

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities initiative

#### **Who benefits from this stimulus grant and the resulting initiative?**

The benefits of this grant will be widespread across greater Minnesota. There are several elements of the initiative, ultimately touching thousands of people. For example:

- Those who use MN Workforce Centers will benefit from longer hours and more digital literacy training
- Low-income families without a home computer will be able to obtain one for free or at very low cost
- Businesses that want to use the internet more effectively to increase profits and lower costs will benefit from computer and web training available through more MN Extension Service

Within the 11 Demonstration Communities, the impact will be more localized with grant funds available to fund local priorities.

- Communities that want to attract knowledge workers and retain youth
- Health care institutions that want to improve the quality of the services they offer while reducing costs

#### **Why is this happening now, when the economy is so bad?**

The federal government recognizes the importance of broadband and technology adoption for a full economic recovery, especially in rural areas. Widespread adoption of technology will enable new innovation in health care, education, business and government that will improve the quality of life in rural communities by making all of these services and opportunities more available at less cost.

These programs will equip people with the skills they need to be successful. The increased demand for broadband services will drive investment by telecommunications providers. As the economy improves, we will be better positioned with a better broadband infrastructure, a more educated workforce, and more competitive businesses.

### **Whom should I contact to get help from this grant?**

As the various programs of this initiative are developed, the Blandin Foundation website ([www.blandinfoundation.org](http://www.blandinfoundation.org)) provides a good first stop for information.

Once initiative programs are in place, Minnesota's Regional Development Commissions will have a key role in connecting with community leaders and organizations to make them aware of the possibilities presented by these funds.

### **How can these funds be used?**

There are specific activities proscribed in our application to the federal government. Each partner--the workforce centers, MN Extension Service, Blandin Foundation and others--have agreed to carry out these activities. Federal rules will govern the allowable uses for the funds; our project partners are well-familiar with dealing with federal project funding.

The Demonstration Communities will have significant latitude in how funds are spent in their communities. Their specific activities are not proscribed in the application, but will be determined by community project steering committees. These activities must be in support of the federal grant program purposes and within the Intelligent Community framework.

### **What is special about the demonstration communities versus other rural communities?**

Demonstration communities were selected based on a number of factors, including geographic distribution and community type. MIRC is partnering with individual cities, counties, a region and a tribal government. These communities have the components necessary to support the Intelligent Community approach — one or more colleges, high technology employment, health care providers and decent telecommunications services.

We also invited communities that already have been focusing on broadband- and technology-based economic development. These communities have the committed leadership and vision needed to be successful in this initiative. They will be able to move forward quickly through the planning stage into rapid implementation.

Demonstration communities will showcase best practice models so that other Minnesota communities can utilize the same approach. Other communities will not have the same level of funding available, but will be able to access many of the same resources through our statewide efforts. Projects implemented by health care providers or educational institutions could be expanded into non-demonstration communities.

### **How does this initiative work with all the other technology training programs and technical assistance in our communities?**

Generally, the MIRC grant will be used to boost the impact of existing efforts by workforce centers, University of Minnesota Extension Service, county governments, Regional Development Commissions and others.

Similarly, the Demonstration Communities will have the opportunity to leverage these and other programs as appropriate to their strategies. For example, if a community is seeking technology training for their business community, they could obtain the general assistance available from the MN Extension Service plus they could seek specialized assistance from Enterprise MN, MNSCU or private vendors.

### **Who will decide what projects get funded in the Demonstration Communities?**

Blandin Foundation has contracted with with a lead organization in each community. These grantees will form a project steering team that will include key community stakeholders, most likely from business, health care, education and government. The committee will assess community opportunities, set priorities and determine project funding. The community will forward their draft budgets and funding decisions to Blandin Foundation. Blandin Foundation will ensure that the projects meet the federal requirements and that proper matching funding is in place.

### **What do you mean by "Intelligent Rural Communities?"**

"Intelligent Communities" is an economic development framework that supports communities competing in the global broadband economy. The New York-based Intelligent Community Forum (ICF) framework created this concept. More than 400 communities around the world have registered their efforts with ICF.

There are five components to the approach: Ensuring Broadband; Creating and supporting Knowledge Workers; Spurring Innovation; Addressing Digital Inclusion; and Marketing and Advocacy for a community's Broadband Economy strengths. Intelligent Communities have initiatives in each of these issue areas. Together, these initiatives help to build a community that can thrive economically and socially.

This will be the first widespread effort to test the Intelligent Community concept in rural communities.