



Office of the County Administrator

Administrative Services Office

635 2nd Street SE

Milaca, MN 56353

Phone: (320) 983-8218

Fax: (320) 983-8382

Mille Lacs County Community Broadband Initiative

C.K. Blandin Foundation
Attn: Mary Magnuson
100 North Pokegama Avenue
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

Mary,

Thank you for this opportunity to become a Blandin Broadband Community. We feel that Mille Lacs County is ideally suited for this wonderful program. Mille Lacs County is in the east central part of Minnesota. Mille Lacs Lake comprises two-thirds of the northern boundary of the county. The county consists of 685 square miles (354,472.95 acres), of which 102 square miles is water and 583 square miles is land. The county is divided into 17 townships. There are eight towns within the county: Bock, Foreston, Isle, Milaca, Onamia, Pease, Princeton, and Wahkon. From the 2010 Census, there are 26,097 people now living in Mille Lacs County. In the years 2006-2010 Mille Lacs County had 12.6% of residents living below the poverty level. Our high school graduation rates are consistently below the state average and our unemployment rate is consistently higher than the state average.

Mille Lacs County officials are dedicated to maintaining and enhancing Mille Lacs County citizens' quality of life, delivering essential services in the most efficient ways possible, protecting our children and vulnerable adults, prosecuting criminals, preserving the public's health and welfare, and doing so while spending revenues prudently and wisely. The broadband initiative falls primarily under the first goal of the county to maintain and enhance the quality of life for the citizens of the County. According to the Connect Minnesota Broadband Service Inventory, all but a small portion of the County has broadband available, with the majority being either mobile wireless or DSL broadband with the cities being served by cable broadband. While the service is available, a bigger issue in the County is accessibility issues due to cost and technology skills.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this application for the Blandin Broadband Communities from Mille Lacs County.

Roxy Traxler
County Administrator



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As outlined our cover letter, this broadband initiative falls primarily under the first goal of the County to maintain and enhance the quality of life for the citizens of the County. With that being said, we face many challenges. Mille Lacs County is a poor county, both economically and with our tax base. We will have to be creative, think outside the box and engage in many partnerships in order to continue to improve our citizens' welfare using broadband. According to the Connect Minnesota Broadband Service Inventory, all but a small portion of the County has broadband available, with the majority being either mobile wireless or DSL broadband with the cities being served by cable broadband. While the service is available, a bigger issue in the County is accessibility issues due to cost and technology skills.

As part of learning how to better serve our residents, Mille Lacs County is in the process of updating our Comprehensive Plan. We have formed 9 different task forces to look at issues within the County. Of the 7 task forces completed to date, one of the common denominators was the need to enhance and better serve our residents and businesses with broadband accessibility. The Economic Development task force has several policies with an associated action item to: "Foster the growth and expansion of broadband internet service and fiber infrastructure for business, education and private use in the county so it is accessible to all County residents. The first policy being to promote the growth and diversification of Mille Lacs County's economy making it a County with a broad economic base and the second policy to promote private business growth to create living wage jobs in the county.

As stated, these both need to be built upon the broadband initiative and enhancement. In addition, the Social, Public Health and Quality of Life task force had as a main goal to encourage and support improved/increased communication infrastructure and access including internet and phone, high speed, broadband access. This task force also has a goal of supporting programs and activities related to improving employment opportunities, and training opportunities, including economic development programs.



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Our unemployment rate for 2011 was 11.6%, significantly higher than that state average of 6.7%. This is why our task forces have determined that economic development is increasingly important; and along with that, the technology of broadband. It is apparent that without further improving our residents' skills in technology, which means making the technology (in this case broadband), accessible and affordable to our residents and organizations. These organizations include our schools, libraries, government entities and business partners.

This program will allow us to develop programs to enhance the lives of our citizens through better use of technology. It will also allow us to further develop the goals of our Comprehensive Plan task force into an actual program and a specific task. Until we can show what broadband in the County is capable of doing, and increase the accessibility of said broadband to our workforce, further economic development will continue to be difficult. For example, we can support and increase the number of small businesses in the County, but if in the end no one knows where they are because either they have no web presence, or our residents cannot afford or do not know how to access them, they may flounder.

Another objective brought forth by our task forces is to increase the presence of education programs such as local technical programs within the County. Furthermore, if we have students and a general workforce without the accessibility and knowledge of broadband capabilities, these schools and programs are not likely to come to Mille Lacs County. A lot of our economic development future success may hinge on increasing broadband usage, support, affordability and access in Mille Lacs County.

Several schools have started projects aimed at increasing digital inclusion among their students, including Milaca and Onamia public schools. The program they have started is the providing of iPAD's and they are working on digital inclusion. We have a high proportion of students on free and/or reduced lunch programs, thus we know that many cannot afford to go out and purchase their own computers and iPAD's.



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Currently, every 9th-12th grade student at Milaca High School has access to an iPad to use as an instructional tool. The district is committed to preparing their students to succeed in the changing societal landscape. It is essential that the District provide our students with the 21st century skills that they need to be self-directed learners. They believe that effective teaching and learning include the effective use of technology to best prepare each student for the world in which they will live.

In Onamia they have found that educational agility has worked well where technology is concerned. Even without a lot of money, they've managed to lead the scholastic pack on a variety of technology fronts; they own the fiber optic cable network that supplies the school's communication systems; they have smart boards in every elementary class in the school, and now a portion of their student body have iPad's.

Computers have also been added, over the past several years, to the East Central Regional Libraries, of which Mille Lacs County is a partner, in Milaca, Princeton, and Onamia to enhance accessibility to online information and learning. In addition to the school population that is underserved, Mille Lacs County has a high senior population. In 2010, 16.1% of our population was over 65, as compared to the state average of 12.9%. Inclusion of computers and other technology at the libraries is also aimed at this age group. Keeping this population connected is in everyone's best interests.

The County Board has recently included in their 2013 budget a position of Economic Development/Grants Coordinator. This position was added because of the need identified in our Comprehensive Planning process for a county-wide approach to economic development, training, and technology education. The Board has also decided to set aside funds dedicated to economic development, growth and education. The County is making a commitment to the future of this County, and part of that commitment includes the enhancement of technology in the lives of our residents and business communities.



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Mille Lacs County Community Broadband Initiative Contact Information

Roxy Traxler, County Administrator

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320-983-8218 or 320-983-8349

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roxy.traxler@co.mille-lacs.mn.us

ID# 41-6005845

Mille Lacs County as established by the State of Minnesota operates under Minnesota Statute 375A.

Letters of support have been received to date from the City of Milaca, Onamia Public Schools, Mille Lacs County Times, Central Minnesota Jobs and Training, City of Princeton, First National Bank of Milaca, and the Mille Lacs Health System. This represents a broad range of sectors, including public, private and regional joint powers.



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Mille Lacs County Broadband Initiative Leadership Team

This listing represents the existing leadership team. As the project moves forward, we expect to add additional representation to the group, either as topic specific Task Force members or on the leadership team to further represent all sectors. We fully recognize that this team will expand, and one of our objectives is to involve the school and business community more directly, rather than just as support as seen in the letters of support for this project.

Paula Soderberg

Paula has a degree in Human Resource management, with a minor in Computer Science. She previously worked for NorthStar Access, a telecommunications company serving Mora, Cambridge, North Branch, Princeton and Elk River, and was closely involved in project management, process analysis, data management, design and development of databases, and both computer and customer service training. Most recently, she is involved with the County Planning Commission and Comprehensive Plan process. She is also on the Community Education Advisory board for Milaca Public Schools and is a past President of the Milaca Friends of the Library. Paula represents residents that are underserved in the County.

John McPherson

John McPherson works with and understands computers. John has a blog and comments on world happenings. John has currently served on the County's Comprehensive Plan task force for transportation, and economic development. He is currently sitting on the task for related to Land Use.



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Carla Vita

Carla is currently employed as a Business Services Specialist for the State of Minnesota; and serves as the Treasurer for the East Central Regional Arts Council. Her past employment includes Re-Employment Assistance Coordinator at State of Minnesota; Community Development Director at City of Isanti; and Administrative Researcher at City of Faribault. She has an MA degree from Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Carla has over 10 years of significant experience working on many community-wide projects, consensus building, intergovernmental projects, and project management working in a variety of government positions including local, regional and state. Carla is currently serving on several Comprehensive Plan task force committees for Mille Lacs County.

Dan Whitcomb

As a current County Commissioner, Dan represents all populations within the County, including those less served by broadband. Dan owns and works for J.Q. Fruit Farm and Orchard (A Minnesota Century Farm) in Princeton Township. He has farmed and worked in Mille Lacs County for 23 years. Dan has a Master's of Science Management and a Bachelors of Science Physics. His previous employment includes Homeland Security & Emergency Management, State of Minnesota-RP Administrator; Northern States Power Production Engineer/Project Manager and from 1976 – 1982 he was a U.S. Navy Submarine Officer, Lieutenant.

Dan also serves on Lakes and Pines Board, the Regional Emergency Response Board and previously served as Mayor of Zimmerman, and on the Princeton School Board. Dan is currently the President of the Princeton-Zimmerman Farmers Market Association.



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Mike is responsible for the network infrastructure, security and most anything else related to technology in the County. He researches and purchases the computer software and hardware required. He is responsible for Help Desk support including maintenance and training and the management of 300 desktop and mobile workstations, as well as the setup and management of 40 physical and virtual servers at this time. Technical Services is also responsible for the management of the County's telephone system including desktop phones, cell phones and mobile air cards.

Roxy Traxler, Mille Lacs County Administrator

Roxy has served as the Mille Lacs County Administrator since 2008; and as the County Coordinator prior to that in both Mille Lacs County and Le Sueur County. Roxy has worked in the public sector for over 15 years and has experience managing grants, including multiyear projects such as our recently completed energy improvement grant project. She has a MA in Public Administration, and is currently working on her MBA. Roxy has been instrumental in the County's Comprehensive Planning process and the County's LEAN endeavors. She also has experience and training in facilitation, mediation, large group meetings and project management. She has been appointed to the Minnesota Association of County Administrators Executive Board, and currently serves on the Professional Development Committee. As staff lead on this project, she has the experience to work with larger groups, multiple organizations and various people. Ms. Traxler has been the staff lead on the Comprehensive Plan process with a steering committee and 9 task force committees, including residents, business, schools and other organizations. Ms. Traxler has overseen grant projects ranging from capital purchases to energy improvement programs to various state and local programs.