

Connecting Wisconsin Kick-Off

October 25, 2022

8:30 AM – 5PM

This in-person or virtual event was co-hosted by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and Public Service Commission of Wisconsin. It was developed in partnership between the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the Office of Rural Prosperity, the University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension and the Educational Communications Board.

I missed the initial discussion pertaining to progress to date and future broadband expansion discussions of panel members. Leadership from the Wisconsin Public Service Commission and NTIA gave an overview of efforts to date in Wisconsin and future opportunities that exist with federal, state and local partnerships moving forward. Later under another panel answering questions it was stated that the Milwaukee area will be receiving 14M dollars that the state may match. However, the 28M will fall very short of the estimated 140M required to roll out fast, reliable internet services to the Milwaukee area. Even with well established partnerships amongst businesses, non-profit organizations and private entities; the likelihood of inclusion of all Wisconsinites acquiring internet service during this round of expansion holds the reality this is the first round of expansion and another will have to be performed later. This fact highlights the importance of sound planning now allowing the most internet access and laying the groundwork for the next internet undertaking.

Mapping and Data was the second panel of questions with a focus of efforts and tools that can assist communities in identifying challenges and opportunities in the development of a broadband plan and connected community.

- (1) The top point: How to acquire data w/o a starting point
- (2) Data leads to mapping which activates discussion forming partnerships
- (3) PSC stated Wisconsin programs and resources driven by mapping data
- (4) Technical knowledge of one who can analyze data and realize some sources are much more accurate
- (5) Sharing data with community leading to adoption

Question directed to panel: What are the biggest challenges of data and mapping?

- (1) Knowing how to acquire the data and knowing the various sources and the differing accuracies of each
- (2) Plan now to utilize funding allowing the maximum internet connection
- (3) Have legal council who will protect confidentiality

On to Workforce Planning Needs and Strategies panel

- (1) Workforce shortage – demands of broadband projects will require many specific technology trained employees

- (2) Outreach of tech colleges reaching out to re-entry employees, high school students and correctional facilities
- (3) Tribal populations reaching out to people who display technology skills
- (4) New technical degrees developed: telecommunications, Design and Maintain Networks, Educate broadband engineers and etc..

Biggest challenges of the demanded workforce

- (1) How many people have ever used the internet or worked with fiber optic cable
- (2) Fast educational training demanded
- (3) Efficiencies must be improved due to more work and lack of people to support demand
- (4) Provide equitable access to technology education
- (5) Tribe and business relationships must be tribal approved
- (6) Knowledge of the industry skill requirements
- (7) Provide business scholarships which promote the company providing educational opportunities
- (8) Communicate the technology learning opportunities related to fiber optic cable enhancing good earning potential

The last panel discussion I could attend was Digital Equity and Inclusion. The focus was digital equity assets and needs in the state of Wisconsin and looking at strategies on how to ensure that all communities have access and use affordable, reliable high-speed internet.

- (1) AARP efforts: Libraries a good source of use and education of internet. Outreach to AARP members via email assisting older population with internet usage
- (2) Tribal efforts: Tribal people very supportive of all; an advantage to learning internet capabilities; also, an advantage to forming partnerships for internet expansion. Red Cliff library offers help with resumes, teaching people how to host cooking shows and many more internet opportunities

Community Outreach: What are the most important activities?

- (1) Accurate data and mapping lead to using a combination of resources effectively and strategically
- (2) Literacy to navigate the internet and caution of safety related to high scamming in today's environment
- (3) Talk to people to find the best adoption practices
- (4) Internet and employment opportunities inter-related to each other
- (5) Have libraries and schools promote internet education and programs offered
- (6) Community meetings with real time interaction leading to reliable feedback of the specific community
- (7) Adequate library funding
- (8) Digital equity plan: Three items in plan: (a) Use the most accurate initializing plans, (b) Standardize digital skills including tools and standards and (c) promote advocacy coalition groups leading to community partners from all sectors and backgrounds
- (9) Help communities to organize and set priorities

Some additional Community Outreach initiatives:

Use BEAD funds in apartment buildings allowing multiple internet users living in the same complex internet access

Social isolation lessened

Develop consumer protections and regulations pertaining to scammers

School volunteers could assist people with internet usage
Providers implement older volunteers providing people purpose
Anti-virus more advertised

This Internet Kick-Off was an event to attend. I hold great respect for all involved in regard to their knowledge base, creativity related to long-term planning and lastly but certainly not least: their deep concern and desire to be all inclusive of all in the pursuit of internet and ideas of helping people feel comfortable with internet usage and safe too.

Please take time to listen to the recorded Internet for all of October 25, 2022. This recording may take a couple of weeks to be available on the PSC website. It is well worth your time.
