environment?
  - b. What is the market demand?
  - c. What are the best technology options?
  - d. What are the best operations, management and ownership choices?
2. Observe, document and share best practices and lessons learned so as to assist other communities engaged in broadband discussions and decision making.

## **Network Requirements**

The Robust Broadband Network Feasibility Fund is technology-neutral. Proposed Networks must be able to provide symmetric 50 megabits per second to every premise in the community. Network ownership can be private, public or a private-public partnership. Services must be provided in accordance with the FCC definitions of a non-discriminatory network.

## **Uses of Funds**

Foundation funds may be used to pay the organization(s) that conduct the feasibility study.

## **Funding**

The Foundation will accept applications for up to \$25,000 for a single community or up to \$40,000 for applications that serve multiple communities. All Foundation grant funds must be matched on a 1:1 cash<sup>1</sup> basis. Additional in-kind contributions are welcome and will be considered as an indicator of organizational support for the project. Grantees should plan to expend the funds within six months of funding.

## ***Application Information and Process***

### **Pre-Application Process**

Applicants should contact the Blandin Foundation when considering a proposal. The Foundation would prefer to be involved in design (not implementation) of the community solicitation process [of an organization to do conduct the feasibility study] to ensure that the feasibility study deliverables meet Foundation expectations. In cases where the applicant has already identified a qualified organization to conduct the feasibility study, the Foundation would prefer to review contractual arrangements before they are finalized. The Foundation will provide minimum specifications and requirements for all feasibility studies.

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<sup>1</sup> Cash match will need to be accounted for according to standards accepted by the IRS. For further explanation, please contact Mary Magnuson at 218.327.8738 or memagnuson@blandinfoundation.org.

## Specifications for Proposal

All proposals submitted in response to this RFP should be prepared simply and economically, avoiding the use of elaborate promotional materials beyond those sufficient to provide a complete, accurate and reliable presentation.

Submit one printed copy of the proposal along with an electronic version of the proposed narrative (financial statements required with the submission need not be mailed electronically). Proposals should be sent: Attention Bernadine Joselyn, Blandin Foundation, 100 North Pokegama Avenue, Grand Rapids, MN 55744, and, emailed to [Brjoselyn@BlandinFoundation.org](mailto:Brjoselyn@BlandinFoundation.org).

**All proposals must be no longer than eight pages, excluding required legal and financial documentation, and contain the following information:**

- Cover letter that introduces your organization and your proposal, and makes a strategic link between your proposal and the Foundation's mission and grant making interests.
- Organization Information
  - Summary of lead organization's history, including the date your organization was established.
    - Please indicate if the project's lead organization is a 501(c)(3) or a unit of government. An officer of the project's lead organization/fiscal agent should sign Grant application cover letters.
  - Summary of lead organization's mission and goals.
  - Description of all participating organizations. This should include: legal name, mission statement, services and programs, addresses, and staff contacts.
  - Description of the role of the lead and participating organizations, inter-organizational coordination and collaboration during the project, and decision-making processes.
- Area or market to be served
- Feasibility study elements
  - Describe the major elements of the proposed feasibility study
    - Market, Engineering, Operations, etc.
- Evaluation Criteria for this Proposal
  - Qualifications of personnel/organizations conducting the study
  - Contractual deliverables (outcomes) of the study. Blandin will provide additional information on this requirement.
  - Is this project in alignment with any ARRA stimulus funds? If so, which programs? Will ARRA funds be sought for this project?

- Timeliness and cost
  - Explain how this activity could not be undertaken, “but for” the availability of Blandin funds.
- Attachments (financial information required only of lead/fiscal agent organization)
  - Contract(s) with proposed vendor(s) (if available), or
  - Proposed solicitation request for vendors
  - Most recent financial statement from most recently completed year, audited if available, showing actual expenses. This information should include a balance sheet, a statement of activities (or statement of income and expenses) and functional expenses.
  - Organization budget for current year, including income and expenses.
  - Project Budget, including income and expenses
  - Additional funders. List names of corporations and foundations from which you are requesting funds to implement project activities, with dollar amounts, indicating which sources are committed or pending.
  - Brief description of key project staff and organizations
  - A copy of the lead organization’s (or your fiscal agent’s) IRS determination letter indicating tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status.

***Proposal Checklist***

- Cover letter
- Cover sheet
- Proposal narrative
- Lead organization budget
- Project budget
- Financial statements from lead organization, preferably audited, showing actual expenses including:
  - Balance sheet
  - Statement of activities (income and expenses)
  - Statement of functional expenses
- List of additional funders
- Brief description of key staff
- Copies of contracts or requests for proposals
- IRS determination letter

## **Disposition and Disclosure of Proposals**

All proposals submitted in response to this RFP will become the property of the Blandin Foundation.

## **Modification or Withdrawal of Proposals**

Responses to this request for proposals may be modified or withdrawn by written notice (e-mail notice acceptable) prior to the final due date of **May 1, 2010**.

## **Reservation of Rights**

The Blandin Foundation reserves the right to:

- Accept or reject any and all proposals received in response to this RFP, and to solicit new submittals.
- Waive or modify any irregularities in proposals received after prior notification to the vendor.
- Request the submission of proposal modifications at any time if deemed in the best interest of the Foundation with the understanding that such requests may change the cost of services provided.
- Consider proposals or modifications received at any time before the contract is made if such changes are deemed in the best interest of the Foundation.
- Request clarification and/or additional information from the vendor during the evaluation process.
- Utilize any and all ideas submitted in the proposals received unless those ideas are covered by legal patent or proprietary rights and the patent of those rights is indicated by the vendor. Proposals will become the property of Blandin Foundation.
- In the event of contract termination, enter into contract negotiations with other qualified firms that submitted proposals, rather than redoing the proposal process for the project.

Thank you for your submission of a proposal to the Blandin Foundation.