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Description automatically generatedBlandin Community Broadband Program

# Application Instructions

# Blandin Broadband Communities Program

Issued: June 30, 2021 | Due: July 30, 2021

**Summary**

C. K. Blandin Foundation seeks **six** rural Minnesota counties to participate in the Blandin Broadband Communities (BBC) Program. Selected through an application process, BBCs will define their technology goals, receive planning and technical assistance, and have access to resources to implement projects designed to make progress on their broadband and community technology enhancement goals.

This cohort of Blandin Broadband Communities has been made possible through a gift from The Margaret A. Cargill Foundation Fund at the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation.

**Background**

Blandin Foundation stands with Minnesota’s rural leaders and communities as they create and claim futures that are resilient, vibrant, and connected. Abundant and robust access to the Internet (broadband), and the digital literacy skills necessary to take full advantage of this access are essential as rural communities seek to compete and thrive in a digitally connected world.

Since making rural broadband access and use a primary focus in 2003, Blandin Foundation has partnered with broadband champions in over 100 rural communities across Minnesota to implement community-based broadband projects that increase opportunity for all and enrich quality of life and place.

**Vision**

At the November 2015 *Border to Border Broadband: Better Together* conference, more than 170 people from across our state worked to create, and by consensus adopt, a broadband vision for Minnesota, which was subsequently endorsed by nearly 100 organizations from around the state:

***Everyone in Minnesota will be able to use convenient, affordable world-class broadband networks that enable us to survive and thrive in our communities and across the globe.***

This vision continues to guide our work today.

**Blandin Broadband Communities**

Once selected, participating counties will, over a two-year period, receive planning and facilitation support, and the opportunity to apply for a grant of up to $75,000 for locally developed projects that address community-identified needs and opportunities. Project grants require a minimum cash or in-kind match of 25% (1:3) of total project cost ($25,000). *Grant funding is not guaranteed.*

Significant commitment on the part of the Blandin Broadband Communities will be expected and required throughout the two-year project period.

* County teams must have an organization that will manage this process over the two-year period, including providing leadership, event hosting, committee management and grant administration. This organization should be a 501(c)3 nonprofit or unit of government, or partner with an eligible fiscal sponsor.
* County teams must commit to recruiting and supporting an inclusive steering team that reflects community composition. See attached *Guidelines for Building an Inclusive Steering Committee*.
* Steering team members must be able and willing to commit time and attention to planning and project development/implementation over the two-year initiative. Most BBCs implement 6-10 projects over the course of their participation.
* Steering team members must participate in virtual and in-person meetings with other BBCs and in-community Blandin meetings. *Blandin Foundation is not currently holding in-person meetings due to the pandemic, but we anticipate resuming yet this year. We will continue to observe state guidance regarding in-person meeting protocols.*

To learn more about the BBC opportunity, we invite prospective county steering team members to attend a BBC Informational Session on Wednesday, July 14 from 2:00-3:00pm via Zoom. [Click here](https://blandinfoundation-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJAqde2hrj8pGd0RUHshcPEigYidkpjhUx5a) to register.

**Principles for the Work**

Diagram

Description automatically generatedIntelligent Community Framework: Blandin Foundation and its broadband partners have had great success in organizing around the indicators and concepts developed by the [Intelligent Community Forum](https://www.intelligentcommunity.org/).

This model illustrates how broadband infrastructure and services (connect) support community efforts to build workforce, support innovation, and redress digital inequity through efforts sustainable over time. Based on these assets, a community can build effective marketing messages that attract and retain families, talent and investment.

Blandin Broadband Communities are expected to work across all six components of the Intelligent Community framework, though each community will determine its own set of priorities and develop projects that reflect these priorities.

Those communities with excellent broadband access can focus on the other five elements, thus ensuring that the community receives full benefits from existing broadband networks. Communities that are struggling to improve broadband infrastructure can use this program to build support from additional broadband investments.

## Blandin Broadband Communities program application process

Participation from multiple organizations and sectors within the county is critical for success but one “lead organization” should submit the BBC program application and be prepared to manage the BBC effort in the county. Eligible lead organizations should be 501(c)3 nonprofits or units of government or must partner with an eligible fiscal sponsor who can apply for and administer grant funding.

Evaluation Criteria:

Applications will be evaluated on the following criteria:

* The level of commitment and appropriate skills of the lead organization to manage the program for the county, and the ability to serve as the fiscal host should grant funds be awarded (or partnership with qualified fiscal sponsor.)
* The level of demonstrated support from key partners, including local government, chamber of commerce and/or economic development groups, school districts, health care providers, library, social service agencies and others.
* The commitment of the lead organization to developing an inclusive process and representation on the project steering committee of underserved and underrepresented populations (see attached *Building an Inclusive Steering Committee*)
* A commitment to attend program-sponsored events.
* The level of past/current action and energy in broadband-related community economic development activities.
* Demonstrated need for support and funding for broadband-related activities.

Response Instructions:

All Blandin Broadband Communities program applications should be prepared simply and economically, avoiding the use of elaborate promotional materials beyond those sufficient to provide a complete, accurate and reliable presentation.

Qualifying institutions and/or organizations should submit application materials via email to Mary Magnuson at [memagnuson@blandinfoundation.org](mailto:memagnuson@blandinfoundation.org).

Applicants are encouraged to contact Blandin Foundation with any questions regarding the Blandin Broadband Communities program. This includes transmitting draft version of applications for pre-submittal review. All inquiries should be directed to Mary Magnuson at [memagnuson@blandinfoundation.org](mailto:memagnuson@blandinfoundation.org) or (218) 327-8738.

Application:

Applications should be no longer than eight pages (excluding financial statements, other legal documents, and letters of support) and contain the following information:

1. Cover letter that introduces your organization and explains why your county wants to participate in the Blandin Broadband Communities Program.
2. Lead Organization Information
   1. Complete contact information, including organization name, primary contact name, title, address, email address, phone number, website address, and federal ID number.
   2. Brief summary of organization’s history, including the date established.
   3. Summary of organization’s mission and goals.
   4. Brief description of the organization’s key project staff, including qualifications relevant to the BBC program.
   5. Overview of organization’s current programs or activities.
   6. Description of parent organization, affiliated companies, strategic partners or joint ventures (if applicable). This should include legal name, mission statement, services and programs, addresses, and staff contacts.
   7. Description of parent organization, affiliated companies, strategic partners or joint ventures (if applicable). This should include legal name, mission statement, services and programs, addresses, and staff contacts.
   8. If using a separate fiscal sponsor, please provide the above information for them, too.
3. Ability to manage and lead a successful community broadband project
   1. Identify the county on whose behalf you are applying.
   2. List your county’s s economic development priorities and current efforts around these priorities.
   3. Describe the broadband opportunities and challenges in your county, and how they might be addressed through this program.
   4. Describe any work done previously or currently underway around the Intelligent Community Indicators:
      1. Broadband infrastructure and services development
      2. Creation, attraction and support of knowledge workers (highly skilled, highly paid workers)
      3. Innovation (new industries, new companies, new practices to enhance competitiveness)
      4. Digital Inclusion (ensuring that all community members have computers, skills and connectivity)
      5. Sustainability (improving living standards while maintaining the ability of future generations to do the same)
      6. Community engagement (efforts to work proactively with your citizens and to attract investment and talent from outside the community.)
   5. List and provide brief bios for members of the project’s leadership team. Please make note of people representing underserved or underrepresented populations.
   6. List and describe the local/regional organizations that have provided letters of support and participation.
4. Letters of support and/or participation from local/regional organizations. Other attachments.

Submission of an application does not create any right in or expectation of a contract or obligation with the Foundation. The Foundation reserves the right to reject any or all applications, and the Foundation further declares that it will incur no financial obligation for any costs by any organization in preparation of applications.

## Once selected, Blandin Broadband Communities are not guaranteed grant funding through the program.

## More about the Blandin Broadband Communities program

Anticipated Timeline

*Meetings noted in the timeline may be in person or virtual based on state guidance regarding in-person meeting protocols.*

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| --- | --- |
| Application instructions released | June 30, 2021 |
| BBC Informational Zoom Session ([Register here](https://blandinfoundation-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJAqde2hrj8pGd0RUHshcPEigYidkpjhUx5a)) | Wednesday, July 14, 2-3:00 pm |
| Application deadline | July 30 |
| Blandin Broadband Communities Program selection notification | August 6 |
| Kick-off Steering Team meetings | August/September |
| Community benchmarking | August/September |
| Kick-off Cohort Gathering | September 23 |
| Community planning commences | September/October |
| *Building on Broadband: Inspiring Progress*  virtual conference | October 12-14 |
| Grant application/approval | December 2021/January 2022 |
| Review/update community plans | September 2022 |
| Project evaluation | July/August 2023 |

### Project Funding and Process

BBCs should be prepared to submit a grant application to Blandin Foundation for $75,000 in December of 2021. Of the $75,000 total funding, approximately 60% should be allocated to projects at the time of application. Grant proposals will be reviewed in January 2022 by Foundation staff and members of the Foundation’s Broadband Strategy Board, a group of public and private leaders who advise the Foundation’s broadband work. The Strategy Board will determine which applications are funded based on grant evaluation criteria[[1]](#footnote-2).

The remaining funds may be allocated later in the grant period and submitted to Blandin Foundation for approval. All grant funds should be spent within 18 months of the award date.

Community Project Grants must demonstrate a cash or in-kind match of at least 25% of the total project cost. Projects that provide community-wide cross-sectorial benefits require 25% (1:3) cash and/or in-kind match, and all bulk equipment purchases require 1:1 *cash* match. Projects that demonstrate more than the minimum match required will be viewed favorably.

**Robust Network Feasibility Fund Grants:** Communities actively working to improve broadband networks and access are eligible to apply for up to $25,000 through the [Robust Network Feasibility Fund program](https://blandinfoundation.org/programs/expanding-opportunity/broadband/robust-network-feasibility-fund-grants/). These grants require a 1:1 cash match and are designed to help a community better understand their technology and business model options to improve local broadband services.

## More about the application process

### Disposition and Disclosure of Applications:

All Blandin Broadband Communities program applications will become the property of the Blandin Foundation.

### Modification or Withdrawal of Applications:

Applications may be modified or withdrawn by written notice (e-mail notice acceptable) prior to the final review of the application by C. K. Blandin Foundation.

### Reservation of Rights:

The Blandin Foundation reserves the right to:

* Accept or reject any and all Blandin Broadband Communities Program applications received, and to solicit new submittals.
* Waive or modify any irregularities in applications received after prior notification to the lead organization.
* Request the submission of application modifications at any time if deemed in the best interest of the Foundation.
* Consider application modifications received at any time if such changes are deemed in the best interest of the Foundation.
* Request clarification and/or additional information from the applicant during the evaluation process.
* Deny grant funding for projects chosen by a Blandin Broadband Community should that community not follow program requirements or if the projects forwarded to the Foundation for funding consideration do not meet the goals of the program or are not allowable costs for private foundations.
* In the event of termination, enter into negotiations with other qualified firms that submitted applications, rather than redoing the application process for the project.

**For more information:**

Mary Magnuson (Broadband Program Administrator), 218-326-0523 or [broadband@blandinfoundation.org](mailto:broadband@blandinfoundation.org)

Blandin Foundation website: [www.blandinfoundation.org](http://www.blandinfoundation.org)

Broadband: <http://broadband.blandinfoundation.org>

Grants: <http://grants.blandinfoundation.org>

Blandin on Broadband blog: [www.blandinonbroadband.org](http://www.blandinonbroadband.org)

### C. K. Blandin Foundation

Blandin Foundation, Minnesota’s largest rural-based private foundation, is located in Grand Rapids, Minn. Its mission is to be a trusted partner and advocate to strengthen rural Minnesota communities, especially the Grand Rapids area. Blandin Foundation is one of only a handful of private foundations in the United States entirely committed to rural communities through grantmaking, community leadership training programs, community engagement and advocacy.

**Blandin Community Broadband Program**

Since 2003, the Blandin Community Broadband Program has engaged at local, state and federal levels to ignite and sustain policies that support abundant broadband access and technologically literate citizens as essential ingredients for creating vibrant rural communities. Information about the Blandin Broadband Communities Program: <http://broadband.blandinfoundation.org>



**Blandin Broadband Communities: Guidelines for Building an Inclusive Steering Committee**

Creating an inclusive steering committee is an important part of becoming a Blandin Broadband Community. Here are six things to do to help ensure that your steering committee is inclusive.

1. Know your community demographics and how your technology issues connect to various stakeholders (it is important to look at the current demographics of your community both in the census data but also at the MN Department of Education website). Know your community as a whole and how your efforts will impact the community.
2. Make sure you get representatives from your community’s underrepresented populations for your leadership team. In addition to ethnicity, age and gender, consider residents who are unemployed and seeking employment, small main street businesses which have not yet adopted modern Internet-based technologies, and county government. This can be tricky if this is not a group you’ve worked with before. Here are some tips:
   1. To avoid ‘tokenism,’ aim for including a minimum of 3 people from underrepresented populations on your team.
   2. Include on your team a community leader who works with and already has established a trusted relationship with some or all of the minority or underrepresented populations you are targeting as members of the steering committee.
   3. When recruiting people to represent a minority population, talk with a variety of sources to find leaders who are respected within the community you are reaching out to. For example, talk to union representatives, local businesses, churches, schools, or others familiar with the community.
3. Have a good job description which includes the expectations and time commitments of the steering committee members. It is really helpful to have a handout that includes your project’s purpose and expectations that you can leave with possible steering members. Community members are busy people and knowing what they are signing up for is important in order to help maintain volunteers and momentum.
4. Look for steering committee members who are: credible, open-minded, passionate about the specific issue, and willing to work collaboratively.
5. Your steering committee should represent a broad network of individuals who have the ability to access information and resources needed to move your project forward.
6. When recruiting steering committee members, make sure to visit them face-to-face and not via email or letter. Creating a more personal invitation really reinforces that they (not just anyone) are valued and needed as members of the steering committee.

1. Grant evaluation criteria will be listed in the grant application instructions. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)