



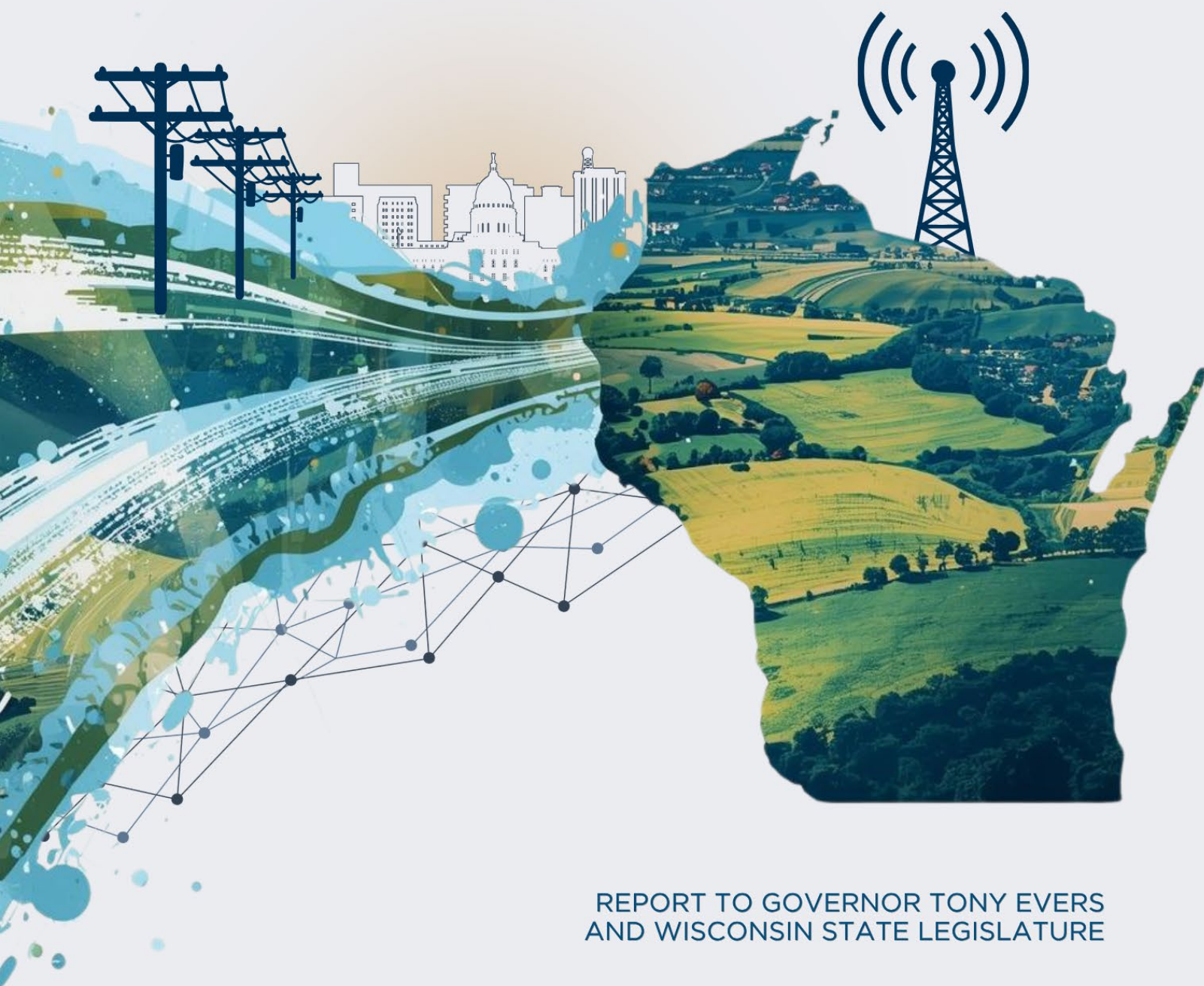
Wisconsin
Broadband Office



GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE ON

BROADBAND ACCESS

2026



REPORT TO GOVERNOR TONY EVERS
AND WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The sixth report of the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access highlights the successful progress of Wisconsin's broadband expansion journey over the years. Thanks to Governor Evers' leadership, more than 410,000 Wisconsin homes and businesses will have access to new or improved high-speed service. With the one-year anniversary of federal changes to the Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program, Wisconsin was able to successfully secure the National Telecommunication and Information Administration (NTIA) approval to award \$697 million of its \$1.1 billion allocation to connect 175,000 households and businesses lacking high-speed broadband access. The Public Service Commission (PSC) has also opened the application process for the 2026 Broadband Expansion Grant program that makes \$60 million in state funding available to fill in gaps for an estimated 31,000 locations left behind by BEAD.

Last year NTIA rescinded BEAD Nondeployment funds as part of the [June 6 BEAD Restructuring Policy Notice](#) that set aside BEAD funds for workforce development activities that were previously approved by NTIA. Wisconsin had also planned to make use of Nondeployment funds for digital adoption and upskilling activities. NTIA held listening sessions to gather input from stakeholders to inform planning and policy development regarding the use of Nondeployment funds. During the listening session Wisconsin advocated for use of funds for its original approved usage along with extending usage for addressing permitting needs and for deployment in case of BEAD defaults and reaching gaps left behind by BEAD. Governor Evers and Senator Tammy Baldwin also recently sent a [letter](#) to NTIA urging them to release the \$300 million in Wisconsin BEAD Nondeployment funds so Wisconsin may tend to time-sensitive BEAD program needs both now and for the future. As of June 2026, this funding has yet to be released by NTIA.

Digital Equity Act funding was also terminated by the Trump administration, and the PSC therefore could not make awards for the State Capacity Grant program. Additionally, while digital equity funding termination was unfortunate, Wisconsin continues to make progress on adoption and upskilling in other ways, including through leveraging Universal Service Fund grant investments. For example, in 2026 an estimated 5,000 individuals will gain access to telecommunications service, devices, and training through the Nonprofit Access Grant. An estimated 13,000 individuals will receive enhanced medical care from telehealth equipment purchased through the Telemedicine Equipment Grant, and the Lifeline Outreach Grant is expected to inform over 500,000 individuals on the Lifeline Program. Wisconsinites were also able to gain access to loaned devices and free Wi-Fi along with technical assistance and digital skills training through the Capital Project Funds Digital Connectivity and Navigator Grant Program.

Task Force Goals

In 2021, the Task Force set goals on getting all Wisconsinites 25/3 Mbps service by 2025 and 50/10 Mbps service by 2028. By 2023, the standard for high-speed broadband changed to 100/20 Mbps, which altered the approach and focus on how the Task Force made recommendations to ensure broadband deployment in Wisconsin is efficiently planned out through investment, collaboration, and transparency. In 2026, the Task Force continued to emphasize its goals established in previous years, which are:

- By 2029, all homes and businesses will have access to high-speed broadband service that provides a download speed of at least 100 Megabits per second (Mbps) and an upload speed of at least 20 Mbps.
- By 2029, all community anchor institutions (CAI) will have access to high-speed broadband service that reliably provides a download speed of at least 1000 Mbps and an upload speed of at least 1000 Mbps.
- Where practicable, a strong emphasis and priority should be placed on reaching “future proof” speeds beyond 100/20, up to and including 1000/1000 Mbps for as many homes, businesses, and community anchor institutions as possible.
- Fiber technology should be prioritized, but not exclusively required, for public investments where practicable. Also, terrestrial fixed wireless solutions should be pursued in harder to reach areas or as an incremental short-term solution.

Task Force Recommendations

Consistent with the Task Force goals over the past six years, the Task Force recommendations are transitioning beyond the needs of today and serve as a blueprint for Wisconsin’s future. Task Force recommendations have shaped legislative action in approaching Wisconsin’s broadband infrastructure expansion such as the recent updates to the state broadband expansion grant program requirements. This year, the Task Force focused on five themes: Infrastructure and Future Proofing; Outreach, Partnership, and Accountability; Workforce Development; Digital Skills and Sustained Affordability; and Emerging Technologies. The recommendations are forward-thinking actions that can be taken in the immediate future as well as other steps that support long-term development for sustainable programming and to maximize output to close the digital divide in Wisconsin. Below are the recommendations by theme.

Infrastructure and Future Proofing

- Fund additional state broadband expansion program offerings and include incentives for applicants that offer low-cost service plans, open access networks, and future proof and scalable technology to meet upcoming needs.
- Establish a line extension program to provide service to isolated homes and businesses in otherwise served areas and other programs to fill remaining gaps in broadband service. Provide targeted outreach to ensure robust participation in such programs.
- Support middle mile upgrades and construction of new routes to close gaps in capacity and ensure that middle mile infrastructure is sufficient for future broadband expansion, and emerging bandwidth and resiliency needs.
- Support continued improvement and utilization of broadband deployment technologies to ensure the best possible performance, scalability, and reliability of broadband networks.
- Invest and support climate-resilient infrastructure designs that reduce outage risks and future repair costs.

- Continue efforts to streamline permitting processes to reduce duplication, improve interagency coordination, and expedite broadband permits to prevent construction delays and increased costs.
- Support competition in rural areas where Wisconsinites only have one service provider option by collecting and sharing information on pricing, promotional rates, and comparisons in services between providers.
- Improve access to existing facilities or infrastructure in the right way to reduce duplication and permitting processes required by new infrastructure.

Outreach, Partnership and Accountability

- Expand statewide public outreach efforts about ongoing and future broadband expansion efforts to ensure transparency in use of funds and accountability in results.
- Foster early and frequent communication and technical assistance with grant recipients, impacted utilities, and beneficiaries of broadband expansion and BEAD funding to ensure expeditious, safe, and federally compliant implementation.
- Increase communication and engagement with policymakers, county and municipal governments, and Tribal Nations on the latest broadband affordability and adoption data. Learn about their local community needs and gaps to improve broadband adoption and affordability programming.
- Provide technical assistance and establish safeguards to ensure project commitments are completed on time, including penalty provisions for commitments that are not met.
- Strengthen partnerships with Tribal Nations in Wisconsin in their pursuit of digital sovereignty by ensuring Tribal Nations are eligible for funds for infrastructure, digital upskilling and adoption.
- In the absence of the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access, the PSC should continue to convene groups of stakeholders to assess community needs and collect data to address broadband access, affordability, and adoption. The PSC should continue to build on their work convening groups of stakeholders to assess community needs and collect data to address broadband access, affordability, and adoption.

Workforce Development

- Provide targeted funding for broadband workforce development training, certifications and apprenticeship programs to high schools and higher education institutions, workforce development entities, trade associations, and internet service providers.
- Identify and leverage broadband workforce development programs in Wisconsin to support and address broadband industry workforce needs such as equipment operators, technicians, inspectors, engineers, electricians, surveyors, locators, trenchers, trucking crews, and laborers. Expand or replicate successful programs to address workforce gaps.
- Research best practices and develop long term workforce strategies to create career pathways and economic development that aligns with broadband expansion.

- Coordinate cross-sector stakeholder groups from state agencies, educational institutions, workforce development boards, Tribal Nations, and industry partners to develop and promote broadband career pathways.
- Partner with the Department of Workforce Development, institutions of higher education and industry stakeholders to develop and implement technology-based training to attract and create jobs in Wisconsin.

Digital Skills and Sustained Affordability

- Identify a sustainable revenue source to establish a broadband affordability program that reduces the cost of a monthly internet service subscription for eligible families.
- Research best practices and identify a sustainable revenue source to establish broadband adoption and digital skills programs that increase participation in digital society.
- Establish digital literacy programs tailored to diverse proficiency levels and demographics and collaborate with trusted community organizations and institutions to expand digital adoption and training efforts. Publish public facing data and information on the impacts of these efforts.
- Strengthen partnerships among individuals, nonprofits, economic development organizations, workforce development boards, libraries, K-12 schools, higher education, local governments, and Tribal Nations to foster robust participation in digital adoption and promote internet affordability.
- Continue to convene and support the Wisconsin Digital Equity and Inclusion Stakeholders Group and Wisconsin Digital Navigators Network. Establish and support digital skills alliances. Use these entities to grow and strengthen adoption in Wisconsin.
- Establish partnerships between the Wisconsin Broadband Office, workforce development entities, and Department of Public Instruction to enhance technology-based training in high school settings.

Emerging Technology Readiness

- Evaluate emerging technologies, like artificial intelligence and broadband deployment technologies, and update digital skills curriculum to incorporate examples and best practices for their safe and effective use to meet the educational, health, and workforce needs in the daily lives of Wisconsinites.
- Convene higher education institutions, K-12 schools, CESAs, local libraries and nonprofits, industry partners, and Tribal Nations to identify and amplify training and workforce development opportunities to improve utilization of emerging technologies.
- Integrate emerging technology readiness into existing training and workforce development programs, and partner with existing stakeholders to share best practices and expand the impact of programs.

Recommendations to Maximize BEAD Nondeployment Funds

1. Establish strong partnerships with stakeholders to support planning and use of funds and provide regular updates to the public on implementation.
2. Establish broad-based eligibility for funded programs, to include nonprofits, Tribal Nations, libraries, and community organizations.
3. Prioritize allocation of funds for the following uses:
 - a. Further deployment to fill gaps in availability left behind during BEAD process, including in areas where awards default or experience cost overruns;
 - b. Outreach, training, and education programs that expand the adoption of broadband in more households and deepens the use of broadband by those who adopt it;
 - c. Digital device distribution programs to ensure everyone has access to devices;
 - d. Digital navigation and training programs to ensure those with devices have the knowledge and support to utilize them fully;
 - e. Affordability programs to ensure everyone can afford a monthly broadband subscription; and
 - f. Workforce development programs to mitigate workforce shortages in roles supporting the deployment and operation of broadband caused by the surge in broadband deployment funding.

Recommendations Policymakers Can Act on Immediately

1. Encourage NTIA to release BEAD Nondeployment funds to the state for use in maximizing the success of the BEAD program and bridging the digital divide.
2. Fund additional state broadband expansion program offerings and include incentives for applicants that offer low-cost service plans, open access networks, and future proof and scalable technology to meet future needs.
3. Identify a sustainable revenue source to establish a broadband affordability program that reduces the cost of a monthly internet service subscription for eligible families.
4. Establish a line extension program to provide service to isolated homes and businesses in otherwise served areas and other programs to fill remaining gaps in broadband service. Provide targeted outreach to ensure robust participation in such programs.
5. Research best practices and identify a sustainable revenue source to establish broadband adoption and digital skills programs that increase participation in digital society.
6. Provide targeted funding for broadband workforce development training, certifications and apprenticeship programs to high schools and higher education institutions, workforce development entities, trade associations, and internet service providers.

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Governor Evers appointed members to the Task Force on Broadband Access to provide balanced perspectives, reflect individual's knowledge or expertise, or to represent an organization engaged in the expansion of broadband access, adoption, or affordability. The Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access members include:

Chris Meyer (Chair), Vice President– Business Intelligence and Efficiency, Royal Credit Union

Bob Abrams, Senior Managing Consultant, Forvis Mazars, LLP (retired)

Robert Earl Baker III, Founder, RenderTech

Kwami Barnes, Broadband Coordinator, Communications Workers of America

Marta Bechtol, Executive Director, Educational Communications Board

Brittany Beyer, Community Economic Development Specialist, UW Madison Division of Extension

Salvador L. Carranza, Board Member, Latino Academy of Workforce Development

Lori Collins, President/CEO, SonicNet Inc.

Angie Dickison, State Government Affairs Manager, TDS Telecommunications

Emily Dittmar, Legislative Director, Wisconsin Educational Media and Technology Association

Russ Falkenberg, Board Member, Ntera, LLC

Chris Her-Xiong, CEO, Hmong American Peace Academy

Gail Huycke, Community Economic Development Specialist, UW Madison Division of Extension

Barbara Koldos, Vice President of Business Development, New North, Inc.

Howard Marklein, State Senator (R-Spring Green)

Jose Martinez, President/CEO, UMOs

Jeffrey Mursau, State Representative (R-Crivitz)

Brad Pfaff, State Senator (D-Onalaska)

Melissa Ratcliff, State Senator (D-Cottage Grove)

Michael Rave, Executive Director of Administration, Ho-Chunk Nation

Rachel K. Schemelin, E-Rate and Broadband Education Consultant, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Steve Schneider, Founder, President Emeritus and Director, Bug Tussel Wireless

Michelle Schuler, Manager of TechSpark Wisconsin, Microsoft

Brett Schuppner, General Manager, Reedsburg Utility Commission

Josh Shell, President, Badgerland Connections

Dr. Chet Strebe, Vice President of Business and Technology, Chief Information Officer, Northcentral Technical College

Randy Udell, State Representative (D-Fitchburg)

Chad Young, CEO/General Manager, Norvado

LETTER FROM GOVERNOR TONY EVERS

Access to affordable, high-speed internet is critical to nearly everything we do in this day and age—from accessing healthcare to going to school and working remotely to connecting with loved ones and friends.

Since I took office in 2019, I have made improving broadband access and closing the digital divide a top priority of my administration because, for far too long, too many Wisconsinites lacked access to the high-speed internet they needed. Now, looking back on almost eight years of serving the people of this great state as Governor, I'm proud to report that our work has paid off, and Wisconsin has steadily seen the number of locations lacking high-speed internet drop year by year.



I declared 2021 the “Year of Broadband Access” to focus our attention on the investments, tools, and strategies needed to make sure no individual or community was left behind. Folks, no administration has done more to expand access to high-speed internet, and thanks to our efforts, more than 410,000 Wisconsin homes and businesses will have access to new or improved high-speed service.

We have made important progress on our broadband expansion goals, but it wasn't easy. The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that broadband access was no longer a luxury, but a necessity. My administration responded to the increased urgency to expand broadband across the state and worked to connect folks to high-speed broadband, but we knew we couldn't do this work alone. We needed community leaders, industry experts, Tribal, state, and local officials, along with other key stakeholders, to come to the table and provide their expertise and recommendations to help us improve broadband access, affordability, and adoption statewide. That's why, in July 2020, I signed Executive Order #80 creating the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access to do just that.

For the last six years, this Task Force has worked together, studying Wisconsin broadband data and maps, learning best practices from broadband access and digital equity experts in other states, building relationships, and exploring policy ideas. As a result of that work, each year, the Task Force publishes a report with its findings and recommendations to make high-speed internet service accessible and affordable for all Wisconsinites. These recommendations have been invaluable and have helped guide and inform our broadband expansion efforts.

This includes directing nearly \$350 million in state and federal funding to expand broadband, including the largest state investment in state history. It includes how we planned for and began implementing the Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program to build broadband infrastructure in the hardest-to-reach areas of Wisconsin. And together, we improved local broadband and digital equity planning efforts and created new tools to help residents find affordable internet service. All of this was possible thanks to the Task Force and their commitment to these issues facing our state.

However, this work was not without its hardships. Over the years, we faced setbacks that prevented us from doing more, whether it was the State Legislature's refusal to meaningfully invest in broadband access, or more recently, the federal government's countless obstacles that have limited our ability to

invest in scalable, future-proof broadband technology, improve internet affordability and access to devices, and improve digital skills. There is much more work ahead to do.

The Task Force's sixth and final report captures the incredible work we have done in our mission to close the state's digital divide while also laying out recommendations for future elected officials to continue this important work. We need to invest further to fill gaps, identify ways to support digital skills and affordability programs, and support workforce development efforts to ensure successful broadband deployment.

I am grateful to Task Force members for their years of dedicated service to this work. I want to thank chair of the Task Force Chris Meyer for his leadership, and also to thank the presenters and stakeholders who contributed to the Task Force's success over the years. I also deeply appreciate the leadership of PSC Chairperson Summer Strand and the Wisconsin Broadband Office for their help and support to the Task Force. Their dedication and commitment to serving the people of Wisconsin made this work possible.

Together, with the commitment of partners like these, we must continue the work ahead to close the digital divide and move our state, as our motto demands, Forward.

As always, yours in service,

Tony Evers

Governor, State of Wisconsin

LETTER FROM PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION CHAIR SUMMER STRAND

During his tenure, Governor Evers has championed broadband expansion efforts because he understands the essentiality of internet access and how closing the digital divide in Wisconsin provides a multitude of benefits including increased connectivity, greater economic and education opportunities, and healthier, more flexible and resilient communities throughout the state. Since 2019, his leadership, including the creation of the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access, has directly resulted in improved broadband access, adoption, and affordability in our state.



The Public Service Commission, through the Wisconsin Broadband Office (WBO), has proudly supported and executed Governor Evers' broadband vision and expansion goals. The WBO also helped facilitate the Task Force, whose work has been integral to these initiatives.

For six years, Task Force members have worked collaboratively on internet access and adoption issues—identifying barriers and challenges and proposing potential solutions. As part of this process, the Task Force has undertaken robust information gathering activities, enlisting industry experts, listening to community leaders, and engaging in thoughtful dialogue and creative reflection. Additionally, the Task Force developed a slate of informed policy recommendations for the governor and the state legislature.

Governor Evers recognized the value of this work, incorporating Task Force recommendations into his budget and policy initiatives, and directing implementation where possible. This led to robust planning efforts, informed decision-making, collaborative partnerships with key stakeholders, and strategic investments in broadband infrastructure, all of which have helped Wisconsin reach several significant milestones including:

- Nearly \$350 million in state and federal funding awarded to 387 broadband infrastructure projects throughout the state
- New or improved internet service for 410,000 homes and businesses in Wisconsin
- An additional 175,000 locations will soon receive improved internet service under the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program, 130,000 of which will utilize best available technology fiber connections.

Unfortunately, inaction by the state legislature and obstruction from the federal government have prevented Wisconsin from achieving even greater successes. Specifically, the Trump administration's regressive policy changes and myopic perspective, including the de-prioritization of reliable, best available broadband technology, the dismantling of digital equity programs, and the removal of

affordability options to reduce costs for customers, combined with a lack of consistent state funding, have hamstrung our ability to further minimize the digital divide in Wisconsin.

Despite these setbacks, the work continues. Reflective of the overarching successes listed above, the 2026 Task Force report provides updates highlighting progress made on previous recommendations related to broadband deployment, internet adoption goals, and partnership development.

Looking forward, the 2026 report also articulates constructive recommendations for new, incoming state leaders. Notably, these recommendations build on the strong foundation established over the last several years, especially in the areas of infrastructure investment, public engagement and community partnerships, workforce development, digital skills training, emerging technology readiness, and sustained affordability.

I want to thank all members of the Governor’s Task Force on Broadband Access for the years of service dedicated to this important work — their significant time and efforts are much appreciated. Thanks to current Task Force members for their diligence in developing the recommendations included in this 2026 report. Special thanks to Chris Meyer for serving as Chair, and to Jessica Beckendorf and Patrick Nehring from UW-Extension for facilitating Task Force discussions.

As always, I want to thank the hard-working and ever-resilient Wisconsin Broadband Office team for supporting the Task Force through the years, and for their unwavering commitment to the provision of accessible and affordable high-speed internet for all people in Wisconsin.

Last but certainly not least, a huge thank you to Governor Evers for his clear vision, steadfast leadership, and decisive dedication to broadband access, adoption, and affordability. Without these, the progress made and accomplishments achieved would not have been possible.

Our work does not stop here. We have the winds of achievement at our backs, and momentum with us, pushing us forward toward the ambitious goals ahead. I’m confident Wisconsin is up to the task.

Sincerely,

Summer Strand

Chairperson, Public Service Commission of Wisconsin

LETTER FROM TASK FORCE CHAIR

CHRIS MEYER

Six years ago, in the early months of a global pandemic, the urgency of Wisconsin's digital divide became impossible to ignore. Workers could not do their jobs, students could not attend class, and patients could not see their doctors — not because the tools didn't exist, but because hundreds of thousands of Wisconsinites lacked a reliable connection to use them. In July 2020, Governor Evers signed Executive Order #80 creating the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access with a clear mission: research and recommend forward-looking broadband policies, promote the strategic expansion and adoption of broadband across the state, and report annually to the Governor and the Legislature on Wisconsin's progress. This letter accompanies the final report under that charge, presented on behalf of the Task Force.



The Wisconsin of 2026 is a far more connected state than the Wisconsin of 2020. When the Task Force first convened, many in rural communities lacked access to even basic fixed broadband service. Since then, through the largest state investment in broadband in Wisconsin's history, sustained federal partnership, and the work of providers, local governments, Tribal Nations, and community organizations, that picture has changed substantially. From 2019 to 2026, new broadband service of 100/20 Mbps or better became available to an estimated 740,000 Wisconsinites. As of December 31, 2025, approximately 170,000 locations in Wisconsin still lacked access to 100/20 Mbps service — about 7.2 percent of all locations statewide — a significant improvement from 2020 and a clear measure of both how far we have come and the work that remains. And because access alone is not enough, there has been a significant increase in Wisconsinites reached through digital literacy and adoption activities, including digital navigation services and technical assistance, subsidized broadband services, and low-cost and free devices. Each of those numbers represents a household, a farm, a small business, or a classroom better able to participate in our economy and civic life.

The annual reports of this Task Force have served the purpose Executive Order #80 intended: a consistent, candid assessment of where Wisconsin stands and a practical roadmap for what to do next. Recommendations from these reports have shaped state grant programs, informed Wisconsin's approach to the federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program, elevated digital equity and affordability alongside infrastructure, and kept attention on the communities — rural, urban, and Tribal alike — that the market alone would leave behind. The value of these reports has been less in the documents themselves than in the shared understanding they built among state agencies, legislators of both parties, providers, and local leaders about what it will take to connect everyone.

On behalf of the Task Force, I first want to thank Governor Evers for creating this body and for his sustained and unwavering commitment to closing the digital divide across his two terms as Governor. No governor in Wisconsin history has done more to expand high-quality broadband in our state, and

Wisconsinites in all corners of the state have increased access to healthcare, education, and job opportunities thanks to the investments and leadership of Governor Evers.

I also want to thank the Wisconsin State Legislature for its bipartisan investment in broadband expansion as well as; and the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Broadband Office, whose professional staffing of this Task Force made every meeting, report, and recommendation possible. I also thank the presenters, researchers, and University of Wisconsin Extension staff who facilitated our discussions, and the residents across Wisconsin who participated in our meetings and informed our work.

Finally, I thank my fellow Task Force members. For six years, this group of providers, educators, local officials, Tribal leaders, healthcare professionals, and advocates volunteered their time and expertise, engaged in honest and sometimes difficult discussions, and kept the focus where it belonged: on connecting every corner of Wisconsin. Their knowledge made our recommendations credible; their commitment made them count.

The work to close Wisconsin's digital divide must continue. Technology will keep advancing, affordability will remain a challenge, and the definition of "connected" will keep rising. The foundation laid over these six years — the data, the partnerships, the programs, and the practice of measuring progress honestly — positions the state to finish the job. It has been a privilege to chair this effort.

Forward,

Chris Meyer

Chair, Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge several individuals for their participation and effort in making this Task Force a success.

Thank you to our presenters, including:

- **Rebecca Deschane, Vice President of Talent Development, New North Inc.**
- **Brian Gauthier, UW Extension Community Development Educator for Lac du Flambeau Tribal Nation**
- **Kara Pennoyer, Chief of Staff, Public Service Commission**
- **Jacob Pankratz, Policy Director, Office of the Governor, State of Wisconsin**
- **Lexi West, Officer, Broadband Access Initiative, The Pew Charitable Trusts**
- **Kiersten Frobom, Senior Evidence Analyst, County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute**
- **Ana Mancia, Principal, Boston Consultant Group (BCG)**
- **Majid Alivand, Data and Analytics Senior Manager, BCG**
- **Ben Thornton, Data and Analytics Lead, BCG**
- **Tom Moore, Executive Director, Wisconsin Cable Communications Association (WCCA)**
- **Chad Young, CEO/General Manager, Norvado**
- **Brett Schuppner, General Manager, Reedsburg Utility Commission/Lightspeed**
- **Keefe John, CEO, Ethoplex Internet**

And thank you to:

- **Jessica Beckendorf and Patrick Nehring** for their help with facilitation, exploration, and coordination of Task Force meetings.
- Wisconsin Broadband Office and other Public Service Commission of Wisconsin staff for their work on Task Force meetings and this report, including: **Bernard Apeku, Sawyer Boldt, Sarah Curtin, Robbie Dailey, Joe Fontaine, Alyssa Kenney, Josie Lathrop, Mark Leonard, Christina Luna, Matthew Marcus, Katie Mumm, Hannah Peschek, Damarr Purifoy, Tom Scholten, Colter Sikora, Jennifer Smith, Meghan Sovey-Lashua, and Rory Tikalsky.**

TASK FORCE PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

The Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access (Task Force) was established by Governor Tony Evers under [Executive Order 80](#) on July 14, 2020. Task Force members are selected and appointed by Governor Tony Evers. On January 4, 2023, Governor Tony Evers issued [Executive Order 182](#), relating to the recreation of Non-Statutory Committees, including this Task Force. The Task Force's charge is:

"Advise the Governor and Wisconsin State Legislature on broadband actions and policy, including strategies for successfully expanding high speed internet access to every residence, business, and institution in the state; initiatives for digital inclusion; and pathways to unlocking and optimizing the benefits of statewide, affordable access to broadband for all communities in Wisconsin."

The Task Force meetings were planned by a six-member team, which included Task Force Chair Chris Meyer, State Broadband and Digital Equity Director Alyssa Kenney, Broadband Expansion manager Rory Tikalsky, Wisconsin Broadband Office Broadband Planning and Policy Coordinator Mark Leonard, and University of Wisconsin Division of Extension (UW Extension) Community Economic Development Broadband Partnership Specialist Jessica Beckendorf and Community Development Agent/Professor Patrick Nehrig, who served as Task Force discussion facilitator. A planning meeting was held monthly to plan the agenda and invite speakers. Jessica and Mark also had meetings to finalize discussion content, and the planning team held debrief meetings after each Task Force meeting.

Eight meetings were convened by the Task Force virtually via the Zoom platform for two hours on the third Wednesday of the month at 1:00 PM CT, between September 2026 to May 2026. The Task Force did not meet in December 2025. Task Force meeting agendas with Zoom registration link were posted publicly to the PSC Event Calendar at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting. Each meeting included time for public comment.

During the first half of each meeting, the PSC presented updates to the Task Force on broadband work being done at the state and federal level, followed by presentations by invited entities on topics related to the Task Force discussion topics that took place during the second half of each meeting. September and October discussions focused on prioritizing themes and vision for this year's Task Force work. November to April meeting discussions centered around the prioritized themes, with the final discussion in May focused on finalizing Task Force Report recommendations.

Discussions were facilitated with one main facilitator for the whole group and in small groups where PSC staff members served as discussion facilitators. Google slides and documents were utilized by the facilitators to record comments and the Task Force responses to the discussion questions. Google slides and documents were downloaded for preservation and used as a resource in framing the report and its recommendations.

PRESENTATIONS TO AND WORK OF THE TASK FORCE

September 17, 2025

- PSC updates on the BEAD Program and 2025 Universal Service Fund Program Awards
- NEW BOOST Digital Skilling Program Presentation from New North
- Task Force discussion on Task Force Planning and Actions for 2025-2026 year

October 15, 2025

- PSC updates on the BEAD Program
- Lac du Flambeau's Broadband Expansion Development Presentation from Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Task Force ranking and discussion on Impact and Leverage of Themes for 2025-2026

November 19, 2025

- PSC updates on the BEAD Program
- Presentation on How Task Force Report Recommendations Impact Policy Makers from the PSC and Governor's Office
- Task Force Members Workforce Development Experience Presentation
- Task Force discussion on Strategic Partnership and Workforce Development

January 21, 2026

- PSC updates on BEAD and Universal Service Fund Programs
- Workforce Impact on Broadband Expansion Presentation from the Pew Charitable Trusts
- Task Force discussion on Workforce Development and Sustained Affordability

February 18, 2026

- PSC updates on State and Federal Broadband Infrastructure and Telecommunication Programs
- Broadband Impact on Telehealth Presentation from the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute
- Task Force discussion on Future-Proofing Infrastructure and Oversight, and Sustained Affordability

March 2026

- PSC updates on BEAD and Wisconsin Broadband Almanac
- Broadband Intelligence Year Three Presentation by Boston Consulting Group (BCG)
- Task Force discussion on BEAD Nondeployment Funding Recommendations, Future-Proofing Infrastructure and Oversight, Legislative and State Funding/Policy, and Emerging Technology Readiness

April 2026

- PSC updates on BEAD and Nonprofit Access Grant
- Industry Panel
- Task Force discussion on Legislative and State Funding/Policy, Emerging Technology, and 2026 Annual Report Themes and Recommendations

May 2026

- PSC updates on BEAD and 2026 State Broadband Expansion Grant
- Discussion on Emerging Technology Readiness and 2026 Annual Report Recommendations

CURRENT STATE OF BROADBAND

In 2025, broadband service availability continued to improve in Wisconsin, with an emphasis on new construction of fiber, upgrades to cable service, and expansion of additional high-speed fixed wireless technologies. In the last year, 97,000 locations received new or improved broadband service that gave them access to 100 Megabits per second (Mbps) download and 20 Mbps upload (“100/20”) or faster internet for the first time. Fiber expansion is supporting both new served locations and upgrades to existing served locations, with a total of 234,000 more locations able to access fiber compared to one year ago.

As seen in Table 1, as of December 31, 2025, the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) [National Broadband Map](#) reports 2.3 million broadband serviceable locations in Wisconsin. Approximately 3.1% of households and businesses in Wisconsin lack basic 25/3 broadband service from wired or fixed wireless technology, and a further 4.1% lack access to high-speed 100/20 broadband service from wired or fixed wireless technology. This equals approximately 165,000 locations in Wisconsin that lack access to a fixed wireless or wireline connection of at least 100/20, or 7.2% of locations.

Table 1: Best Available Speeds by Location (as of Dec.31,2025)

Speed	Locations	Percent
1000/1000 Mbps or better	1,248,200	54.2%
100/20 to 999/999 Mbps	890,500	38.7%
25/3 to 99/19 Mbps	93,600	4.1%
Below 25/3 Mbps	71,400	3.1%
Total	2,303,700	100%

As seen in Table 2, in addition to improvements for unserved Wisconsinites, significant upgrades have driven growth in gigabit symmetrical service (1000/1000 Mbps). For the first time in 2025, more than half of Wisconsin locations (54%) now have access to gigabit symmetrical or faster internet service. Alongside ongoing fiber deployment, growth in symmetrical gigabit service is supported by upgrades to cable internet service using “high split” technology which allows for increased upload speeds. As of December 31, 2025, approximately 101,000 locations now have access to 1000/1000 Mbps cable service.

Table 2: Best Available Speeds by Location Over Time

	1000/1000 Mbps or Better	100/20 to 999/999 Mbps	25/3 to 99/19 Mbps	Below 25/3 Mbps
Dec 31, 2025	54.2%	38.7%	4.1%	3.1%
Dec 31, 2024	44.3%	44.5%	7.6%	3.6%
Dec 31, 2023	34.7%	49.3%	10.1%	5.8%
Dec 31, 2022	28.0%	56.2%	7.7%	8.0%

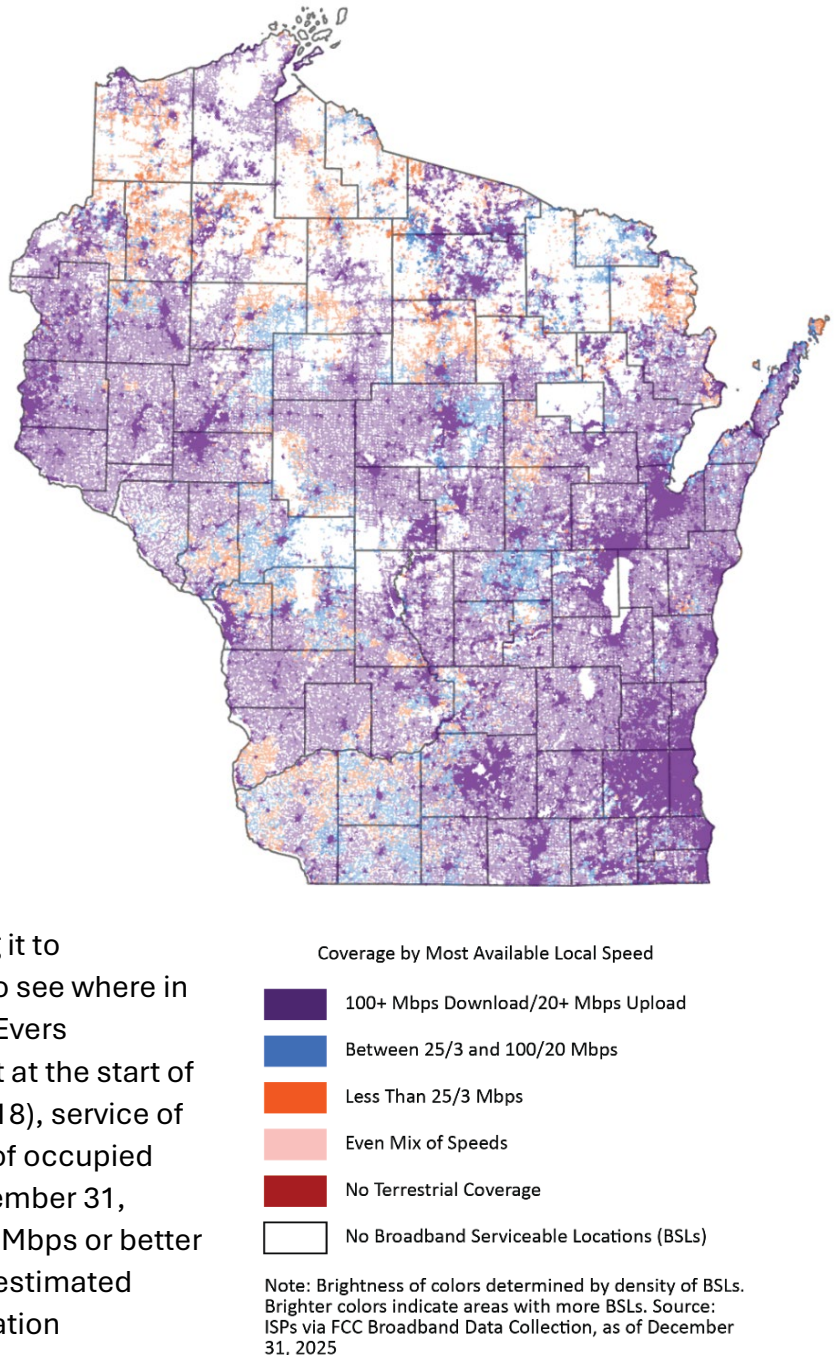
Table 2 shows the change in best available service since 2022, when data was first collected for each broadband serviceable location. From 2024 to 2025, the proportion of locations lacking 100/20 Mbps has declined by four percentage points. Table 2 shows that mid-range speeds are declining, in favor of gigabit service. However, the trend for improved service in locations with the lowest available speeds (below 25/3) is slowing, showing that the last remaining locations are increasingly difficult to reach and may need additional incentives to fully serve.

Graphic 1 shows the distribution of best available speed across Wisconsin. Purple areas are those with 100/20 Mbps or better, blue with service 25/3 to 100/20, and orange with less than 25/3 service. Graphic 1 shows pockets of unserved locations concentrated in southwest Wisconsin, the north woods, and west central Wisconsin.

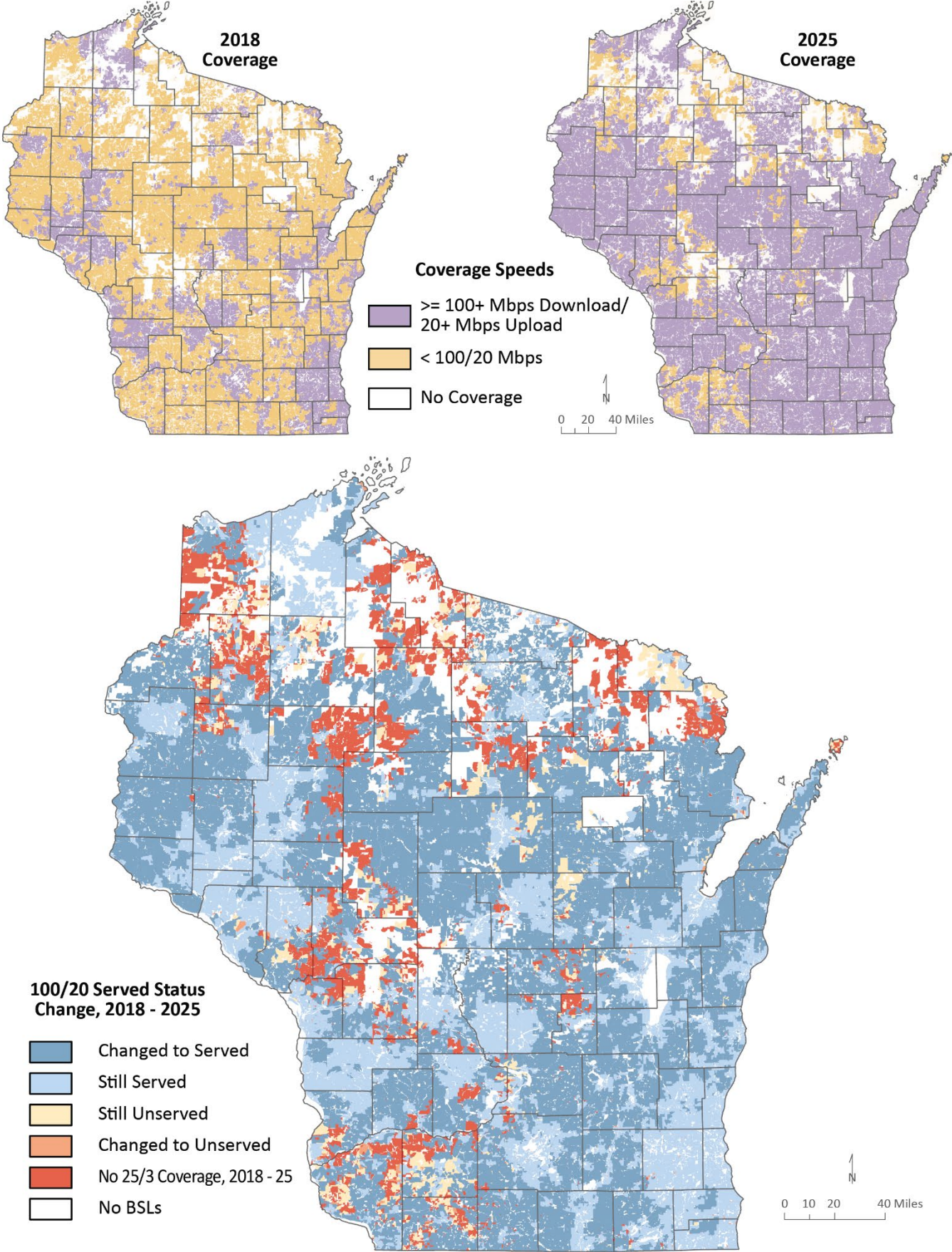
Change Over Time

Since Gov. Evers took office in January of 2019, broadband service has seen substantial improvements statewide, in part due to significant investments in broadband grants by the Evers administration. Prior to 2022, broadband service was reported based on census blocks. Using this prior methodology, if a census block had at least one location with service of a given speed and technology, the block was considered as served by that speed and technology. This risked overestimating service availability, because only one location was required to show all locations in the block as served.

While it has limitations, this metric has the benefit of allowing for comparison of broadband service over time, especially in evaluating the net change in service availability. Using census block data for December 31, 2018, service and comparing it to December 31, 2025, service, it is possible to see where in Wisconsin service has improved under the Evers Administration. Graphic 2 below shows that at the start of the Evers Administration (December 31, 2018), service of at least 100/20 Mbps was available in 64% of occupied census blocks compared to 92% as of December 31, 2025. Thus, from 2019 to 2026, new 100/20 Mbps or better broadband service became available to an estimated 740,000 Wisconsinites using census population estimates. The larger map shows census blocks where service has improved over the seven-year period in dark blue. Despite these broad improvements in service available across Wisconsin, some census blocks remain unserved and lacking 100/20 Mbps (beige). Others have seen their reported 100/20 Mbps removed (orange), likely due to decommissioned copper networks or more precise reporting. The larger map also shows pockets where service availability remains stuck at less than 25/3 Mbps since before 2018 (red), totaling 5.1% of occupied census blocks.



Graphic 2:



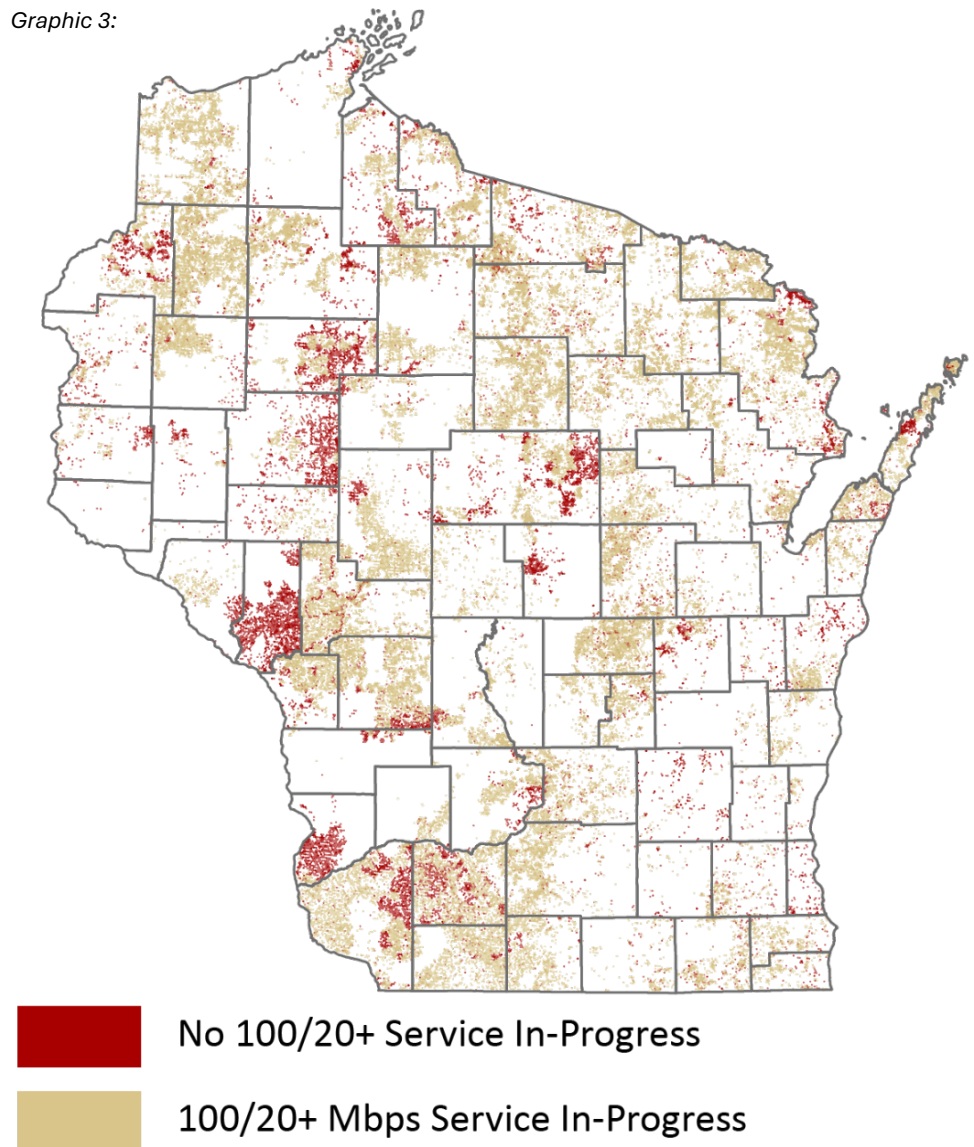
Remaining Unserved Locations

The pockets of persistent unserved locations leave opportunities for continued investment in broadband expansion grant funding. To address these gaps, in May 2026, Governor Evers and the Commission announced a \$60 million grant round under the [State Broadband Expansion Program](#). Funds are derived from previously awarded but unspent state funds and underspending in other state universal service fund programs.

Graphic 3 shows approximately 170,000 locations eligible for the grant round (beige areas). Due to ongoing investment through prior state grants, the Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program and other federal programs, approximately 139,000 of these locations are in progress and planned to be built by 2030. The remaining 31,000 locations lack 100/20 and are not in progress (red areas).

Despite the size of the current funding round, experience shows that the most expensive unserved locations remain because construction is pursued at lower cost locations first. Continued strategic allocation of funds targeting these locations will ensure the PSC meets its goal that no location lack access to high-speed internet. Applications for the latest round of Broadband Expansion Grants are due in late July, with projects expected to commence in 2027 and conclude by 2029.

Graphic 3:



Availability by County

Table 3 below shows current broadband availability by county, and in progress locations planned to be built with a fixed wireless or fiber connection before 2030.

Table 3: Served vs. Unserved Locations by County (as of December 31, 2025)

Service Status by County (%), December 31, 2025						Unserved Locations by County, December 31, 2025									
Served BSLs	Unserved BSLs In Progress*	Unserved BSLs Not In Progress*	Unserved In Progress %	Unserved Not In Progress %*		Unserved BSLs In Progress*	Unserved BSLs Not In Progress*	Unserved Count	Unserved Not In Progress Count*						
20%	40%	60%	80%			1K	2K	3K	4K	5K	6K	7K			
Adams					7	<1								1,346	74
Ashland					18	9								2,475	829
Barron					12	1								3,111	156
Bayfield					1	1								224	72
Brown					1	<1								858	91
Buffalo					5	3								614	221
Burnett					10	7								2,664	1119
Calumet					<1	<1								108	48
Chippewa					1	5								1,922	1540
Clark					18	2								3,179	268
Columbia					10	1								2,732	280
Crawford					2	14								1,468	1275
Dane					2	<1								3,215	120
Dodge					<1	1								434	374
Door					18	6								5,664	1508
Douglas					27	1								6,308	261
Dunn					<1	1								259	190
Eau Claire					1	1								582	231
Florence					57	4								2,970	173
Fond du Lac					<1	<1								190	37
Forest					45	2								4,029	143
Grant					18	7								5,594	1610
Green					9	1								1,500	96
Green Lake					15	1								1,792	129
Iowa					26	9								4,096	1068
Iron					59	8								4,203	485
Jackson					39	7								4,878	757
Jefferson					1	<1								326	96
Juneau					10	1								1,712	163
Kenosha					1	<1								815	99
Kewaunee					6	<1								596	27
La Crosse					6	1								2,893	397
Lafayette					29	3								2,753	218
Langlade					21	1								2,913	115
Lincoln					36	1								6,128	189
Manitowoc					3	1								1,134	219
Marathon					5	3								4,339	1669
Marquette					20	4								7,192	1114
Marquette					8	1								912	57
Menominee					2	2								94	38
Milwaukee					<1	<1								184	184
Monroe					24	3								5,492	666
Oconto					10	1								3,052	361
Oneida					19	2								6,407	563
Outagamie					1	<1								459	51
Ozaukee					<1	<1								128	26
Pepin					<1	<1								15	9
Pierce					<1	<1								26	18
Polk					2	1								760	307
Portage					1	2								982	645
Price					29	2								3,471	270
Racine					1	<1								642	71
Richland					6	<1								560	29
Rock					1	<1								506	60
Rusk					16	16								3,113	1547
Saint Croix					1	1								1,883	409
Sauk					5	1								5,485	1185
Sawyer					26	7								1,649	80
Shawano					7	<1								568	34
Sheboygan					1	<1								504	268
Taylor					9	2								1,118	170
Trempealeau					1	18								2,777	2694
Vernon					1	1								371	193
Vilas					20	3								6,089	795
Walworth					3	<1								1,471	177
Washburn					54	2								7,684	226
Washington					<1	<1								103	37
Waukesha					<1	<1								709	136
Waupaca					12	1								3,412	386
Wausara					31	2								5,476	363
Winnebago					2	1								1,581	468
Wood					1	<1								416	19

*In Progress refers to committed funding for broadband expansion known to the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin using fiber and/or fixed wireless technologies.

Summary

Historic public and private investments under the Evers Administration have resulted in a remarkable improvement in the availability of high-speed internet across the State. With an estimated 92.8% of locations in Wisconsin having access to 100/20 Mbps service, and 54% with access to gigabit symmetrical service, broadband internet now plays an influential role in nearly all Wisconsinites' day to day lives. Despite these gains, the trend in service improvement remains limited in the hardest to reach locations, which remain trapped in pockets of unavailability. Targeted investment in these remaining gaps is essential to close the digital divide and ensure universal service.

Task Force recommendations identify opportunities for immediate action to begin addressing these gaps, and long-term investments towards universal service. The Task Force has recommended immediate actions not just on providing additional state broadband expansion or new line extension program funding, but also ensuring the infrastructure being deployed are open access networks which will reduce the overall cost allowing for funds to go further to reach more locations and close gaps in services for homes and businesses, which the data in this section supports. Lastly, the Task Force recommends NTIA release BEAD Nondeployment funds with the option to use the funds to fill in gaps left behind during the BEAD process, including in areas where awards may default or experience cost overruns.

To address future needs, the Task Force recommends improving middle mile upgrades and construction of new routes to close gaps in service and ensure that middle mile infrastructure is sufficient for future broadband expansion, along with deploying broadband networks with technologies that are scalable and reliable to ensure the best performance measures. The Task Force believes that efficient planning, specific buildout requirements, and technology upgrades will improve Wisconsin's future broadband service needs.

IN PROGRESS INFRASTRUCTURE

Historic investments of state and federal funds have reshaped the landscape of broadband availability in recent years and have been a major contributor to the accelerated pace of broadband deployment in Wisconsin. However, allocation of funding is only the first step, and significant investments remain in planning and construction phases. Table 4 below shows the count of locations by administering agency and program that are still in progress as of December 31, 2025, meaning the locations that did not yet have access on that date to the planned technology and speed funded by the grant. While each funding program has different timelines and milestones, the locations listed below are planned to be constructed by 2030 at the latest.

Since the last Task Force report, awards under the Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program were finalized, representing a majority of listed in-progress locations. As of June 2026, the majority of BEAD locations were under executed grant agreements, representing a binding commitment to complete by 2030. Graphic 4 below shows in-progress grants, with BEAD commitments in red.

While existing in-progress grants represent credible commitments, if a project experiences cost overruns, workforce availability issues, permitting barriers, or other challenges, it may not be completed. Ongoing reporting, technical assistance, and compliance measures by the administering agencies seek to mitigate these issues and ensure timely and accountable deployment. As in progress commitments continue, Task Force recommendations identify opportunities to ensure successful completion of projects, including recommendations that support workforce readiness, permitting improvements and right of way access, and additional funding availability.

Table 4: In Progress Locations by Program

Agency	Program Name	Locations in Progress
Public Service Commission of Wisconsin	Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment Program	147,613
	American Rescue Plan Act Broadband Access	4,328
	State Broadband Expansion	9,192
	Capital Projects Fund Broadband Infrastructure	7,450
	State Contract	2,713
Federal Communications Commission	Connect America Fund Phase II	25
	Enhanced Alternative Connect America Cost Model	75,321
	Rural Digital Opportunity Fund	40,039
National Telecommunications and Information Administration	Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program NOFO 1	2,255
	Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program NOFO 2	955
U.S. Department of Agriculture	Community Connect Grant Program	1,049
	Rural eConnectivity (ReConnect) Program	3,864
	Telephone Loan Program	1,224
Grand Total		289,951 (Unique Locations)
Note: in rare instances multiple awards affect a single location, thus the sum of all awards does not equal the total unique locations.		

Broadband Equity, Access & Deployment (BEAD) Program

On November 15, 2021, Congress passed and President Joe Biden signed into law the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Infrastructure Act), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), which included \$42.45 billion in funding for the BEAD program nationwide for broadband deployment, in which \$1,055,823,573.71 was allocated to Wisconsin. States were required to submit a Five-Year Action Plan along with an initial proposal to NTIA on how they would allocate funds and then seek approval of the final awarded recipients and locations prior to beginning implementation activities.

Initial Planning

Wisconsin conducted outreach and planning activities throughout 2022 and 2023 which created its [Five-Year Action Plan](#). In 2024, Wisconsin conducted a [challenge process](#) to finalize the locations eligible for BEAD funding. Concurrent with its challenge process, the Commission opened its [Letter of Intent](#) to invite providers to participate in the BEAD program, and evaluate their managerial, operational, technical, and financial capabilities. Over the course of its first two rounds of applications and awards, the Commission received applications covering 98% of eligible locations and was set to award at least 90% of eligible locations as fiber.

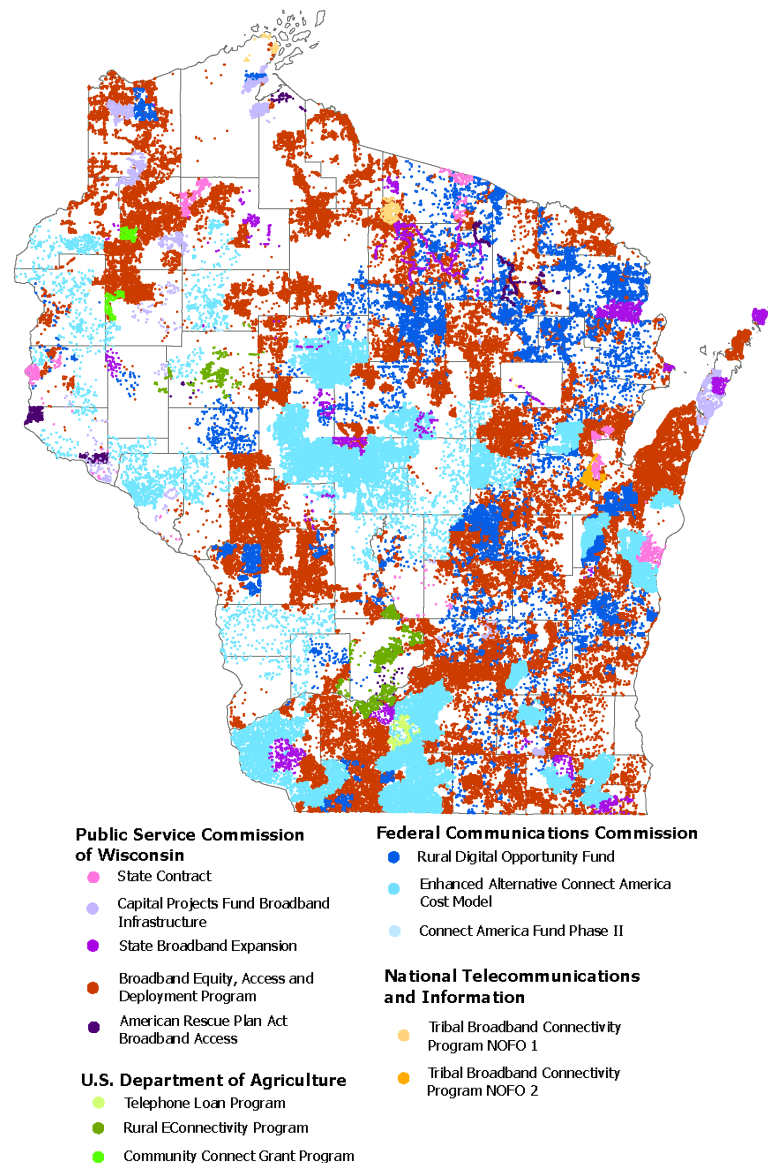
Restructuring

On June 6, 2025, NTIA released the [BEAD Restructuring Policy Notice](#) (RPN). The notice required the Commission to [rescind](#) all prior BEAD awards and redesign its awarding process. The process did not allow the Commission to consider previous merit criteria related to labor practices and workforce development, climate resilience, local government coordination, and affordability plans. The RPN also mandated a technology neutral approach, requiring the Commission to select the proposed project with the lowest cost, as long as the broadband technology proposed for deployment met the statutory required minimum performance of 100/20 Mbps and 100 millisecond or less latency and scalability requirements to meet future needs.

NTIA gave Wisconsin 90 days from the RPN to conduct the revised grant round and submit the BEAD Final Proposal by September 4, 2025. The Commission submitted revisions to the Initial Proposal Volume 2 to incorporate the RPN guidance changes which were approved by NTIA on June 26, 2025. All previously approved non-deployment activities, including the planning grants and broadband workforce

Graphic 4:

Grants in Progress by Administrative Agency and Program Name



training initiatives, were cancelled. The WBO opened a new BEAD LOI Process for potential new applicants from June 17 to June 30, 2025. A total of 41 applicants were approved to apply for BEAD funding in the new grant round.

Table 5: Summary of BEAD Awards by Technology

Awarding

The Commission conducted the revised subgranting process and determined final awards for all eligible locations as shown in Table 5. A [draft](#)

[final proposal](#) was posted for public comment and the [Commission considered](#) the revised awards at an open meeting on September 3, 2025. [Public comments](#) were generally opposed to the new subgranting requirements and resulting awards. Frequently expressed concerns were included that the highest performing technologies such as fiber did not receive priority, removal of the previous structure of the low-cost service requirement for subgrantees, and elimination of consideration for local planning and coordination. The Commission concurred with these comments, expressing concern about the overall future reliability, performance, affordability, and longevity of the technologies preliminarily awarded, noting that under the previous BEAD awarding rules, Wisconsin would have preliminarily awarded approximately 60,000 more locations to be served with fiber optic technology. The Commission ultimately approved the revised awards, acknowledging that despite these concerns the revised awards were necessary to comply with the RPN and receive access to BEAD funding.

Commission staff finalized and submitted the final proposal on September 3, 2025 and 90 days later [NTIA approved](#) the Commission's final proposal on December 2, 2025. The National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST) [finalized the award](#) on February 9, 2026, allowing Wisconsin to execute its contract for receipt of funds, commencing the implementation phase of BEAD. Table 6 below shows awards by entity and technology as of February 9, which are also shown in the [BEAD Awardees Map](#). While final engineering and preconstruction work is ongoing, initial estimates from grantees indicate that BEAD in Wisconsin will deploy approximately 47,000 miles of fiber and build or improve 188 wireless towers.

Table 6: Summary of BEAD Awards by Entity

Awarded Entities	Projects	Awarded Funds	Match Funds	Locations
AMG Technology Investment Group, LLC dba Nextlink Internet	1	\$2,018,120	\$673,577	2,407
Bayfield Wireless (Waypoint Experts)	4	\$3,421,574	\$1,141,044	722
Bertram Communications LLC	24	\$172,374,078	\$57,466,461	30,748
Brightspeed (Connect Holding II LLC)	18	\$138,349,862	\$128,036,820	44,617
Comcast Cable Communications Management LLC dba Xfinity	2	\$5,922,848	\$6,164,737	860
Country Wireless, LLC	1	\$1,017,730	\$339,605	1,085
CTC Telcom Inc. dba Mosaic Technologies	5	\$39,860,828	\$13,289,970	7,364
East Central Energy dba ECE Fiber	1	\$7,947,689	\$7,193,085	2,101
Edge Broadband LLC	1	\$3,073,711	\$3,494,293	2,251
Frontier Communications Corporation dba Frontier	8	\$33,281,212	\$22,461,543	6,195
Hilbert Communications dba Bug Tussel Wireless	15	\$83,843,580	\$36,174,693	21,029

Hillsboro Telephone Company, Inc.	1	\$704,000	\$487,301	44
La Valle Telephone Coop	1	\$4,781,752	\$3,578,352	675
Lac du Flambeau Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa Indians	1	\$7,390,616	\$2,464,998	932
Lakeland Communications Group, LLC	2	\$1,569,044	\$537,147	474
Lemonweir Valley Telephone Company dba Lynxx Networks	1	\$12,142,829	\$4,047,610	1,102
Marquette-Adams Telephone Cooperative, Inc.	1	\$5,874,430	\$1,957,947	470
Mount Horeb Telephone Company	3	\$345,347	\$115,132	44
NEIT Broadband LLC	1	\$1,048,914	\$2,367,039	391
NET LEC LLC. dba Nsight	10	\$3,316,812	\$3,003,454	4,560
Norvado Inc.	10	\$40,498,651	\$35,725,655	9,480
Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services dba Swiftcurrent Connect	3	\$21,578,140	\$8,680,836	5,136
Richland-Grant Telephone Cooperative, Inc.	1	\$2,449,425	\$2,130,340	331
Saint Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin	1	\$562,455	\$187,515	45
Sokaogon Chippewa Tribe	1	\$56,620,470	\$21,021,303	4,530
Space Exploration Technologies, Corp. dba SpaceX	4	\$37,182,860	\$27,893,013	24,721
Spectrum Mid-America LLC (Charter) dba Spectrum	1	\$6,335,769	\$2,112,330	1,221
Wisconsin Bell LLC dba AT&T Wisconsin dba AT&T	2	\$1,105,785	\$3,768,717	753
Wittenberg Telephone Company Inc. dba Cirrinity	2	\$1,973,757	\$963,429	1,176
Total	126	\$696,592,288	\$397,477,946	175,464

Implementation

PSC staff are now supporting the implementation phase of BEAD. This includes executing grant agreements for each project, receiving and reviewing onboarding materials such as engineering certifications, letters of credit and performance bonds, compliance certifications, and environmental review documents. Further, staff have facilitated the tribal consent process, supporting grantees and Tribal Nations in providing a resolution of consent for construction affecting tribal lands.

Environmental and Historic Review Preparations and Process

BEAD awards are subject to the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). In anticipation of the NEPA review process, PSC staff have worked collaboratively with other state and federal agencies to ensure strong communication and a streamlined process for NEPA reviews. PSC staff met with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and State Historic Preservation Office. Staff also met with the Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service. Staff established communication channels with these agencies, shared information about the BEAD Program, and helped prepare agencies to review permits related to BEAD projects. NEPA reviews must be completed prior to any groundbreaking activity by grant recipients. NEPA reviews are underway, and it is expected that some projects will break ground in 2026.

Preparing for Utility Locating

Utility locating is a significant challenge for broadband construction. Delayed or inaccurate locating of facilities can prevent timely and cost-effective deployment of broadband to unserved areas and presents a serious risk for technicians. BEAD construction is expected to increase demand for utility locating services as more projects begin. The PSC committed to improving utility locating process for BEAD construction to ensure safe, cost-efficient, and timely locating and construction through proactive communication and information sharing. To understand utility locating challenges and determine possible strategies, the WBO convened a focus group of utility locating stakeholders to learn from subject matter experts on a path forward. As part of a grant agreement requirement, BEAD subrecipients are required to invite all impacted utility owners to BEAD preconstruction meetings.

In Progress Program Updates

Commission Administered Grants

Not including the BEAD Program, since 2019, the Commission has awarded \$349.5 million to 387 broadband projects, including \$201 million in state funds for 201 projects, and \$148.5 million to 125 projects in federal funds administered by the Commission. Table 7 below shows the current progress towards completion for each awarded grant. Note that the totals in Table 7 do not match the original award because some completed grants were under budget.

Table 7: PSC Administered Broadband Grants Since 2019, Excluding BEAD

	Completed		Withdrawn		In Progress	
	Award	Projects	Award	Projects	Award	Projects
State Funds						
2019 State Broadband Expansion	\$7,053,577	37	-	-	-	-
2020 State Broadband Expansion	\$22,423,849	66	\$1,758,979	6	-	-
2021 State Broadband Expansion	\$27,778,939	56	\$313,857	2	-	-
2022 State Broadband Expansion	\$78,377,813	53	\$23,852,797	8	\$16,658,237	10
2023 State Broadband Expansion	\$6,206,365	16	-	-	\$10,394,720	8
Federal Funds						
2020 Federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES)	\$5,222,414	11	\$156,063	1	-	-
2022 Federal American Rescue Plan Act	\$83,476,923	78	-	-	\$16,312,541	5
2023 Capital Projects	\$4,251,954	6	-	-	\$38,908,117	24
Total	\$234,791,834	323	\$26,081,696	17	\$82,273,615	47

Enhanced Alternative Connect America Cost Model (E-ACAM)

Table 8 below shows the progress of deployment under E-ACAM as reported to the [National Broadband Funding Map](#) as of December 31, 2025. Approximately 69% of planned locations have been completed. Under FCC rules, providers have until the end of 2028 to complete service to 100% of locations. All E-ACAM recipients in Wisconsin have committed to providing 100% fiber-to-the-premises service under their E-ACAM awards.

Table 8: E-ACAM Progress by Location

Provider	Completed	Not Completed	Total
Amery Telcom Inc	8,156	1,172	9,328
Amherst Communications	10,755	559	11,314
Baldwin Telecom Inc	3,786	117	3,903
Bloomer Broadband	3,017	102	3,119

Bruce Telephone Company	1,645	594	2,239
Clear Lake Telephone Company	1,453	51	1,504
Coon Valley Farmers Telephone Company	2,404	96	2,500
Farmers Independent Telephone Company	2,814	580	3,394
Hillsboro Telephone Company	1,807	58	1,865
Lakeland Communications	5,385	138	5,523
LICT Corporation	0	2,672	2,672
Mt Horeb Telephone Company	3,039	1,336	4,375
Nelson Telephone Cooperative	3,727	507	4,234
Richland-Grant Telephone Cooperative	3,030	137	3,167
Rural Communications Holding Corporation	4,719	731	5,450
Siren Telephone Company	2,292	278	2,570
Spring Valley Telephone Company	1,019	34	1,053
TDS Telecom	68,352	64,463	132,815
Tri-County Communications Cooperative	4,416	441	4,857
Vernon Communications	7,865	246	8,111
Wittenberg Telephone Company	2,397	119	2,516
Wood County Telephone Company	24,130	890	25,020
Grand Total	166,208	75,321	241,529

Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF)

Table 9 below shows the progress of deployment under the RDOF as reported to the [National Broadband Funding Map](#) as of December 31, 2025. Approximately 69% of planned locations have been completed. Under FCC rules, providers have until the end of 2027 or 2028, depending on the initial start of their funding, to complete service for 100% of locations.

Table 9: RDOF Progress by Location and Timeline to Complete

Provider	End Date (Dec 31)	Completed	Not Completed	Total
AMG Technology Investment Group	2028	27	339	366
Baldwin Telecom Inc	2027	8	3	11
Bruce Telephone Company	2027	25	4	29
CenturyTel	2028	158	620	778
La Valle Telephone Cooperative	2027	394	22	416
Lakeland Communications	2028	485	24	509
Marquette-Adams Telephone Cooperative	2028	66	0	66
Reedsburg Utility Commission	2028	2,308	2,168	4,476
Richland-Grant Telephone Cooperative	2028	688	74	762
Somerset Telephone	2027	1,049	72	1,121
Spectrum	2028	84,320	36,686	121,006
Total		89,528	40,017	129,540

Community Connect and Rural eConnectivity Program (ReConnect)

Table 10 below shows the progress of deployment under USDA's Community Connect and ReConnect programs as reported to the [National Broadband Funding Map](#) as of December 31, 2025. 33% of planned locations have been completed.

Table 10: Community Connect and ReConnect Progress by Location and Timeline to Complete

Program	Provider	End Date	Completed	Not Completed	Total
Community Connect Grant Program	Chibardun Telephone Cooperative dba Mosaic Technologies	9/27/29	0	530	530
	CTC Telecom dba Mosaic Technologies	9/27/29	3	519	522
Rural EConnectivity Program	Bloomer Broadband	11/22/29	1	490	491
	Ntera	5/13/27	425	71	496
	Reedsburg Utility Commission	3/12/30	1,923	3,303	5,226
Total			2,352	4,913	7,265

Broadband Deployment on Tribal Lands

Service Availability

Table 11 below shows the reported service offerings for known locations on Tribal lands as of December 31, 2025. Table 11 indicates that 80.5% of Tribal locations in Wisconsin receive high speed internet, including 73% from a fiber or cable source. While significant progress has been made towards expanding broadband availability on Tribal lands, this leaves a gap of 12.4% compared to 92.9% of Wisconsin locations that have such service. However, in progress grants are helping to remedy this gap and once in progress grants are accounted for, the difference is less than 1% compared to other locations.

Table 11: Summary of Tribal Locations by Speed and Technology

Tribes	1000/1000 Mbps+ Cable or Fiber	100/20 Mbps+ Cable or Fiber	100/20 Mbps+ Fixed Wireless or DSL	25/3 Mbps+ Fixed Wireless or DSL	Below 25/3 Mbps Fixed Wireless or DSL	Only Satellite	Total
Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	310	13	95	12	86	36	552
Forest County Potawatomi Community	144	3	1	12	3	2	165
Ho-Chunk Nation	212	22	57	184	23	0	498
Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	449	894	26	181	235	121	1,906
Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	26	35	582	1,747	408	282	3,080
Menominee Nation	971	1,364	14	93	0	2	2,444
Oneida Nation of Wisconsin	6,132	2,186	638	56	3	1	9,016
Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	144	304	20	15	44	23	550
Sokaogon Chippewa Community	123	1	1	29	1	0	155
St. Croix Chippewa Community	165	0	5	27	16	28	241
Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians	221	0	2	3	0	0	226
Total	8,897	4,822	1,441	2,359	819	495	18,833
Percent of Locations	47.2%	25.6%	7.7%	12.5%	4.4%	2.6%	100%

In Progress Funding

Broadband infrastructure continues to expand on Tribal lands in Wisconsin due to a combination of state and federal funds in recent years. In 2025, Oneida Nation was awarded a Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (TBCP) grant totaling \$6.6 million to deploy 102 miles of fiber to 590 locations and 8 community anchor institutions in partnership with Nsight. To date, TBCP has awarded \$43,668,735 in Wisconsin. On June 17, 2026, NTIA [announced](#) the release of the Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFO) totaling \$790 million in available funding for the TBCP round 3 and the Native Entities Grant Program for broadband

infrastructure expansion, digital adoption and upskilling activities. Most recently, BEAD resulted in awards affecting 10 of 11 federally recognized Tribes in Wisconsin, as seen in Table 12 below. It is important to note that the listed dollar amounts are for the full project, and the Sokaogon, Lynxx, and Cirrinity projects also support construction on non-Tribal lands.

Table 12: BEAD Projects Affecting Tribal Land

Recipient	Project Name	Affected Tribal Land	BEAD Award	Match
Sokaogon Chippewa Tribe	Sokaogon All Fiber	Forest County Potawatomi, Sokaogon Chippewa Community	\$56,620,470	\$21,021,303
Lemonweir Valley Telephone Company	Lynxx All Fiber	Ho-Chunk Nation	\$12,142,829	\$4,047,610
Lac du Flambeau Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa Indians	LDF All Fiber	Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	\$7,390,616	\$2,464,998
CTC Telcom Inc.	Mosaic LCO Fiber	Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	\$4,470,400	\$1,490,134
NET LEC LLC.	Nsight Oneida Nation Fiber	Oneida Nation of Wisconsin	\$1,687,745	\$562,767
Wittenberg Telephone Company Inc. Db a Cirrinity	Cirrinity Fiber	Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians	\$772,150	\$468,000
Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services	PPCS Ho-Chunk Fiber	Ho-Chunk Nation	\$579,092	\$361,994
Saint Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin	St. Croix Chippewa All Fiber	St. Croix Chippewa Community	\$562,455	\$187,515
Lakeland Communications, Inc.	Lakeland St. Croix Chippewa Fiber	St. Croix Chippewa Community	\$147,581	\$63,249
Space Exploration Technologies Corp.	SpaceX Menominee	Menominee Nation	\$64,500	\$21,500
Connect Holding II LLC	Brightspeed Ho-Chunk Fiber	Ho-Chunk Nation	\$44,076	\$14,692
Space Exploration Technologies Corp.	SpaceX Red Cliff	Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	\$25,500	\$8,500

As seen in Table 13, combined with prior investments, an estimated 17% of Tribal locations are in progress and planned to be built with fiber technology, and 80% are already served. Despite these efforts in progress, 2% remain unserved and not in progress. As the most remote, hardest to reach locations remain, it is expected additional grant funding may be necessary to support improved services to these locations. Further, continued improvements in mapping of broadband serviceable locations on Tribal lands may identify additional locations not previously known to need service.

Table 13: Service Status for All Tribal Locations

Tribes	Served	Unserved, Fiber in Progress	Unserved, Satellite in Progress	Unserved, Not in Progress	Total
Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	418	71	0	63	552
Forest County Potawatomi Community	148	5	0	12	165
Ho-Chunk Nation	291	194	0	13	498
Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	1,369	479	0	58	1,906
Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	643	2,243	0	194	3,080
Menominee Nation	2,349	57	26	12	2,444
Oneida Nation of Wisconsin	8,956	59	0	1	9,016
Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	468	54	17	11	550
Sokaogon Chippewa Community	125	30	0	0	155
St. Croix Chippewa Community	170	56	0	15	241
Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians	223	2	0	1	226
Total	15,160	3,250	43	380	18,833
% of all BSLs	80.5%	17.3%	0.2%	2.0%	100%

Consistent with Task Force recommendations, the PSC remains committed to partnership with Tribal Nations to ensure universal access to high-speed internet while also respecting Tribal sovereignty. As BEAD implementation progresses, Tribal leaders are important partners to ensure projects are implemented in a timely manner that respects Tribal lands and historic resources. Frequent communication and information sharing is essential to ensure that Tribal Nations can plan for their digital sovereignty and ensure quality of life through telehealth, education, cultural connection, and economic opportunity.

Digital Literacy and Adoption

of telehealth services. The pandemic amplified the scope of the digital divide: households without internet access could not participate in remote work or education, those without devices or digital skills were excluded even when connectivity was available, and the impacts fell disproportionately on low-income households, communities of color, older adults, and rural residents.

Map of Wisconsin showing the percentage of the population that is White by county. The percentages are as follows:

County	Percentage
Adams	93%
Ashland	89%
Barron	91%
Berkshire	91%
Brown	88%
Butler	90%
Calumet	88%
Chippewa	90%
Columbia	88%
Dane	92%
Douglas	92%
Eau Claire	90%
Franklin	92%
Fond du Lac	92%
Grant	94%
Green	92%
Green Lake	94%
Iowa	89%
Jackson	89%
Kewaunee	91%
Koshong	90%
Lafayette	92%
Lewis	90%
Lincoln	92%
Manitowish	90%
Manitowish Water	90%
Marathon	92%
Marquette	91%
Menominee	90%
Monroe	92%
Oconto	94%
Oneida	92%
Outagamie	91%
Pierce	93%
Potter	93%
Price	93%
Racine	93%
Rock	93%
Sauk	93%
Sawyer	93%
Shawano	93%
Sheldon	93%
St. Croix	93%
St. Francis	93%
St. John	93%
St. Louis	93%
St. Marys	93%
St. Patrick	93%
St. Paul	93%
St. Vincent	93%
St. Xavier	93%
St. Zeno	93%
St. Anthony	93%
St. Charles	93%
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St. Joseph	93%
St. Lawrence	93%
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opportunities to access employment, education, and telehealth services. As depicted in Graphic 5 above, most Wisconsin households choose to purchase an available internet plan (of any speed) when it is available. 93.1% of households subscribed to an available plan versus 6.9% who did not.

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and gathering data to understand the factors that influence whether Wisconsinites subscribe to internet service when options are available. The early work and recommendations of the Task Force laid the groundwork for future state and federal investment in broadband connectivity and affordability.

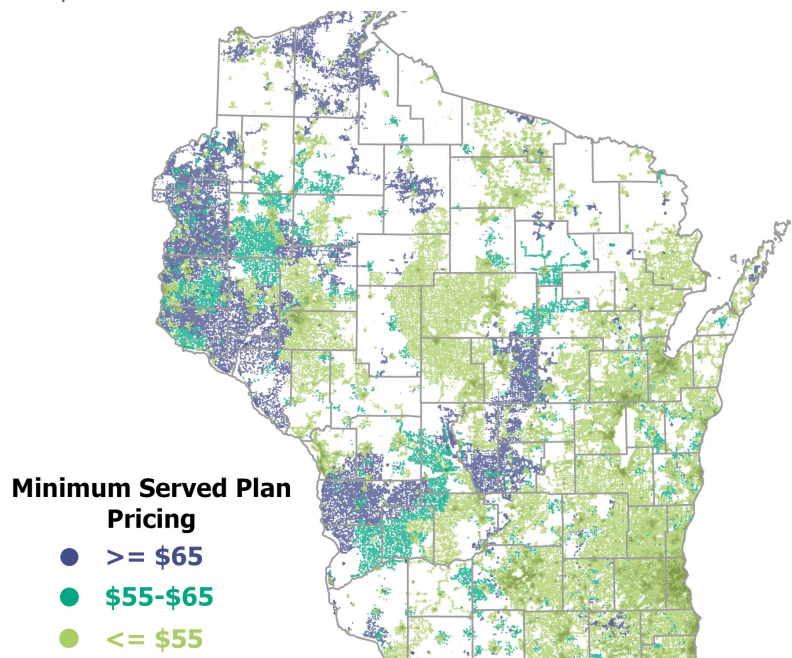
Broadband Affordability

Among the federal programs that address internet affordability, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) established the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) that provided discounts on monthly internet service to low-income families. The ACP immediately made broadband more affordable so low-income households could participate in an increasingly digitized world. The ACP was a \$14.2 billion program launched in December 2021, but after two-and-a-half years of offering discounts on internet service and connected devices to low-income consumers, the funding that Congress initially made available ran out and no new funding was allocated to ACP, despite advocacy from state broadband champions across the country, including Governor Evers and Chairperson Strand. As a result, effective June 1, 2024, the ACP ended and the 23 million households enrolled in the ACP (including 425,000 Wisconsin households) no longer receive the ACP discount. The Task Force has made recommendations to promote the ACP, support new federal funding for the program, and establish a state internet assistance affordability program.

The Task Force continues to recommend the continuation of affordability programs and to find a suitable successor program to ACP on a federal and state level. Task Force attention has shifted to Wisconsin's longstanding Lifeline Program which offers to lower the monthly cost of phone and/or internet service to low-income households. Since last year's Task Force recommendation on increasing marketing of the Lifeline Program, the Commission has seen more interest in the Lifeline Outreach Grant Program, with more applicants applying for more funding each year.

The BEAD Initial Proposal Volume Two affordability criteria presented an opportunity to act on a Task Force affordability recommendation to set a low-cost service option (LCSO) of \$40 per month to ensure BEAD recipients incorporated a low-cost plan to eligible households, guaranteeing affordability was a program priority. However, NTIA revised BEAD program guidance to remove affordability criteria, and BEAD subrecipients were granted the authority to set their own price for the required LCSO. The changes significantly impacted LCSO submissions from BEAD applicants. Monthly prices set for LCSOs by applicants ranged from \$30 to \$80 monthly plan. BEAD subrecipients are required to commit to an LCSO for 10 years following the completion of a project but may increase the costs of the plan as the BEAD subrecipient requests.

Graphic 6:



The launch of the [Wisconsin Broadband Almanac](#) has provided the Task Force’s recommendations on defining standard metrics for affordability, establishing an affordability threshold for internet service in Wisconsin, and publicizing data on affordable broadband data in Wisconsin. The Almanac provides county and municipality level data on broadband affordability and adoption in Wisconsin, including cost burden and the share of Wisconsin residents affected by high broadband costs. Beginning in 2023, the WBO began collecting broadband pricing to better analyze broadband affordability.

The Wisconsin Broadband Almanac has been updated to provide more accurate, granular data on broadband prices, adoption rates, and availability across the state by county and municipality levels. The Almanac continues to play a vital role in educating the public and lawmakers on affordability and adoption gaps in Wisconsin as well as aid in local planning efforts. Furthermore, the Almanac has enabled the Commission to more comprehensively gauge the needs and barriers to adoption across the state. The Almanac will continue to be a valuable resource in understanding the affordability gap as well as provide a valuable resource to community led coalitions that work to advance the work on broadband adoption and digital inclusion.

Cost remains a primary barrier preventing many households from getting and staying connected to broadband. An estimated 31% of Wisconsin households (or 718,453 locations) are cost burdened, meaning they have access to 100/20 Mbps broadband service, but the cost of service exceeds what would be considered affordable for their household income. 2026 pricing data also shows a clear urban-rural split. Depicted above we see that the minimum price for a plan with speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps varies across the state for the same “level” of service, with urban areas having more affordable service than rural areas of the state. Rural plans of 100/20 Mbps are approximately 13% higher cost compared to those in urban areas.

The Task Force helped establish a definition of broadband affordability (1.17% of household monthly gross income), Commission staff built the necessary mapping tools (Almanac and Wisconsin Broadband Map) to measure cost burden and promoted programs that provided discounted internet services to low-income households most in need. The affordability threshold was created by analyzing community level broadband pricing relative to local monthly gross income, illuminating how affordability challenges are distributed across communities. The Almanac provides policymakers and communities an assessment of where affordability gaps persist and who is most impacted. The Task Force recommends legislative action to expand eligibility for low-cost service options, strengthening Lifeline Program participation, and establishing a commitment to affordability in future state broadband grant programs.

Improving Data and Leveraging Funds

The passage of the Digital Equity Act initiated the development of a long-term state plan to close the digital divide. Planning began for the Digital Equity Act, digital equity planning, and capacity grant programs to position the state to receive federal funds that would support digital inclusion programming across target populations.

The first task in preparing to leverage federal funds through Governor Evers’ leadership and Task Force recommendations was to assess broadband adoption and lack of adoption among households. Adoption data was originally collected from the American Community Survey (ACS) which captured household internet subscription rates and service type. However, that data was not granular and did not capture non-adoption information. The Wisconsin Internet Self-Report ([WISER](#)) was

piloted to address those limitations using resident and business surveys to understand adoption through speed tests, and customer perception on cost and performance based on geographic location.

Data collection efforts also included the “Internet for All” Wisconsin Listening Tour. The tour was designed to inform the development of the 5-Year BEAD Action Plan and the development of the [Wisconsin Digital Equity Plan](#). The planning process built a statewide network of relationships, data assessment, and community partners. The BEAD and Digital Equity planning processes informed program activities and Task Force recommendations.

The Commission increased adoption through the awarding of \$27.8 million under the Capital Projects Fund (CPF) Digital Connectivity and Navigators (DCN) Program. The grant program funded the deployment of computing devices to eligible households, promoted digital connectivity in multi-dwelling unit buildings through free Wi-Fi, and required that each awarded project incorporate digital navigation services to ensure that beneficiaries could make effective use of internet access for employment, education, and health monitoring. The program represented a successful realization of the Task Force recommendations on adoption. Since the program’s inception, Digital Connectivity and Navigator grant recipients have purchased 35,944 digital devices with 22,386 users borrowing a device and Digital navigation services have reached over 21,000 people in Wisconsin.

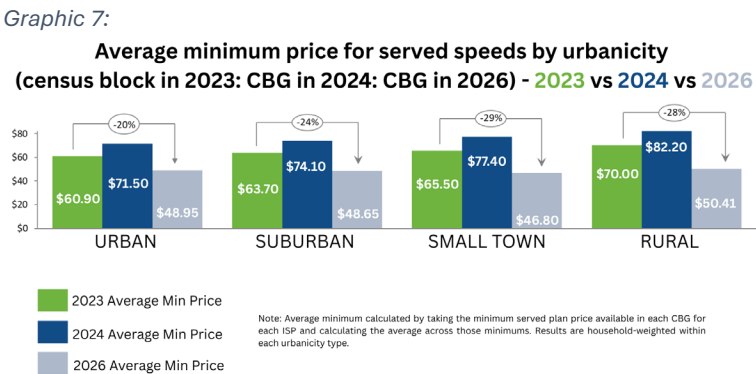
With the federal government’s termination of the State Digital Equity Planning and Capacity Grants in May 2025, the Task Force continues to look towards state-level solutions to follow through on recommendations related to internet affordability and broadband adoption efforts. The Task Force recommends the continued support for digital navigation, adoption, and literacy initiatives as well as strengthened partnerships between state, tribal, and local governments.

The Commission regularly hosts the Wisconsin Digital Equity and Inclusion Stakeholder Group meetings. Digital Inclusion practitioners across the state meet to receive updates from the PSC and partners on important digital equity matters as well as hear from local broadband advocates sharing their impactful work on digital inclusion in their communities.

Broadband adoption in Wisconsin has improved greatly since the inception of the Governor’s Task Force, however, there is still work to do that includes improving device distribution and teaching digital skills to increase take rates. The Task Force identified several recommendations for policy makers to prioritize that focus on data collection, stakeholder engagement and relationship building, and funding programs to improve adoption and digital literacy. Sustaining the work of the Task Force requires continued state investment in digital inclusion programming and digital navigators to close the digital divide in Wisconsin.

Trends In Adoption And Affordability

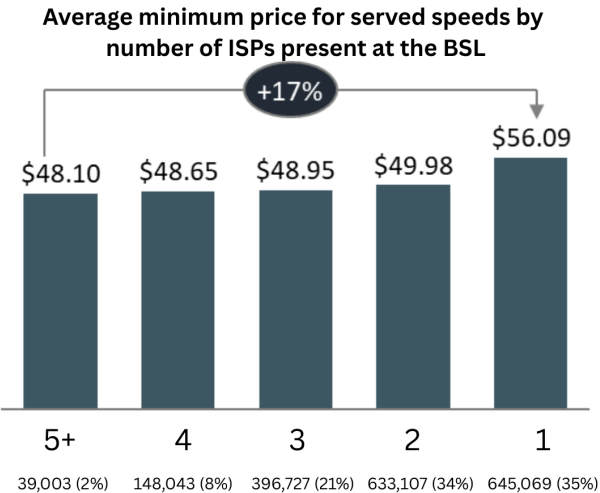
Today, adoption and affordability data shows progress as well as areas for improvement. As seen in Graphic 7, for the first time since beginning to collect pricing data, in 2026 we saw the first decrease in served plan pricing across all urbanicities. This was driven in part by



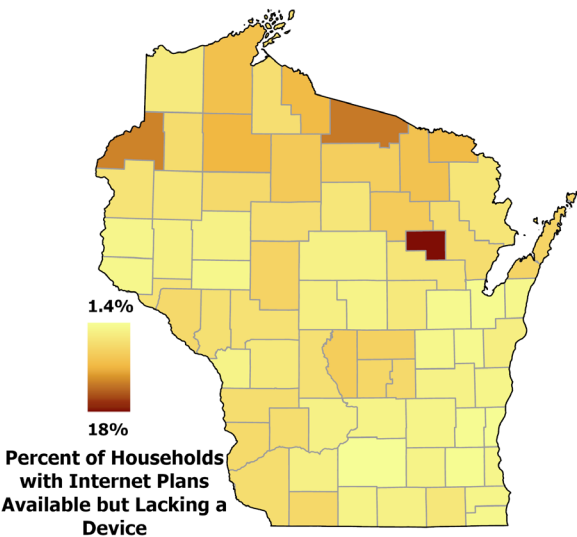
fixed wireless providers offering plans of 100/20 Mbps for \$30-\$50 across large areas of the state.

Minimum prices are frequently higher in areas with fewer providers. As seen in Graphic 8, as the number of providers that serve a location increases the average minimum cost of service at that BSL decreases. However, in Wisconsin 645,069 BSLs are served by only one provider and see higher prices. Multiple structural and economic factors contribute to higher pricing in areas with fewer providers including the competitive dynamics as well as the notion that higher cost plans exist in harder to serve geographies. The current data available on affordability confirms that it remains an important concern for Wisconsin residents and policymakers. Despite increasing subscription take rates, many households are cost burdened, forcing Wisconsin residents to make difficult trade-offs between internet access and other essential needs.

Graphic 8:



Graphic 9:



The digital divide is not just based on internet coverage and cost but also on device access and ownership. In Wisconsin 3% of households with internet access available at their home, currently do not own a device to connect. This burden share of households is not evenly distributed across the state, ranging from 1.4% of households in Dane County experiencing a lack of device ownership at a rate of 1.4% to 18% in Menominee County. A device is considered a large screen option such as a laptop, desktop or tablet, not just an internet-enabled smartphone. While a smartphone provides convenience, they cannot replace the critical benefits that a large screen provides. Access to devices can be limited by evolving technology and the expense to purchase and maintain the device.

Knowing how to use technology is also a large component to closing the digital divide. Digital literacy widely varies across demographics and communities. Digital inclusion activities include closing the gap in digital skills and addressing concerns of online privacy and safety.

Affordability and Adoption Programs

The [Universal Service Fund](#) was created to promote and assist with availability and affordability of telecommunications services in Wisconsin. Telecommunication carriers providing certain telecommunications services in Wisconsin are required to contribute to USF. The Commission has been awarding USF funds since 2012. The Commission administers the following programs funded by USF in 2026: Lifeline Program, Lifeline Outreach Grant Program, Nonprofit Access Grant Program,

Telecommunication Equipment Purchase Program Outreach Grant Program and Telemedicine Equipment Grant Program.

The Wisconsin [Lifeline Program](#) provides a discount, complementary to the federal Lifeline Program, to eligible low-income households on essential telecommunications services through a network of Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETCs) across the state. Depending on the type of service, the Wisconsin Lifeline Program provides a discount up to \$9.25 per customer bill. Added to the discount provided by the federal program, the highest total monthly discount each customer can receive is up to \$18.50 for the Standard Lifeline Benefit and \$53.50 for the Enhanced Tribal Benefit. As of December 2025, the Wisconsin Lifeline Program had a utilization rate of 17% of the estimated eligible subscribers.

The [Lifeline Outreach Grant Program](#) provides up to \$250,000 of funding annually to assist low-income customers with obtaining affordable access to essential telecommunications through the Lifeline Program. The Lifeline Outreach Grant has two tracks: 1) conduct outreach to increase awareness of the Lifeline benefit program and assist eligible individuals with enrollment; and 2) conduct research to identify barriers faced by low-income communities to access the Lifeline program and develop tools or strategies for reaching out to those communities. Most recently, in the 2026 grant round, the Commission received 12 eligible applications, with the requesting \$910,521. On April 23, 2026, the Commission awarded \$243,964 in funds to four applicants.

The [Nonprofit Access Grant Program](#) provides up to \$500,000 in funding annually to 501(c)(3) nonprofit groups to assist low-income household or people with disabilities or customers in areas of the state with a relatively high cost of services in obtaining access to a basic set of telecommunications services. In 2026, the Commission received 41 applications with a total funding request of \$2,360,472.17. The Commission awarded 15 projects totaling the full \$500,000 in available funding.

The [Telemedicine Equipment Grant Program](#) provides up to \$1 million bi-annually to support the purchase of specialized medical telecommunications equipment designed to promote technologically advanced medical services, enhance access to medical care for certain areas of the state, and serve underserved populations and/or persons with disabilities. In 2026, the Commission received a record number of applications and funding request with 21 applications requested a total of \$2,637,330. 10 total applicants were awarded, including two Tribal entities, totaling the full \$1 million dollars to benefit Wisconsin residents.

The [Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program \(TEPP\)](#) supports the purchase of specialized telecommunications equipment for people with hearing, speech and mobility disabilities through a voucher program. Applicants apply for and are issued vouchers depending on their disability and use the vouchers to purchase equipment through a network of authorized vendors. Voucher amounts are based on average costs of specialized equipment commonly used by people with different types of disabilities. Customers may apply for a new voucher to purchase updated equipment once every three years. Last year, TEPP funded \$760,360 and processed 1,011 vouchers.

The TEPP Outreach Grant Program is an annual, non-competitive program funded at \$350,000, which is split evenly between the eight Wisconsin Independent Living Centers (ILCs) located throughout the state. These eight ILCs are experts in assistive technology and have equipment try-out centers to assist customers in finding what specialized telecommunications equipment best suit their needs.

In September of 2024, the Commission awarded \$27.8 million in federal funds through the [Capital Project Fund Digital Connectivity and Navigators Program](#) to promote digital connectivity by both

deploying computing devices, such as computers, laptops, and tablets, for eligible households to access and through promoting the installation of Wi-Fi equipment in eligible multi-dwelling unit (MDU) buildings. Both approaches include a provision for digital navigation services to ensure that Wisconsinites can make full use of the internet for work, education, health monitoring, and other essential activities. This is the largest allocation of adoption-focused funding to date in Wisconsin. Of the eleven awarded projects, two are MDU Wi-Fi projects and all include a form of digital device deployment and digital navigators.

Summary

Wisconsin has made significant progress in advancing digital adoption and internet affordability since the creation of Governor Evers' Task Force on Broadband Access. The digital divide extends beyond infrastructure to include affordability, device access, and digital skills. In response, the Task Force broadened Wisconsin's broadband strategy to include digital inclusion, establishing affordability metrics and developing tools like the Wisconsin Broadband Almanac to better understand and address barriers to access. These efforts have supported more targeted state and federal investments in both broadband deployment and adoption.

93.1% of Wisconsin households subscribe to available internet service, up from 86% in 2019 before the Task Force started. The state has invested \$27.8 million in the Digital Connectivity and Navigators Program, distributing nearly 36,000 devices and reaching over 21,000 residents with digital navigation support. Wisconsin also helped more than 425,000 households benefit from the ACP before its expiration and continues to support affordability through Lifeline and low-cost service initiatives. Further, recent data shows that a basic internet subscription is getting more affordable including a statewide decline in average minimum internet prices in 2026.

However, challenges remain, with 31% of households still cost burdened, the termination of Digital Equity Act Programs and the end of the ACP presenting real barriers to achieving Task Force affordability and adoption goals. Wisconsin continues to make meaningful progress toward ensuring all residents can fully participate in the digital economy, but additional investments are needed to continue and sustain this important work.

PROGRESS UPDATE: PRIOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Significant progress has been made on Task Force recommendations over the past six years. State and federal funds have allowed for programs that impact all corners of the state and facets of the digital divide. Advances in data collection and mapping have provided a clear view of where gaps remain in broadband access and adoption. Outreach efforts have created partnerships and improved transparency. This year's recommendations build upon previous recommendations and resulting progress. The Task Force made recommendations centered around three themes in 2025: **Deployment, Partnership, and Functional Adoption.**

Theme 1: Deployment

First Focus Area for Deployment – Continued Investments in State Broadband Programs

Those recommendations include: 1. Invest in additional state budget funding for broadband expansion to ensure all Wisconsin residents have access to high-speed internet. Prioritize the deployment of fiber technology where practicable and other quality technology solutions in harder to reach areas; 2. Where feasible, strategically braid state broadband expansion funding with private, local and federal funds to support broadband deployment and prioritize fiber including in more remote areas of Wisconsin; and 3. Provide technical assistance to local and Tribal governments and continue to explore cost effective ways to fund broadband expansion for communities facing high buildout costs.

Examples of Deployment Recommendation Progress:

- Governor Evers included \$400 million in his 2025-2027 state budget proposal for state broadband expansion grant funding. The proposed funding was rejected by the Legislature and removed from the final enacted budget.
- The Commission awarded, and received federal approval for, BEAD funding totaling \$696,592,288 to 29 recipients covering 175,464 locations in Wisconsin.
- Wisconsin launched its 2026 State Broadband Expansion Grant round, offering \$60 million of unspent state funding along with underspent Universal Service Fund spending, to target approximately 31,000 locations that will not be reached with fiber or fixed wireless under BEAD or prior funding programs. State funding will prioritize fiber deployment where feasible.
- The PSC continued its regular consultations with Tribal Nations, and WBO staff have provided technical assistance to all Tribal Nations on broadband issues, especially those that received BEAD awards (Lac du Flambeau, Sokaogon, and St. Croix Community).

- WBO staff and UW-Madison Extension continue to attend local meetings, workshops, and events to provide technical assistance, share information and resources on state broadband expansion progress along with broadband grant opportunities to advance Wisconsin's broadband goals.

Second Focus Area for Deployment – Permitting

The recommendations for permitting: 1. Support efficient, transparent, and consistent permitting processes by providing technical assistance to BEAD awardees and providers. Publish up to date permitting guidance, web maps, and tools; 2. Foster early and ongoing communication between providers and permitting authorities at all levels of government to streamline and expedite permitting processes. Consider adopting legislation similar to Broadband Forward! certification model that details reasonable costs and automatic approval of permits after a designated time period; and 3. Explore the creation of a broadband permitting toolkit that has resources for permits that may be required for the construction of broadband projects and specific resources for BEAD awardees. The toolkit should include detailed information from permitting agencies on typical challenges in their permitting process.

Progress on Permitting Activities:

- WBO created and began to implement its Environmental Impacts and Documentation Screening (EIDS) questionnaire to conduct NEPA reviews for BEAD recipients. EIDS has been recognized as a best practice nationally for conducting BEAD NEPA reviews and is being adapted for use in other states.
- PSC staff have met with other state and federal agencies with permitting jurisdiction impacting BEAD projects to share information and facilitate BEAD permitting efforts. Further, PSC has engaged with Tribal Nations to facilitate the Section 106 process.

Third Focus Area for Deployment – Grant Administration

The grant administration recommendation was to continuously improve, implement, and streamline broadband grant administration, reporting, reimbursement, contracting, and compliance processes while ensuring efficient, accountable and timely deployment of public funding. Provide technical assistance and resources to assist recipients with compliance and reporting.

Progress on Grant Administration Recommendations:

- WBO staff have established robust technical assistance resources to administer awarded BEAD funding, including new technical assistance publications, hosting office hours, webinars, and ongoing communication.
- WBO staff have created and executed grant agreements for the BEAD program that establish transparent, accountable milestones, compliance requirements, and penalties for nonperformance.
- The PSC continues to maintain and update its Grants Management System (GMS) to improve document submission, expense tracking and review, and management of milestones.

Theme 2: Partnership

First Focus Area for Partnership – Broadband Facility Locating

Recommendations for Broadband Facility Locating: 1. Collaborate with infrastructure owners, Diggers Hotline, providers, and utility locators to streamline locating processes and ensure timely locates to avoid delays in broadband deployment and construction; 2. Increase the availability of design and engineering information to affected entities for grant funded broadband deployment projects to expedite locating for broadband deployment, including BEAD awardees; 3. Make public funding and training available for locators to mitigate potential locate workforce shortages during BEAD construction; and 4. Establish a compliance system to hold telecommunications utilities and providers accountable for failure to complete locates within required time.

Progress on Facility Locating Recommendations:

- The PSC convened a BEAD Utility Locating Focus Group made up of utility owners, locating companies, providers, diggers hotline representatives, and stakeholders to discuss issues and barriers to utility locating and brainstorm solutions to avoid delays, unnecessary costs, and improve safety.
- PSC established a pre-construction meeting requirement for all BEAD awardees, which requires them to proactively engage with utility owners about BEAD projects affecting their service territories and provide information about construction plans to improve utility locating coordination.
- The PSC developed the [PSC BEAD Utility Locating webpage](#) to improve awareness of BEAD utility locating efforts and provide information to stakeholders. Resources on the webpage include a BEAD Utility Locating Meeting Best Practices, spreadsheets identifying BEAD awardees overlap with utility service territories, project tower and fiber construction estimates by county, and a web map of BEAD awards. The Commission continues to update data and provide detailed information about project timelines to enable better resource planning for utility locating.

Second Focus Area for Partnership – Workforce and Training.

Recommendations for Workforce and Training were: 1. Collaborate with stakeholders – such as workforce development groups, labor organizations, technical colleges, and Tribal governments and state agencies – to address broadband workforce needs for BEAD and other broadband expansion efforts. Foster partnerships between these stakeholders and providers to align workforce development efforts with broadband infrastructure needs; and 2. Invest in and support comprehensive, statewide workforce development efforts, youth apprenticeships, worker training programs and awareness campaigns, to ensure a sufficient, skilled workforce for broadband deployment, operation, and maintenance by allocating funding and offering technical assistance to workforce development organizations.

Progress on Facility Locating Recommendations:

- The Commission continues to work with stakeholder partner organizations to increase awareness of broadband workforce needs. Due to the recission of Nondeployment funds that had been

allocated for broadband workforce training, no resources were available to implement these recommendations.

Third Focus Area for Partnership – Tribal Coordination

Tribal Coordination recommendations: 1. Support Tribal Nations in Wisconsin by providing funding and technical assistance for deployment of broadband infrastructure and improving digital adoption; 2. Continue to encourage and support coordination with Tribal Nations that are considering and developing partnerships with neighboring local governments and providers; and 3. Develop processes to facilitate collaboration between Tribal Nations and BEAD awardees during permitting and historic preservation reviews. Maintain ongoing communications with Tribal Nations in Wisconsin to ensure consultation and Tribal consent is being sought for grant funded projects on or traversing Tribal lands prior to the awarding of funds.

Progress on Tribal Coordination Recommendations:

- The PSC continued its regular consultations with Tribal Nations, and WBO staff have provided technical assistance to all Tribal nations on broadband issues, especially those that received BEAD awards (Lac du Flambeau, Sokaogon, and St. Croix Community).
- Sokaogon and the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council (GLITC) received 2026 Telemedicine Grant Awards.
- USAC created the [Tribal Lands Verification Tool](#) to help consumers check whether their home address is located on qualifying Tribal lands for the Lifeline Program discount of up to \$53.50.
- Capital Project Funds Digital Connectivity and Navigators program award recipients have been holding device distribution events and offering digital skill training and technical assistance on digital devices at or near Tribal communities to increase digital adoption.

Theme 3: Functional Adoption

First Focus Area – Affordability

Affordability recommendations: 1. Advocate, develop, and implement state-level solutions to maintain broadband affordability for low-income households following the end of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP); 2. Maintain a list of resources and tools for households impacted by the end of ACP to assist them in accessing affordability internet service; 3. Expand the availability of the Lifeline Program to more households by providing incentives to encourage internet service providers to become eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs); and 4. Continue to research, measure, and refine a standardized affordability threshold for internet service in Wisconsin. Publish data and reports on the attainment of affordable broadband across Wisconsin based on the threshold.

Progress on Affordability Recommendations:

- Wisconsin continues to offer its Lifeline Program alongside the federal Lifeline Program. The PSC awarded \$243,964 to four applicants as part of the [Lifeline Outreach Grant Program](#) to assist low-income customers signing up for the Lifeline Program.

- WBO finalized low-cost service plan offerings for BEAD recipients for inclusion in each grant agreement and publicly posted those plans on docket [5-BD-2025](#) for public awareness.
- WBO updated its [Wisconsin Broadband Almanac](#) with new data that shows progress broadband availability, affordability, and adoption by county and municipality.
- The 2026 Broadband Expansion Grant instructions merit criteria include priority points for applicants that offer an internet service plan of no more than \$75 per month for 100/20 Mbps service or a reduced cost plan for low-income households.

Second Focus Area for Functional Adoption – Digital Skills and Literacy

The three recommendations for Digital Skills and Literacy: 1. In the absence of federal funds, continue funding and support for digital navigation, adoption, and literacy initiatives to provide Wisconsinites with access, skill development, and assistive technologies for better quality of life. Share information on best practices from those initiatives. Ensure community organizations, anchor institutions, local governments, philanthropic groups, and other entities engaging in digital skills and literacy work are aware of and pursuing available funding opportunities; 2. Continue to improve access to technical support and digital skills education that is relevant for all Wisconsin residents, such as alternative language offerings. Develop, disseminate, and support best practices and trusted resources and supports to increase confidence in accessing the internet and online services safely; and 3. Strengthen partnerships between state, Tribal, and local governments, along with schools, libraries, educational and workforce organizations, internet service providers, and digital inclusion organizations to increase broadband adoption, especially in rural areas, by addressing barriers such as digital skilling and building

Progress on Digital Skills and Literacy Recommendations:

- The PSC awarded \$500,000 to 15 projects through the [Nonprofit Access Grant](#) to assist low-income, disabled, or targeted geographic areas in obtaining access to a basic set of telecommunications services. Award activities include digital navigation and literacy training, device distribution, and subsidized internet service.
- [Capital Projects Digital Connectivity and Navigators Program](#) grant recipients have purchased 35,944 digital devices with 22,386 users borrowing a device and Digital navigation services have reached over 21,000 people in Wisconsin. Several DCN recipients are providing navigator assistance in multiple languages to improve access to technical support and digital skills education. Wisconsin Literacy Inc. offer Spanish, Arabic, Burmese, Dari, Hmong, Rohingya, Swahili, and Ukrainian, while DANenet and City of Racine offer Spanish.
- The [Wisconsin Digital Navigator Network](#) formed and facilitated by University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension, continues to bring together agencies, nonprofits, community leaders, and others working on digital skills and literacy education and device distribution to increase internet adoption for Wisconsin's covered populations.
- The WBO convenes the Wisconsin Digital Equity and Inclusion Stakeholders Group to grow and strengthen the digital inclusion ecosystem in Wisconsin and help develop, inform and advise the

Wisconsin Digital Equity and Inclusion Plan. Stakeholders share best practices and updates on their digital inclusion accomplishments.

- WBO staff attend local, Tribal, and regional broadband meetings to share information and resources, learn, and provide technical assistance on broadband adoption and literacy initiatives.

Third Focus Area for Functional Adoption – Preparing for Our Digital Future

The three recommendations for Preparing for Our Digital Future are: 1. Prepare for the development of new technology resources and tools, including chatbots and generative artificial intelligence (AI). Integrate these tools into digital skills education to ensure that any publicly funded broadband deployments will meet Wisconsin future technology needs; 2. Improve digital literacy and cybersecurity awareness by educating and empowering Wisconsinites to use digital skills and artificial intelligence responsibly, effectively, and in ways that improve their lives; and 3. Support the recommendations and efforts of the Governor’s Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence.

- In March and April of 2026, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension held statewide [AI Forums](#) for local and tribal governments to learn about what generative AI is how to responsibly use it.
- Capital Projects Digital Connectivity and Navigators Program and USF Non-Profit grant recipients have provided digital navigation and digital literacy services to over 28,000 people in Wisconsin that includes specific content to build cybersecurity awareness.

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Infrastructure and Future Proofing

The Task Force supports its previous years' recommendation for continued investment in state broadband expansion funding and continues to advocate fiber as the best technology option for Wisconsin. With historical investment in broadband infrastructure, the Task Force noted that additional funding for infrastructure is still necessary to close service gaps, but funding alone will not resolve these gaps.

The Task Force discussed what makes investments effective and deployments successful. With aging infrastructure that was a standard for its time and new emerging technology competing in a growing broadband industry, the Task Force recommends improving the quality of broadband infrastructure to maximize the longevity and resulting impact of investments. As demand grows for faster speeds, more bandwidth, and future readiness to meet the needs of Wisconsinites, the Task Force believes addressing these infrastructure and future proofing recommendations will ensure Wisconsin does not fall behind in a forward moving digital society.

- Fund additional state broadband expansion program offerings and include incentives for applicants that offer low-cost service plans, open access networks, and future proof and scalable technology to meet upcoming needs.
- Establish a line extension program to provide service to isolated homes and businesses in otherwise served areas and other programs to fill remaining gaps in broadband service. Provide targeted outreach to ensure robust participation in such programs.
- Support middle mile upgrades and construction of new routes to close gaps in capacity and ensure that middle mile infrastructure is sufficient for future broadband expansion, and emerging bandwidth and resiliency needs.
- Support continued improvement and utilization of broadband deployment technologies to ensure the best possible performance, scalability, and reliability of broadband networks.
- Invest and support climate-resilient infrastructure designs that reduce outage risks and future repair costs.
- Continue efforts to streamline permitting processes to reduce duplication, improve interagency coordination, and expedite broadband permits to prevent construction delays and increased costs.
- Support competition in rural areas where Wisconsinites only have one service provider option by collecting and sharing information on pricing, promotional rates, and comparisons in services between providers.

- Improve access to existing facilities or infrastructure in the right way to reduce duplication and permitting processes required by new infrastructure.

Outreach, Partnership and Accountability

The Task Force has seen through Wisconsin's Broadband Expansion Program that the best broadband projects begin with good partnerships and involvement of local and Tribal government. Local partners are best positioned to advocate for their needs, identify gaps in services, address permitting issues, and provide updates to their constituents on broadband expansion. Outreach, engagement, and transparency are also good strategies in making good public-private partnerships and ensuring accountability. As many federal and state broadband programs are being implemented, the Task Force wants to emphasize transparency and accountability to mitigate delays and prevent wasteful spending.

- Expand statewide public outreach efforts about ongoing and future broadband expansion efforts to ensure transparency in use of funds and accountability in results.
- Foster early and frequent communication and technical assistance with grant recipients, impacted utilities, and beneficiaries of broadband expansion and BEAD funding to ensure expeditious, safe, and federally compliant implementation.
- Increase communication and engagement with policymakers, county and municipal governments, and Tribal Nations on the latest broadband affordability and adoption data. Learn about their local community needs and gaps to improve broadband adoption and affordability programming.
- Provide technical assistance and establish safeguards to ensure project commitments are completed on time, including penalty provisions for commitments that are not met.
- Strengthen partnerships with Tribal Nations in Wisconsin in their pursuit of digital sovereignty by ensuring Tribal Nations are eligible for funds for infrastructure, digital upskilling and adoption.
- In the absence of the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access, the PSC should continue to convene groups of stakeholders to assess community needs and collect data to address broadband access, affordability, and adoption. The PSC should continue to build on their work convening groups of stakeholders to assess community needs and collect data to address broadband access, affordability, and adoption.

Workforce Development

The Task Force has made previous recommendations on workforce development and still believes those hold true. This past year, the Task Force had a presentation on broadband workforce development that suggested there may be a workforce shortage on the horizon. Task Force members also presented their expertise on workforce development that influenced these recommendations. BEAD subrecipients are preparing for construction and more broadband construction is coming through the State Broadband Expansion Grant, therefore the Task Force has made these recommendations to prepare and plan for Wisconsin broadband expansion workforce needs.

- Provide targeted funding for broadband workforce development training, certifications and apprenticeship programs to high schools and higher education institutions, workforce development entities, trade associations, and internet service providers.
- Identify and leverage broadband workforce development programs in Wisconsin to support and address broadband industry workforce needs such as equipment operators, technicians, inspectors, engineers, electricians, surveyors, locators, trenchers, trucking crews, and laborers. Expand or replicate successful programs to address workforce gaps.
- Research best practices and develop long term workforce strategies to create career pathways and economic development that aligns with broadband expansion.
- Coordinate cross-sector stakeholder groups from state agencies, educational institutions, workforce development boards, Tribal Nations, and industry partners to develop and promote broadband career pathways.
- Partner with the Department of Workforce Development, institutions of higher education and industry stakeholders to develop and implement technology-based training to attract and create jobs in Wisconsin.

Digital Skills and Sustained Affordability

With the rescinding of the Digital Equity Act programs and changes to the BEAD low-cost service offerings, the Task Force finds it critical to address affordability and digital upskilling to ensure that BEAD is a success and that Wisconsin does not fall behind in a growing digital world. The Task Force has made digital skills and affordability recommendations in previous years that have influenced digital adoption activities, but addressing a sustainable funding source is needed to continue those efforts. The Task Force advocates for continued support for organizations that help Wisconsinites adopt broadband and makes recommendations to address barriers to affordability and digital upskilling.

- Identify a sustainable revenue source to establish a broadband affordability program that reduces the cost of a monthly internet service subscription for eligible families.
- Research best practices and identify a sustainable revenue source to establish broadband adoption and digital skills programs that increase participation in digital society.
- Establish digital literacy programs tailored to diverse proficiency levels and demographics and collaborate with trusted community organizations and institutions to expand digital adoption and training efforts. Publish public facing data and information on the impacts of these efforts.
- Strengthen partnerships among individuals, nonprofits, economic development organizations, workforce development boards, libraries, K-12 schools, higher education, local governments, and tribal nations to foster robust participation in digital adoption and promote internet affordability.
- Continue to convene and support the Wisconsin Digital Equity and Inclusion Stakeholders Group and Wisconsin Digital Navigators Network. Establish and support digital skills alliances. Use these entities to grow and strengthen adoption in Wisconsin.

- Establish partnerships between the Wisconsin Broadband Office, workforce development entities, and Department of Public Instruction to enhance technology-based training in high school settings.

Emerging Technology Readiness

In an ever-evolving world, the Task Force believes preparing Wisconsinites is imperative. With the onset of artificial intelligence and new broadband technology, these emerging technology readiness recommendations by the Task Force not only ensure Wisconsin's digital future but will grow Wisconsin's economy through education and workforce development, and increase quality of life.

- Evaluate emerging technologies, like artificial intelligence and broadband deployment technologies, and update digital skills curriculum to incorporate examples and best practices for their safe and effective use to meet the educational, health, and workforce needs in the daily lives of Wisconsinites.
- Convene higher education institutions, K-12 schools, CESAs, local libraries and nonprofits, industry partners, and Tribal Nations to identify and amplify training and workforce development opportunities to improve utilization of emerging technologies.
- Integrate emerging technology readiness into existing training and workforce development programs, and partner with existing stakeholders to share best practices and expand the impact of programs.

Recommendations to Maximize BEAD Nondeployment Funds

1. Establish strong partnerships with stakeholders to support planning and use of funds and provide regular updates to the public on implementation.
2. Establish broad-based eligibility for funded programs, to include nonprofits, tribal nations, libraries, and community organizations.
3. Prioritize allocation of funds for the following uses:
 - g. Further deployment to fill gaps in availability left behind during BEAD process, including in areas where awards default or experience cost overruns;
 - h. Outreach, training, and education programs that expand the adoption of broadband in more households and deepens the use of broadband by those who adopt it;
 - i. Digital device distribution programs to ensure everyone has access to devices;
 - j. Digital navigation and training programs to ensure those with devices have the knowledge and support to utilize them fully;
 - k. Affordability programs to ensure everyone can afford a monthly broadband subscription; and
 - l. Workforce development programs to mitigate workforce shortages in roles supporting the deployment and operation of broadband caused by the surge in broadband deployment funding.

Recommendations Policymakers Can Take Action on Immediately

1. Encourage NTIA to release BEAD Nondeployment funds to the state for use in maximizing the success of the BEAD program and bridging the digital divide.
2. Fund additional state broadband expansion program offerings and include incentives for applicants that offer low-cost service plans, open access networks, and future proof and scalable technology to meet future needs.
3. Identify a sustainable revenue source to establish a broadband affordability program that reduces the cost of a monthly internet service subscription for eligible families.
4. Establish a line extension program to provide service to isolated homes and businesses in otherwise served areas and other programs to fill remaining gaps in broadband service. Provide targeted outreach to ensure robust participation in such programs.
5. Research best practices and identify a sustainable revenue source to establish broadband adoption and digital skills programs that increase participation in digital society.
6. Provide targeted funding for broadband workforce development training, certifications and apprenticeship programs to high schools and higher education institutions, workforce development entities, trade associations, and internet service providers.

CASE STUDY 1: Digital Coalition of Southeast Wisconsin

In the aftermath of the pandemic, the City of Racine developed the Smart City Initiative and Digital Divide Roundtable (DDR) to improve the economic well-being and quality of life for residents through the use of advanced technology. DDR created a Steering Committee where Racine created their Digital Equity Plan to and set goals and actions for addressing barriers to broadband adoption and digital literacy. Using its Capital Projects Fund Digital Connectivity and Navigators award, Racine is addressing barriers to digital inclusion by establishing a digital navigator program to teach digital skills training and distribute devices to qualified residents, share resources, created asset maps, and hold digital literacy events.

Due to Racine's robust digital inclusion work, the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) recognized Racine as a [Digital Inclusion Visionary Trailblazers 2025](#) award recipient that recognizes local government for their digital inclusion work and being a model for digital inclusive communities committed to advancing digital equity.

ARPA funding was depleted by the end of 2025 and plans to apply for the Digital Equity Capacity Grant ceased after the Digital Equity Act funded program was terminated by the federal government. DDR then partnered with NDIA to create the Digital Coalition of Southeast Wisconsin (Coalition) to take a regional approach in establishing a sustainable structured and action-oriented group of digital inclusion partners to ensure all Southeast Wisconsin residents can participate in a digital society through affordable broadband services, devices access for telehealth and education, workforce readiness, and digital skills training. The Coalition has successfully brought together over 40 entities across Racine and Kenosha Counties, and surrounding Southeast Wisconsin communities from nonprofits, providers, public libraries, governments agencies, K-12 and higher education institutions, healthcare organizations, and businesses. The Coalition strives to close the digital divide through community centered, collaborative effort that adapts to ongoing needs, and builds a strong resilient ecosystem.

A charter was developed so the Coalition can focus its initial efforts on establishing infrastructure, governance, communication channels, and collaborative relationships necessary for long-term regional impact. Through the charter, an executive board leadership team was established, and the Coalition is forming itself into a 501c3 nonprofit organization.

The Coalition currently convenes through regular coalition-wide meetings, executive board meetings, working group collaboration, and ongoing communication through email and shared planning documents. The working groups focus on sustainability, outreach, programming, and asset mapping to support ongoing organizational development and future initiatives. The coalition meets on the fourth Thursday of every month at 10:00am. Each quarter the meeting is held in-person at various locations around the community. All other meetings are held virtually.

CASE STUDY 2: Sokaogon Chippewa Community NibiLink BEAD Project

In the Northwoods of Wisconsin, in Southwest Forest County, is the home to the Sokaogon Chippewa Community (SCC), also known as the Mole Lake Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. SCC is a sovereign Tribal Nation that has established laws, government, and businesses dedicated to serving their community and the land. Sokaogon has an established departments on Health, Housing, Elder and Family Services, Education, Forestry, Environmental, and Fishery. The low population density and geographic location of the SCC and their neighbors and the difficult terrain of a heavily forested area with

many lakes makes providing broadband service to the area difficult. Thus, there are persistent broadband gaps and many households and businesses for SCC and their neighbors lack reliable, future-proof broadband service which limits education, telehealth, workforce participation, and economic development.

SCC recognized limited access means limited care and advancement in quality of life for their community, so SCC sought to close the digital divide. SCC is completing a \$4,250,000 Capital Projects Fund Flexible Facilities Grant project that will provide infrastructure necessary for up to 11,500 individuals to access affordable and high-quality telehealth services and enable work and education. SCC also recently received a \$243,274 Telemedicine Grant from PSC to expand a specialty, behavioral health, and chronic care access room for rural/underserved patients enabling high-quality remote visits and real-time collaboration with off-site clinicians. Within Forest County, SCC has partnered in device distribution activities where SCC members can access a free laptop and digital skills training and technical assistance as part of a Capital Project Funds Connectivity and Navigators Program Grant.

After PSC BEAD consultation to the Great Lakes Inter Tribal Council (GLITC), internal discussions, and discussions with the PSC, SCC decided to apply for BEAD funding to close remaining gaps within their tribal lands, tribal neighbor Forest County Potawatomi's land, and neighboring communities in Forest and Florence counties. SCC proposed significant investments to take a regional coalition approach to BEAD implementation. The approach will be led by SCC and seek to serve residents across tribal lands and Forest and Florence counties. SCC has brought together tribal leadership, county partners, and an operating provider to deliver a coordinated end-to-end fiber solution that is future proof and maximizes speed, resiliency, scalability, and reliability for SCC and their partners. SCC also garnered support from local municipalities, businesses, educational institutions, nonprofits, and other Tribal and state government offices.

SCC's proposed BEAD project was awarded, and they became one of the largest Tribal-led BEAD subaward recipients in the United States. As a result of the BEAD project, SCC has established a provider named NibiLink (Nibi in Ojibwe meaning water). SCC has held fiber cable laying trainings to grow SCC's workforce and economy. In implementing the project, SCC has set a clear operational plan for service activation, one that focuses early on compliance and execution readiness (mapping layers, permitting preparation, and reporting discipline). The partnerships and support will play a key role in implementation of permitting, local coordination, right of way access, and construction to improve access to the 4,600 locations affected by the grant.

NibiLink's goal is to provide reliable high speed broadband service to support telehealth, education, public safety, and economic opportunity that has been lagging in the SCC, Forest and Florence counties. SCC's efforts demonstrate the opportunity for tribal sovereignty to establish a successful strategy for broadband deployment and serves as a repeatable collaboration model that other rural and tribal communities can adapt for future broadband projects. This project proves that tribal leadership and regional collaboration can deliver futureproof fiber at scale—while strengthening local partnerships and improving services for all residents and the seventh generation.

CASE STUDY 3: BEAD Utility locating Focus Group & Webpage

In March 2025, the WBO hosted an Underground Facilities Focus Group. BEAD construction will cover over 130,000 locations across Wisconsin that are planned to be built with fiber and an additional 17,000 that will be supported by new and existing wireless towers. To facilitate the safe and timely locating of underground utility facilities, eliminate unnecessary costs, and maintain construction schedules the PSC convened a group of relevant stakeholders to understand challenges related to utility locating on broadband projects, identify opportunities to streamline locating efforts and reduce waste, and to improve communication among affected parties.

The focus group provided insights into the main challenges and provided solutions that include establishing communication and building relationships prior to construction through preconstruction meetings, and sharing information regarding BEAD construction plans and timelines. Through the information gathered during the focus group, the WBO published a [BEAD Utility Locating webpage](#) and created a [Utility Locating Pre-Construction Meeting Best Practices](#) technical assistance document.

CONCLUSION

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Task Force established goals to connect all Wisconsinites with affordable and reliable high-speed broadband infrastructure. Internet became essential for telehealth, remote work and education, and basic day-to-day participation in our society. Demand for high-quality service pushed the standard for broadband service higher.

Historic public and private investments in broadband expansion under Gov. Evers' leadership have helped more Wisconsinites gain access to high-speed broadband service. Thanks to successful implementation of Task Force recommendations under the Evers Administration, data collection, mapping, public facing resources, have improved the engagement and planning for broadband access, affordability, and adoption in the state. Recommendations have also driven strategic deployment of public funds for broadband expansion, affordability, and adoption. No other administration in the state's history has made as big of an impact on Wisconsin's efforts to close the digital divide to expand internet for all and work forward to universal service.

The 2026 Task Force Report details Wisconsin's broadband expansion journey in the past six years. It highlights the increased access and adoption of broadband by Wisconsinites at a granular level to depict the significant impact Task Force recommendations have had under Governor Evers' leadership. The report also recognizes continuing barriers to broadband access, affordability, and adoption. The 2026 themes and recommendations are informed by this year's Task Force discussions and presentations.

Access to affordable, high-speed internet in the 21st Century is a necessity, not a luxury. The work of this Task Force has shown the importance of internet for all because it opens opportunities and growth in all corners of the state. Under the leadership of Gov. Evers, incredible progress has been made towards closing the digital divide, but the work does not end here. Throughout the year, Task Force members from diverse backgrounds provided a broad range of expertise and perspectives to make recommendations that move Wisconsin forward for today and tomorrow's digital society. The Task Force's seeks to lift Wisconsinites up to bolster economic development and quality of life. Wisconsin must use these recommendations to keep moving forward to close the digital divide and achieve universal service for all Wisconsinites.