



## Application Instructions

### Blandin Broadband Communities Program

Issued: August 7, 2012

Due: October 15, 2012

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#### Summary

C. K. Blandin Foundation seeks ten<sup>1</sup> rural Minnesota communities to participate in the Blandin Community Broadband Program (BCBP) as Blandin Broadband Communities. Selected through an application process, Blandin Broadband Communities will define their technology goals, have access to technical assistance and resources to meet their goals and measure current levels of broadband access and use.

The definition of “community” is flexible. Applications may be made by an individual city, a group of cities, a county, a tribal government, a self-defined region or community of interest. Applicants should be a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, educational organization or unit of government. Preference will be given to applications representing a range of organizations/entities.

#### 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 use and access a primary focus in 2003, Blandin Foundation has partnered with broadband champions in over 60 communities and 80 organizations across the state to implement hundreds of community-based broadband projects with two core objectives in mind: sustainable broadband adoption and enriched quality of life and place.

In 2005, Blandin Foundation convened leaders from across the state to imagine what it would take for Minnesota and its communities to fully take advantage of broadband technologies.

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<sup>1</sup> Grand Rapids/Itasca area has been preselected as one of the 10 communities.

This vision has been driving the Foundation's work ever since:

*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.<sup>2</sup>*

A set of principles further defines that vision:

- **Ubiquity:** Ultra-high-speed broadband needs to be available to everyone in Minnesota, including businesses, institutions, and individuals. *While ultimately all Minnesotans will need this service, this goal will necessarily be achieved in stages.*
- **Symmetry:** Ultra-high-speed broadband needs to provide symmetric speeds and facilitate source-to-source communication. *More communication in the future will be "two-way" as we work more from our homes.*
- **Affordable:** Ultra-high-speed broadband needs to be available at rates people can afford.
- **Competition:** Competition among service providers should be encouraged. *Competition increases customer choice and promotes innovation.*
- **World Class:** We must achieve world class state-of-the-art service based on global standards. *We cannot afford just to be better than our neighboring states.*
- **Collaboration:** The deployment and utilization of ultra-high-speed broadband is a challenging goal that can benefit from public and private entities working together.
- **Neutrality:** Ultra-high-speed broadband policy should be promoted regardless of the technology platform that delivers it. *The best technology for delivering ultra-high-speed broadband may not have even been invented yet.*
- **Interoperability:** Regardless of the technology used for ultra-high-speed delivery, all systems must seamlessly interoperate with all other technologies.

Through the Blandin Community Broadband Program, the foundation extends its broadband focus in 2013 and 2014 with up to \$1.5 million in grants and technical support available to rural Minnesota communities. The program offers a robust series of resources for community-designed and -driven initiatives. Blandin Foundation matches community resources and vision with technical support, grants, access to peer community insights, conferences, workshops and webinars. Together we explore broadband possibilities in three primary ways:

- *Blandin Broadband Communities* program – an intensive two-year partnership with 10 rural Minnesota communities
- Community Project Grants – Matching grants available to all rural Minnesota communities (*application instructions will be released in December 2012*)
- Community Broadband Resources – Non-grant resources

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<sup>2</sup> To learn more about the Broadband Vision for Minnesota and its eight supporting principles visit <http://broadband.blandinfoundation.org/>

## Blandin Broadband Communities

Blandin Broadband Communities builds on the success of the Demonstration Community component of the Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities program, which was funded by federal grant dollars and administered by the foundation.

Once selected, Blandin Broadband Community teams will receive planning and organizing support, and the *opportunity* to apply for grant funding for locally developed projects that address community identified needs. Chosen communities may apply for up to \$100,000 in matching funding over a two-year period, with the average amount of grant support anticipated to be \$75,000 per community. Being chosen as a Blandin Broadband Community, however, is not a guarantee of grant support.

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

- Communities must commit to recruiting and supporting an inclusive community leadership team that reflects community composition. See attached *Guidelines for Building an Inclusive Steering Committee*.
- Community leadership team members must be able and willing to commit time and attention to community planning and project development and management.
- Community leadership team member representatives must participate in virtual and in-person meetings with other participating communities.

### Principles for the Work

Intelligent 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.



Intelligent Community Indicators

**The Virtuous Cycle**

[www.intelligentcommunity.org](http://www.intelligentcommunity.org)

The model to the right illustrates that on a base of broadband infrastructure and services, a community can build its workforce, support innovation and address digital inclusion. From those assets, a community can build an effective marketing message to both internal and external markets with the goal of retaining and attracting talent and investment.

## ***Blandin Broadband Communities program application process***

To be considered a qualified applicant, an organization must comply with all of the specifications and respond to all items listed within the application instructions. Eligible organizations are located in Minnesota, serve Minnesota residents, and are 501(c)3 organizations, educational organizations or units of government.

### Evaluation Criteria:

Applications will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- The apparent level of commitment and appropriate skills of the lead organization to manage the local program, and the ability to serve as the fiscal agent should Blandin Foundation grant funds be awarded.
- The level of demonstrated support from key community organizations, including local government, chamber of commerce and/or economic development groups, school districts, health care providers, library and others.
- The demonstrated commitment from the lead organization to developing an inclusive process and representation on the project leadership team of underserved/underrepresented populations (see attached *Building an Inclusive Steering Committee*)
- A commitment to attend program-related Blandin Foundation-sponsored events.
- The level of past/current action and energy in community broadband-related community economic development 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.

Qualified community institutions and/or organizations should submit one printed copy of the application along with an electronic version of the application narrative (financial statements required with the submission need not be mailed electronically) to:

***C. K. Blandin Foundation  
Attn: Mary Magnuson  
100 North Pokegama Avenue  
Grand Rapids, MN 55744  
[memagnuson@blandinfoundation.org](mailto:memagnuson@blandinfoundation.org)***

Applicants are encouraged to contact Blandin Foundation with any and all 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.

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, defines your 'community', and makes a strategic link between your community's technology aspirations and the Foundation's mission and goals of the Blandin Community Broadband Program.
2. Sponsoring Organization Information
  - a. Complete contact information, including contact name, title, address, email address, phone number, website address, and federal ID number.
  - b. Summary of organization's history, including the date established.
    - i. Please indicate if the project's lead organization is a non-profit organization or unit of government, and submit a copy of the IRS determination letter or unit of government state statute authorization, and form W9.
  - c. Summary of organization's mission and goals.
  - d. Summary of corporate structure, including a brief description of key project staff, including qualifications relevant to the specific request
  - e. Description of organization's current programs or activities, including any service statistics and strengths or accomplishments. Please highlight new or different activities, if any, for this organization.
  - f. 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.
3. Ability to manage and lead a successful community broadband project
  - a. Describe the opportunities and challenges that exist in your community, and how they might be addressed through this program.
    - i. Define the geographical area of your 'community of place' or the affiliation at the heart of your 'community of interest.'
  - b. List and describe the local/regional organizations that have provided letters of support and participation.
  - c. List your community's economic development priorities and current efforts around these priorities.
  - d. Describe any work done previously or currently underway around the Intelligent Community Indicators:
    - i. Broadband infrastructure and services development
    - ii. Creation, attraction and support of knowledge workers (highly skilled, highly paid workers)
    - iii. Innovation (new industries, new companies, new practices to enhance competitiveness)
    - iv. Digital Inclusion (ensuring that all community members have computers, skills and connectivity)
    - v. Community marketing (efforts to attract investment and talent)

- e. List and provide brief bios for members of the project’s leadership team. Please make note of people representing underserved or underrepresented populations.
4. Attachments. *While Blandin Broadband Communities are not guaranteed grant funding through the program, it is important that the lead organization has the ability to act as fiscal agent for foundation-funded community-led projects.*
- a. IRS Determination Letter
  - b. Form W9 (<http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw9.pdf?portlet=3>)
  - c. 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.
  - d. Letters of support and/or participation from local/regional organizations.

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.

***More about the Blandin Broadband Communities program***

Timeline

Application instructions released	August 7, 2012
Application deadline	October 15, 2012
Blandin Broadband Communities Program selection notification	November 2, 2012
Blandin Broadband Communities selection public announcement	November 13-14, 2012
Community benchmarking	December 2012
Kick-off meeting w/ten communities	January 2013
Community planning commences	January/February 2013
Initial community project application/approval	April/May 2013
Second round of project application/approval	October/November 2013
Review/update community plans	January 2014
Project evaluation	November/December 2014

Communities will be publically announced at the November 13-14 conference in Duluth, *Building our Connected Future: Minnesota's Better with Broadband!* co-hosted by Blandin Foundation and Connect Minnesota. Communities selected for the program should plan on sending at least two representatives to the conference. All applicant organizations will receive two free registrations to the conference, and are encouraged to attend.

Grant proposals will be developed by the Blandin Broadband Communities leadership teams and recommended for approval to Blandin Foundation in the spring and fall of 2013 as indicated above. However, recommendation for funding by a community team will not guarantee project funding by Blandin Foundation. All grant funds should be spent within one year of the award date.

#### Project Funding and Process

Blandin Foundation has committed \$750,000 specifically to the Blandin Broadband Communities program. Selected communities may apply for up to \$100,000 in project funding, with the average community receiving \$75,000 of grant support.

All projects recommended by Blandin Broadband Communities leadership teams must demonstrate a cash or in-kind match of 25-50% of the total project cost, depending on the nature of the project: generally, projects that provide community-wide cross-sectorial benefits will require 25% match, projects that benefit one specific entity or sector require 50% (1:1) match, and all equipment purchases will require 1:1 *cash* match. Projects that demonstrate more than the minimum match required will be viewed favorably.

As mentioned previously, Blandin Broadband Communities leadership teams will have two opportunities to recommend grant proposals to Blandin Foundation for funding. Grant proposals will be reviewed by Foundation staff and members of the Blandin Foundation's Broadband Strategy Board – a group of public and private leaders who advise the Foundation's broadband work. The Strategy Board will rank the community project proposals in a semi-competitive process based on which projects best fit program criteria, and allocate grant funds accordingly.

Once again, being selected to participate in the Blandin Broadband Communities Program is not a guarantee of grant funding.

### ***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 (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**

C. K. 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. As of December 31, 2011, the net assets of the Foundation and the Residuary Trust were \$370 million.

The Foundation's mission "To strengthen rural Minnesota communities, especially the Grand Rapids area," and vision "To be the premier partner for building healthy rural Minnesota communities, grounded in strong economies, where 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.



### **Blandin's Community-Based Broadband Programs**

The Blandin Foundation has long believed that abundant broadband access and technologically literate citizens are essential ingredients for creating vibrant rural communities, and began its focused community work in 2005.

***Get Broadband*** was the Foundation's first community-based program. Over the three-year duration of the program, 29 communities used Foundation-generated tools and financial support to promote broadband use as a community and economic development strategy. The majority of communities completed their programs by spring 2008.

***Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities*** (MIRC) is a multi-year sustainable broadband adoption grant funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The project has involved multiple statewide and regional partners and 11 demonstration communities. Blandin Foundation wraps-up its leadership of MIRC in 2012.



## **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:
  - a. To avoid 'tokenism,' aim for including a minimum of 3 people from underrepresented populations on your team.
  - b. 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.
  - c. 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.