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PSC Opens Applications for First Round of ARPA Broadband Access Grants

Applications for \$100 million in ARPA funds will be accepted through July 27, 2021

MADISON – The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) today released [application instructions](#) for the first round of Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Broadband Access Grants. The PSC will be awarding up to [\\$100 million](#) for projects that will expand high-speed broadband internet to unserved and underserved locations in the state. Applications for the ARPA Broadband Access Grants are due on July 27, 2021. The PSC expects to make award decisions in early fall.

"I declared 2021 as the Year of Broadband Access, and this funding is a major step forward toward connecting all Wisconsinites," said Governor Tony Evers. "To get everyone connected, it will take not just federal dollars but also state investment to get the job done. I urge our state legislature to pass our Badger Bounceback agenda that allocates nearly \$200 million for broadband access. The combination of federal and state funding is critical to our economic recovery."

"Too many of our neighbors are at a disadvantage because they lack access to broadband. The pandemic exacerbated this disadvantage. I am grateful for Governor Evers' continued commitment to connecting all Wisconsinites. These federal funds, along with those in the Governor's budget, will help our state recover from the pandemic by allowing Wisconsin businesses and families to participate in our economic recovery," said PSC Chairperson Rebecca Cameron Valcq. "I encourage bold projects that will close broadband access gaps for the next generation and deliver high-speed, reliable, and affordable broadband service."

Internet service providers, telecommunications utilities, cooperatives, local governments, and for-profit and non-profit organizations are eligible to apply for grants. Approved projects must be completed by December 31, 2024, and there is no minimum or maximum amount of funding an applicant may request. Funds will be disbursed through a reimbursement process similar to the current process for the state Broadband Expansion Grant Program.

In accordance with the U.S. Treasury guidance for the ARPA funds (86 Fed. Reg. 26786), eligible broadband projects are expected to:

- Serve unserved or underserved households and businesses, as defined by the U.S. Treasury.
- Be designed to deliver upon project completion internet service that reliably meets or exceeds symmetrical (upload and download) speeds of 100 Mbps (or at least 100 Mbps download and at least 20 Mbps upload, if it is not practicable to deliver the higher upload speeds due to geography, topography, or excessive costs), and be scalable to 100 Mbps upload in the future.

Under U.S. Treasury guidance, the Broadband Access Grant program will:

- Prioritize projects that deliver physical broadband connections that achieve the last mile connection.
- Prioritize applications that integrate 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.
- Prioritize projects providing internet access or digital literacy support to households facing negative economic impacts due to COVID-19.
- Prioritize support for broadband networks owned, operated by, or affiliated with local governments, non-profits, and co-operatives.

In addition to federal criteria, the PSC will evaluate broadband projects based on applicant capacity, capability, performance, planning, project budget, proposed matching funds, and the proposed service area's existing broadband service need.

The PSC will host an ARPA Broadband Access Grant program webinar on Tuesday, June 8, 2021, at 2:30 p.m. Registration is available [here](#). For those who cannot attend, a recording of the webinar will be made available on the State Broadband Office webpage. Subsequent webinars will be posted on the State Broadband Office webpage. For additional information on Wisconsin's ARPA Broadband Access Grants, please visit the State Broadband Office webpage [here](#).

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