

\$100 Million in First Round of Federal Funding for Broadband Access

Written by GOV Press Wisconsin

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<http://newiproggressive.com/images/stories/S5/internet-apps-s5.jpg>



Applications for largest single round of broadband investment in Wisconsin history available on June 1, 2021

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers announced Tuesday that the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) will launch a round of broadband expansion funding in two weeks with \$100 million in funding from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). This is the initial batch of federal funds to be dedicated to expanding high-speed broadband internet across the state. Funding will be awarded by the PSC based on a model similar to the successful Broadband Expansion Grant Program.



“I declared 2021 the Year of Broadband Access because everyone in this state should have access to reliable internet service. Between our Badger Bounceback agenda investments and these federal funds, we’re taking a major step toward connecting everyone in our state,” said Gov. Evers. “I’m glad to be able to direct this funding to the PSC so the folks in need of high-speed internet can get connected as quickly as possible. I also urge our state legislature to pass our Badger Bounceback agenda to allocate an additional nearly \$200 million for

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broadband access and provide financial assistance to low-income households struggling with their internet bills. This isn't a question of providing federal or state funding for broadband—we must do both to ensure folks can get connected."

Under U.S. Treasury guidance for the ARPA funds, eligible broadband projects are expected to:

- Serve unserved or underserved households and businesses.
- Be designed to deliver upon project completion internet service that reliably meets or exceeds upload and download speeds of 100 Mbps or at least 100 Mbps download and at least 20 Mbps upload if it not practicable to deliver the higher upload speeds due to geography, topography, or excessive costs.
- Prioritize projects that deliver a physical broadband connection that achieve the last mile connection.
- Prioritize affordability options.
- Prioritize investments in fiber optic infrastructure where feasible.
- Avoid investments in locations that have existing agreements to build reliable service of at least 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload by December 31, 2024.

"I want to thank Gov. Evers for his continued leadership and commitment to broadband connectivity and for allocating this funding that will make a significant impact in the lives of those who are unserved by high-speed internet," said PSC Chairperson Rebecca Cameron Valcq. "We are committed to getting the funding awarded quickly and efficiently while continuing to be good stewards of public dollars."

The State Broadband Office at the PSC coordinates broadband investment, develops broadband coverage maps, and manages the Broadband Expansion Grant Program. The grant program helps providers find a path to return on investment in areas of the state that are challenging to serve due to population density or geography. Since 2019, the PSC has received 267 applications requesting more than \$112 million to fund broadband infrastructure expansion. Over the past two years alone, the PSC has awarded more than \$52 million for 130 broadband expansion projects across the state.

Gov. Evers' proposed biennial budget allocates \$151.7 million over the biennium to fund Broadband Expansion Grants. The governor's comprehensive broadband package also includes provisions to bookend the Broadband Expansion Grants, from Broadband Planning Grants that will make communities ready to partner on projects, to Line Extension Grants that will decrease the cost many individual customers face in order to connect to existing

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broadband infrastructure. The governor's proposal also included provisions that would have made internet service affordable for tens of thousands of families across Wisconsin through an internet subscription monthly subsidy program for low-income households; however, that proposal has been eliminated by the Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance.

In September 2020, Gov. Evers allocated over \$5 million in federal CARES Act funding for the PSC to make awards to 12 broadband expansion projects. Projects from that funding provided new or improved access to service for more than 20,000 homes, businesses, and farms across the state.

The PSC will make applications available, including information on project eligibility guidelines, for this first round of federal broadband funding on June 1, 2021, with applications due on July 27, 2021. More information regarding the PSC's broadband access and affordability programs can be found [here](#).