



Champion Report

Theme Area: **Connectivity**

Champions: Pam Mahling, Janelle Riley, Kevin Larson (Kristi Westbrook),
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REPORTING PERIOD: April 15, 2014 through July 15, 2014

Goals/Strategies or Action Steps:	What NEW success have you had in moving your theme goals forward over the reporting period?
Goal 1: All Action Steps	<p>Telehealth. We received a Blandin Foundation grant to conduct a needs assessment for telehealth within the five-county region and to identify demonstration projects. We pulled together a list of telehealth providers (or those interested in working on a telehealth project). We sent an online survey and are conducting interviews with a few of the providers, including the resilient region health care champions. We will be hosting a community meeting on July 28 from 1-4 at NJPA.</p>
	<p>Infrastructure. We are working together to develop a broadband infrastructure plan for the region. We are also beginning to identify a demonstration project for the five-county area. We have shared funding opportunities with various partners, such as USDA for the Leech Lake Wireless Telecommunications project. We are pulling together an inventory of other potential funding sources for the shovel ready projects.</p>
	<p>Other highlights: Kevin Larson and Stacey Stockdill presented at the April 3rd East Central Broadband meeting. We continue to keep Roxy Traxler (their lead) in the loop for collaboration opportunities.</p> <p>\$20 Million was allocated by the legislature for broadband demonstration projects. We also met with Senator Schmit and local legislators on June 11. Cheryal Hills continued the conversation with local legislators at the Brainerd Lakes Chamber Politics and a Pint event (June 17). Senator Klobuchar visited Sebeka for the Smart Rural Community Award and WCTA captured some video. NTCA has taken several clips from it to use in their rural broadband video being shown nationally.</p> <p>http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AlyGADLi-CY&feature=youtu.be</p> <p>Senator Klobuchar (and others on the Hill) do seem to finally be hearing our messages that "rural is cool" and important, broadband can be a key driver of our successes, and some of the FCC rules are hampering our ability to provide broadband to all. She authored a couple of letters to the FCC to that effect and we feel our message is finally being heard.</p> <p>The net neutrality debate has the nation learning more about the exciting world of telecommunications regulation such as "section 706 of the 1996 Telecommunications Act", etc.! ;-)</p> <p>We will be meeting with Danna Mackenzie, State Broadband director, July 28.</p> <p>Paul Drange, Director of Regional Programs (NJPA), has joined our Connectivity Theme Champions! Welcome Paul!!</p>

How are you working with any of the other RR Theme areas?

Yes, the health theme champions.

List any Goals or Recommendations within the plan that your team of theme Champions are struggling to address?

We did not receive Bush Foundation support for the Grow Our Own IT Career Pathway, but are working with BLAEDC and Brainerd Lakes Chamber's High-Tech Sector Taskforce to continue to explore ways to address workforce and infrastructure needs within the region.

Connectivity

Connectivity Issue

Connectivity: Extending high-speed internet access to the entire region increases telecommuting opportunities, provides greater access to customers and markets for businesses, and allows all residents access to civic resources and commerce.

Connectivity Issue Goal

Connectivity: The number of households in the region served by high-speed internet-services rises from the current level of 40% to 95% served. The (region/rural areas) community is willing to invest to increase coverage. This will include both public and private investment in service.

Recommendation 1

Access across the region: Ensure all households in the region have high-speed internet access which meets common state standards.

Action Step 1A

Access: Promote, support and develop high-speed internet access throughout region for telecommuting, educational benefits, and supporting business activity.

Recommendation 2

Efficiency: Local units of governments will work across political boundaries to share equipment costs/facilities for more efficient delivery of high-speed internet.

Action Step 2A

Efficiency in installation: Lay conduit for fiber optics when upgrading sewer and water or digging trench.

Recommendation 3

Access for entrepreneurs: Provide access to technology needs and support to retain businesses and encourage potential entrepreneurs

Action Step 3A

Economic development: Determine the compatibility and interface between communications, smart grid technologies, and internet systems. Develop a recruiting initiative encouraging technology-oriented companies to explore opportunities offered in non-urban spaces.

Action Step 3B

Telecommuting: Create a business plan that facilitates legitimate telecommuting jobs and promotes high-speed internet connection in the region. Upgrade and expand high-speed internet infrastructure in housing so residents may work from home.

Action Step 3C

Map of access sites: Develop map or list of accessible sites within region to conduct web-type meetings, free Wi-Fi etc.

Recommendation 4

Access for children: All school aged children will have access to a computer with high-speed internet capabilities.

Action Step 4A

Support sites: Make available sites providing educational, internet, support, financial resources, etc.

Recommendation 5

Funding: Identify and pursue state, federal, and philanthropic grants to fund connectivity recommendations.