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WEDC and PSC to launch new broadband technical assistance pilot

Pilot will help six communities prepare to apply for broadband funds

MADISON, SEPT. 17, 2020 – Six communities will receive technical assistance so they are better prepared to apply for federal, state and private-sector broadband expansion funds under a new joint pilot program announced today by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) and the state Public Service Commission (PSC).

The pilot program comes in response to overwhelming requests for broadband expansion as communities throughout the state continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic.

“One of the clearest lessons of the past year is that broadband is now as essential to daily life as electricity,” said WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes. “The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that broadband provides a critical link to the outside world, whether it’s for education, business or health care—yet many parts of Wisconsin still have either no access, limited access or high-cost access.”

Hughes noted that WEDC identified broadband as one of the three key opportunities to help Wisconsin businesses recover from the pandemic. Broadband access, speed and affordability has been cited repeatedly by participants during the recent listening sessions held by the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity. Navigating broadband expansion can be challenging, and local capacity is often stretched thin—even more so as communities deal with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Broadband internet is an essential catalyst to drive community, public safety, learning, health and economic goals across the state of Wisconsin,” said PSC Chairperson Rebecca Cameron Valcq. “Governor Evers’ administration and the PSC are committed to the continued equitable expansion of broadband services to meet the needs of all Wisconsin communities and residents.”

The pilot, which will run from late September to late December, will help communities prepare to apply for future state, federal and private funds as they are made available, Hughes and Valcq said. The pilot will be housed in the Office of Rural Prosperity within WEDC and will draw on the expertise of both WEDC and PSC staff.

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Applications to participate in the pilot will be accepted from Sept. 21-30, and eligible applicants include local governments (towns, villages, cities and counties), school districts and tribal nations. Participants will be selected based on the following criteria: the community has taken some initial steps towards broadband expansion, diverse community partners have committed to working together on broadband expansion, the community has a clear vision for the technical assistance they are seeking, and the community seeks to expand broadband in an underserved or unserved area. In selecting the six communities, WEDC will seek to ensure geographic diversity across the state.

The pilot program is intended to help WEDC and PSC to better understand what communities' broadband technical assistance needs are. WEDC and PSC anticipate that the lessons learned and best practices developed from the pilot program will be incorporated into a new Wisconsin Broadband Playbook for Communities.

More information about the pilot can be found on the Office of Rural Prosperity's website: <https://wedc.org/rural-prosperity/>.

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About the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) leads economic development efforts for the state by advancing and maximizing opportunities in Wisconsin for businesses, communities and people to thrive in a globally competitive environment. Working with more than 600 regional and local partners, WEDC develops and delivers solutions representative of a highly responsive and coordinated economic development network. Visit wedc.org or follow WEDC on Twitter @WEDCNews to learn more.

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