

**Governor’s Task Force on Broadband**

**Tuesday, June 18, 2024**

**10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.**

**Southwest Initiative Foundation**,
15 3rd Avenue NW Hutchinson MN 55350

**Task Force Members in Attendance in Person**: Teddy Bekele; Bruce Crane; Daniel Lightfoot; Briana Mumme; and Melissa Wolf.

**Task Force Members in Attendance Virtually**: Ini Augustine; Steve Fenske; Brian Hood; Adam Hutchens; Paul
McDonald; and Dave Wolf.

**Task Force members Absent**: Gail Hedstrom; Marc Johnson; Phil Stalboerger; and John Twiest.

**Others in Attendance in Person**: Bree Make; Hannah Buckland; Megan Moudry; Marie Zimmerman; and Anna Norcutt Preuss

**Others in Attendance Virtually**: Steven Kraus; Ann Treacy; Ace Wesselmann; Ben Vargas; Tom Karst; Todd Kruse; Samantha Ernst; Joe Buttweiler; Angie Dickison; Kirk Crowshoe; Rebekah Crosby; Jer O Leary; Simon Thorne; Nathan Zacharias; and Scott Cole.

1. **Welcome and Introductions:**
Chair Bekele called the meeting to order, roll call was taken, and an overview of the agenda provided.
2. **Approval of minutes from May 15th 2024 Task Force Meeting**

Meeting minutes from May 15th 2024 were approved.

1. **Southwest Initiative Foundation’s Regional Impact**

Briana Mumme (Economic Development Manager, Southwest Initiative Foundation) and Marie Zimmerman (Communications Officer, Southwest Initiative Foundation) presented on the work and impact of the Southwest Initiative Foundation. Based in Southwest Minnesota, they serve 18 counties and 2 native nations with a regional, community foundation. Their history is based in farming, and the Southwest Initiative Foundation was originally created in 1986 during human and economic suffering in the region. A unique role of the foundation is how they serve as a Rural Development Hub: as they respond to issues and concerns in the region today and into the future; connect folks across issues and siloes; and take a systems-level approach. Questions from Task Force members were on how risks have been taken in their work; and on the types of technical assistance offered.

1. **Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Update**

Bree Maki (Executive Director, OBD) gave an update on the Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program. NTIA has approved Volume I for Minnesota and OBD is working to get that on the office’s website very soon. Had a curing meeting with the review committee for Volume II on 6/17, and one area that needs to be worked on is the low-cost rate for Tribal communities, so OBD is working with Tribal partners to identify an appropriate low-cost rate. OBD is also working to get Volume II approved. Minnesota will be starting the BEAD Challenge process through informational sessions around the state starting on the June 25th, events will be in Detroit Lakes, Chisholm, New Ulm, Rochester, one with Tribal Partners, and a webinar. Weekly office hours will also be held throughout the Challenge process. The Challenge registration portal will be opening on July 15th, and the portal will be launched on July 22nd, though those dates as subject to change. The challenge process is open to local units of government, Tribal, ISP, and non-profits. It will be very important that organizations coordinate a single challenge person. Once MN’s Volume II is approved, the 365-day timeline starts. It would be ideal to get through the Challenge process before Volume II is approved, but OBD does not necessarily expect that. OBD also attended the National Governor’s Association meeting. Legislative changes and direction at the state-level are being incorporated into gating and application processes in the subgrantee selections, figuring out how they fit into those processes versus the Volume plans themselves. Questions from Task Force members were for more details on the Volume II’s 365-day timeline process; and if OBD will be monitoring where in the state people are registering. Tom Karst (MN FPO, NTIA) offered congratulations for Volume I approval.

1. **Digital Opportunity (DO) Update**

Hannah Buckland (Digital Equity Lead, OBD) presented updates on Digital Opportunity (DO). DO has been focused on the Capacity Grant program. It’s a non-competitive, formula grant and was submitted on May 24th, applying for the full allocation of just over $12 million. The first state is expected to receive the first capacity grant award by August 28th. Some challenges for this have been funding caps: can’t use more than 20% on digital equity updates; more than 10% on affordability programs; 5% on evaluation; and 3% on administrative fees. Funds are dispersed across 3 separate NOFOs and applications, and expected to be 50%, 25%, and 25%. OBD is also looking at the Competitive Grant program. OBD is not an applicant for this, but have been keeping an eye on it; there’s no formula for this, and is open to: political subdivisions, agencies, tribes, non-profits, anchor institutes, and workforce programs. The ACP existed in Minnesota January 2022-May 2024 and provided, to eligible households, up to $75 in discounts for tribal lands and $30 for non-tribal households. As of June 1st, 244,916 households no longer have access to that benefit, out of 774,310 eligible. Numbers are not in favor to use the DE capacity grant to support the hole left by ACP given the 10% cap on the Capacity Grant. Other states doing a program to supplement ACP are using BEAD nondeployment dollars since they have access to them, and Minnesota does not have access to those dollars for that use. During the Capacity Grant application process, Minnesota can make updates to the Digital Opportunity plan, and the language on workforce development will be present. Questions from Task Force members on concerns around these grants; and on who may apply.

1. **Broadband Overview**

Bree Maki (Executive Director, OBD) gave an overview on the Office of Broadband Development. Bree promoted the office’s biweekly email blasts, as they provide general office updates, and asked for Task Force members to reach out on ideas/suggestions for the Task Force. Ben Vargas (Broadband Fiscal Liaison, OBD) introduced himself as a new OBD staff. Darielle Dannen in Government Affairs has left DEED after 7 years, and there is a new job posting out there right now. OBD is also working on hiring a .5 FTE for designated legal support for the office. We are in round 3 of Line Extension, and for Grant Round 10 being awarded after July 21st, we had 68 applicants for Low Density and Border-to-Border, and 33 challenges. We also still have projects in rounds 5, 6, and 7 with groundbreaking and site visits currently happening. The Progress Report ending June 30th will be going out from the OBD team soon. OBD is also in the middle of audit from grants in 2022, mostly on processes and how we are staffed. Meetings on this so far has gone well, it has been in some ways a good opportunity to talk about the work that OBD has done.

1. **ConnectedMN, Connectivity and Digital Navigation in Minnesota**

Scott D. Cole (CEO and Co-Founder, Collectivity) presented on Connectivity, ConnectedMN, and digital navigation in Minnesota. Scott provided a review of the impact of ConnectedMN’s work on raising $5.3 million to distribute to 870+ devices and connecting 647+ households to impact 1000s of Minnesota students. Scott talked about how storytelling and sharing on the benefits of being connected through health services and employment opportunities will advance equitable outcomes. Clarification was provided that this work is done separately from OBD. Questions from Task Force Members on challenges the communities are seeing now.

1. **Sub-Group Discussion on future Task Force Meetings**

Chair Bekele explained that starting at the next meeting, the Task Force will get a little deeper on the subgroups: consider agenda items for July, August, and September. Starting to put recommendations forward on the challenges that we are seeing and working on putting that together at the end of the year. Subgroups with members present gave updates. Economic Opportunity & Workforce discussed extending invites to the DEED regions, having the Task Force have a timeline of the broadband project from design to completion as well as the jobs it takes to see those through from inception to completion. Ideas for speakers: presenting on statistics by how present of broadband or lack of impacts economic development. On the workforce side, interested in what programs exist. Interest in understanding how programs exist and how we are moving people from schools into those programs. Mapping, Funding, & Policy discussed future speakers and discussion, specifically around the Ag committees. Subgroups are encouraged to meet before the July 18th meeting and discuss more recommendations subgroups may want to see at the end of the year, and how we want to tackle that as a Task Force and in our topic area. Question on the timeline how the report is generated: goal is to have a report in December or by the end of December, and may need to have a couple of meetings in December to vote on the report. There are usually 3 sections to the report, done in either Word or PowerPoint, (1) the state of the state of MN, what we’ve accomplished, coverage, and goals; (2) challenges we are seeing, and things are not working as expected; (3) gaps and policy changes. In July, Task Force thinks about challenges and recommendations, refine in August and September. In October, start to put together in a collective format. By end of October have a draft of what the document looks like and go through the document. In December, vote on the document to approve and send to governor’s office and members of the legislation branch.

1. **Other Business, July 18th Meeting Plans, Wrap-up**

Chair Bekele opened up to others on open business, questions, and comments for Task Force members and others on the call. There were no questions.

**The meeting adjourned at around 11:55am.**