

COMMITTING MATCHING FUNDS FOR A PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION BROADBAND
EXPANSION GRANT

Broadband access is a top priority for residents, businesses, and government at the national, state, and local levels. The Wisconsin Governor’s Task Force on Broadband, and the Dane County Broadband Task Force, are developing recommendations and strategies to improve broadband access.

While much of Dane County is well-served with broadband, nevertheless there are rural areas in the county that are underserved. The Public Service Commission defines underserved as an area served by fewer than two providers offering “broadband service”, which commonly refers to high-speed internet access that is always on and faster than the traditional dial-up access, and has at least a speed of 25 megabits for download and 3 megabits for upload. Broadband includes several high-speed transmission technologies such as DSL, cable modem, fiber, wireless, satellite, and broadband over powerlines (BPL).

On November 9, 2021 Governor Evers announced that the Public Service Commission (PSC) will make \$100 million available for the next round of the State Broadband Expansion Grant Program. The Broadband Expansion Grant program was created in 2013 to help meet the demand for improved broadband and encourage development in Wisconsin’s unserved and underserved areas. Applications for the current round of grants are due on March 17, 2022. It is unclear when the PSC will hold another round of Broadband Expansion grants.

Per the PSC, eligible applicants include an organization, a telecommunications utility, or a city, village, town, or county that has established a legal partnership or joint venture arrangement with an otherwise qualified organization or telecommunications utility, and as such meets the eligibility requirements set forth in [Wis. Stat. § 196.504\(1\)](#). Matching funds for the grants are not required, but have been identified as a priority factor.

Charter Communications has identified approximately 1,000 locations in the Southwest and Western areas of Dane County that are underserved and are eligible for the current round of state grant funding. Charter has projected the cost to expand service to these locations to be approximately \$10.3 million, which includes 192.8 miles of fiber. These costs include bringing fiber to each location.

In 2021 Dane County received \$106 million allocation of the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). These funds can be used for infrastructure improvements, which includes broadband expansion. Funds must be allocated by December 31, 2024, with projects completed by December 31, 2026. Dane County identified broadband expansion as a priority for use of ARPA, setting aside \$5 million for this purpose.

The Dane County Broadband Task Force will make recommendations later this year, but their work will not be completed in time for the upcoming March 2022 deadline for state funding. The

44 opportunity to leverage funds from the state PSC grant, in cooperation with an internet service
45 provider (ISP), complements the work of the Task Force.

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47 Charter has requested Dane County commit matching funds to support a Broadband Expansion
48 grant application. If the application is selected by the PSC, Charter would provide at least \$3.5
49 million, and Dane County would provide \$1 million of ARPA funds, with a requested match for the
50 remaining from the State of Wisconsin. If ARPA funds are used for broadband, the US Treasury
51 requires broadband speeds of 100 download/100 upload, and Charter is able to meet this
52 benchmark.

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54 While the Dane County Broadband Task Force has focused on comprehensive recommendations
55 to improve broadband access in the County, the timing of the grant cycle means action is needed
56 now.

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58 **Whether and how the funding responds to the COVID-19 pandemic**

59 The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need to have affordable, reliable internet in every
60 home and business to attend virtual school, do online banking, and attend healthcare
61 appointments virtually.

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63 **Whether the allocation is duplicative of other federal/state/local/school funding efforts or**
64 **in coordination with them**

65 Partnering with Charter Communications would leverage grant funds available from the State of
66 Wisconsin's Broadband Expansion Grant program. Providing fiber cable is extremely expensive
67 and, in rural areas, requires a mix of funding sources.

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69 **Whether the allocation leverages existing partnerships and Dane County programs**
70 Broadband is a new area of expenditure for Dane County.

71
72 **Reference to the law and/or guidance that authorizes the allocation**

73 Final treasury rules for use of ARPA funds: [https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2022-01-
74 27/pdf/2022-00292.pdf](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2022-01-27/pdf/2022-00292.pdf)

75
76 **An explanation of expected outcomes, including equity measures**

77 Approximately 1,000 locations that are underserved would have access to fiber service. There
78 are other federal, non-county funds for those who already have broadband access, but cannot
79 afford the expense.

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81 **A plan for data collection and other outcome measures that ensure accurate quarterly**
82 **reporting of program experience and outcomes**

83 Charter will notify Dane County when the fiber is laid, and subsequently will provide a number of
84 subscribers six months later.

85
86 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Dane County Board of Supervisors commits
87 \$1 million in matching funds to support the application that Charter Communications will submit

88 for Wisconsin Public Service Commission Broadband Expansion Grant funds, contingent on state
89 funding for the project being awarded.