

Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition
Meeting Minutes
February 4, 2021

Attendance:

Chuck Ackman, Office of Senator Amy Klobuchar; Ron Antony, Yellow Medicine County Commissioner; Sonja Borgeson Bethke, DEED Office of Broadband Development; Anna Boroff, MN Cable Communications Association; Colin Bryant, TelRep Marketing; Joe Buttweiler, CTC; Barbara Chaffee, Central MN Jobs; Brent Christensen, MN Telecom Alliance; Bill Coleman, Community Technology Advisors; Angie Dickison, DEED Office of Broadband Development; Julie Foote, MVTV Wireless; Jim Gill, TransComm US; Steve Giorgi, RAMS MN; Amber Glaeser, MN Farm Bureau; Jenny Glumack, MREA; Alejandra Henriquez, Office of Congressman Tom Emmer; Kyle Hoffman, MN Farmers Union; Nancy Hoffman, Chisago County EDA; Mark Jones, MN Rural Health Association; JoAnne Johnson, MN Public Broadband Alliance; Marc Johnson, ECMECC; Bernadine Joselyn, Blandin Foundation; Kristi Kane, Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging; Janet Keough, Cloquet Valley Internet Initiative; Barbara Dröher Kline, Thrivent; Tim Korby, HR Green; Benya Krause, Lead for MN; Logan Kuschel, MRBC; Dan Larson, MN Rural Counties; Jane Leonard, Growth and Justice; Daniel Lightfoot, League of MN Cities; Jon Linnell, North Region Health Alliance; Josie Lonetti, MN Farm Bureau; Bree Maki, Office of Senator Tina Smith; Molly Malone, Murray County Commissioner; Scott Marquardt, Southwest Initiative Foundation; Michelle May, Chippewa County; Scott McMahon, Greater MN Partnership; Lilly Melander, Medical Alley; Mark Mrla, Finley Engineering Co; Briana Mumme, Redwood County EDA; Emily Murray, Association of MN Counties; Jaci Nagle, Koochiching County; Dave Nordaune, Chippewa County Commissioner; Brenda Nyberg, Carlton County Economic Development; Terry Ocaña, Chippewa County IT Director; Scott Reimer, Federated Rural Electric; Vince Robinson, Lincoln County; Pam Rosenau, MVTV Wireless; Ida Rukavina, Office of Senator Amy Klobuchar; Connie Schmoll, Kandiyohi County & Willmar EDA; Eileen Smith, Hometown Fiber; Paul Solsrud, Cooperative Network Services; Angie Steinbach, Yellow Medicine County; Heidi Steinmetz, Kanabec County EDA; Abby Strom, AAEDC; Jason Swanson, MN River Area Agency on Aging; Ann Treacy, Treacy Information Services; Diane Wells, DEED Office of Broadband Development; Mike Wimmer, Mille Lacs County EDA; Jim Yount, Koochiching Technology Initiative; Nathan Zacharias, Zacharias Government Relations; Jordan Zeller, East Central Regional Development Commission.

Vince Robinson called the meeting to order.

Welcome and Introductions

Vince welcomed attendees and took introductions of all participants.

Approval of December 15, 2020 Minutes

Motion by Brent Christensen to approve the December minutes, second by Nancy Hoffman. **Motion approved.**

Legislative, State Budget, Speed Test Update

Nathan Zacharias provided a legislative update as well as an overview of the current state budget outlook. Nathan started by highlighting the coalition's two goals for the legislative session:

- \$120 million in ongoing biennial funding for the Border-to-Border Broadband Grant Program.
 - This number came from the Governor's Taskforce on Broadband
- Monitoring policy bills that might get introduced; none yet

HF 14 (Ecklund) and SF 22 (Bakk) were both introduced in the first week of session. There might also be additional broadband funding bills introduced by the Senate GOP and the coalition will support those as well if they have the Governor's Taskforce numbers.

The Governor's budget only included \$50 million for broadband in 2022 only. Ultimately, we are thankful the governor included broadband funding in his budget as there is pressure to do a lot of things right now during the pandemic. MMB will release the February budget forecast the first week of March, which will guide legislative work for the rest of session. Committee deadlines have been released:

- First deadline: March 12
- Second deadline: March 19
- Third deadline: April 9

Speed Test Update:

Next, Nathan provided an update on the Speed Test Initiative and some background on the speed test for those that are new to it. To date, there have been 48,000 speed tests taken across the state to date. The first phase of the initiative has ended. The most success we've seen is when we've worked with individual counties directly. The coalition has decided to continue the speed test through the spring and hired an intern. Nathan introduced Logan Kuschel to coalition members.

Update from the Office of Broadband Development

Angie Dickison provided an update from the Office of Broadband Development. Last week, the Office announced the awards for the 2020 grant round with 64 projects requesting \$42 million in funding. The governor also announced his budget proposal, with \$50 million in one-time funding for the Border-to-Border Broadband Grant Program. They are closely monitoring the federal funding, particularly the stimulus package from late December. There is lots of interest in RDOF funding through the FCC, plan to monitor the outcome of that program. Hoping for broadband funding this session, actively participating in committee hearings and reaching out to advocates to make the case for funding in the future. Discussion and questions from members on NTIA money and the decision-making process with regards to state grant money and RDOF areas.

Introduction: Lead for Minnesota, Benya Kraus

Vince introduced Benya Kruas with Lead for Minnesota and how her program might be able to assist local communities on some of the work we are hoping to achieve. Benya gave some background on Lead for MN. They are in the business of homecoming – a national organization. Fellowship program with 106 fellows nationally and rolled out the inaugural cohort this past fall. Over 5,000 applicants nationwide. We are now recruiting for a 2021 host site – looking at strengthening regional clustering strategy.

Broadband development + adoption – fellows support local coordination of federal/state resources for broadband development, including wide community engagement. Fellows can also provide digital education and access services to marginalized communities.

Equity & Entrepreneurship: being proximate to local challenges, fellows are mentored in starting ag businesses, CSAs, nonprofits addressing food insecurity.

They have two zoom sessions to learn more: Monday 2/8 from 12-1pm and Monday 2/15 from 12-1pm.

Vince: could you define what a community is for this program and an overview of what some of them are working on? Benya – we recruit with an intention to find a fellow with a connection to the

community – community is the component of commitment and care. Looking for people who want to be a contributing member of the community. Host sites are a range – cities can apply, regions can apply (Region 9 is a host site), initiative foundations are also hosting fellows.

Blandin Lunch Bunch

Blandin will continue the conversation after the success of last fall. Monthly on the 2nd Wednesday at Noon talking about infrastructure. This month it's on February 10. This month talking with legislators – no presentations, just conversation.

Fundraising Update/Financial Report

Vince provided an overview of the financial report. Rolling out our 2021 fundraising efforts, behind the game on getting funding. Ended last year about \$10,000 short to meet our obligations. Using 2021 contributions to finish out 2020 obligations. Doing much better on the speed test funding – easier for foundations to fund the speed test than other activities because of the lobbying work associated with the coalition generally.

Motion to accept the financial report by Connie Schmoll, second by Joe Buttweiler. **Motion approved.**

Brent discussed the new fundraising proposal. He provided a history of fundraising efforts up to this point. When this group started, we had a \$20K grant from Blandin. Goal of the foundation was to get as many people on as possible. Set up three different tiers – governing \$500, sponsoring \$100, supporting. That model is not sustainable. This year Blandin funding is at \$10K, need to find other revenue streams. Fundraising committee (Brent, Joe, Nancy) looking at a few ideas, looking at membership structure broken into two halves: corporate/non-profit membership and local government membership. This is brought up for discussion only right now. Purpose of this is to start the discussion, make some changes, and move forward with the campaign. We are getting a late start, partially tied to the strategic planning meetings, and we have some catching up to do.

Corporate/non-profit:

Platinum

Partner level

Supporting level

Sustaining level

Individual membership

In kind contributors

How do we define members? How do we get members? What are we asking members to contribute? Voting/non-voting depending on amount you contribute? We need some open/honest insight on this issue. Fundraising committee will work on a cover letter and fact sheet to explain membership.

Strategic Planning Session

Cheryl Glaeser provided an outline in the meeting packet. SWIF has generously agreed to pay for Cheryl's work on behalf of the coalition as well as the extended strategic planning we are heading into.

Those willing to take part in the governance/structure part:

Jaci Nagle

Nancy Hoffman

JoAnne Johnson

Brianne Mumme
Scott Reimer
Barbara Dröher Kline

Those willing to take part in fundraising strategies part:
Brent Christensen? This or regular fundraising committee

Committee Appointments

Executive committee initially on the list for discussion today, but we will wait until after the strategic planning is complete to have that conversation. Will also leave exec committee structure as is until after strategic planning.

Committee members gave a brief overview of each committee. Let us know if you are interested in joining:

- Fundraising
- Communications
- Legislative

Vince Robinson outlined the current membership and committee structure:

- Executive Committee
 - Vince Robinson, Nancy Hoffman, Steve Giorgi, Brian Krambeer, Brent Christensen, Jane Leonard
- Fundraising Committee
 - Brent Christensen, Joe Buttweiler, Nancy Hoffman
- Legislative Committee
 - Nathan Zahcarias, Emily Murray, Nancy Hoffman, Stu Lourey, Daniel Lightfoot, Dan Larson, Steve Fenske, Jay Trusty, Joe Buttweiler, Anna Boroff
- Communications Committee
 - Heidi Steinmetz, Dan Larson

Additional Business

NA.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:51 AM.