# Call for Border-to-Border and Low-Density ProgramBroadband Applications

## Program Description and Background

In order to continue to promote broadband infrastructure expansion for areas of Minnesota that remain unserved or underserved, public sector investment is necessary. The Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program was initially established by the 2014 legislature to assist with costly deployment projects that might not occur without public financial assistance. The Low-Density Population Pilot Program was created by the legislature in 2022 and made a continuing program by the legislature in 2023. Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes §§116J.394-116J.398, the State of Minnesota, Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) has the authority to award grants to assist broadband providers with eligible infrastructure installation costs.

## Funding Availability for 2024 (FY 25-Round 10)

The funding available to be awarded to selected Grantees will be approximately $50 million for fiscal year 2025. As designated in the 2023 legislative session, $50 million has been appropriated from the State General Revenue Fund for each of FY 2024 and FY 2025. The legislature designated the distribution of funds of $30 million for the Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program, and $20 million for the Low-Density Population Broadband Development Grant Program.

For the Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program, the funding available to be awarded to selected Grantees will be approximately $30 million and the maximum individual grant amount is $10 million. This was increased from $5 million by the legislature in 2023. The maximum grant funding award cannot exceed 50% of the eligible total project costs. Priority consideration will be given to projects that leverage funding from other community, private and public sources.

For the Low-Density Population Broadband Development Grant Program, the funding available to be awarded to selected Grantees will be approximately $20 million and the maximum individual grant amount is $10 million, and the grant funding award cannot exceed 75% of the eligible total project costs. Priority consideration will be given to projects that leverage funding from other community, private and public sources.

## Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants for this program are an incorporated business or partnership, a political subdivision, an Indian tribe, a Minnesota nonprofit organization organized under chapter 317A, a Minnesota cooperative association organized under chapter 308A or 308B, or a Minnesota limited liability corporation organized under chapter 322C for the purpose of expanding broadband access.

## Eligible Project Areas

Broadband development projects located in unserved or underserved areas are eligible. An unserved area is an area of Minnesota in which households or businesses lack access to wire-line broadband service at speeds that meet the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) threshold of 25 megabits per second (Mbps) download and 3 megabits per second (Mbps) upload. An underserved area is an area of Minnesota in which households or businesses do receive service at or above the FCC threshold of 25 Mbps down and 3 Mbps up but lack access to wire-line broadband service at speeds of 100 Mbps down and 20 Mbps up.

## Eligible Program Costs

The Broadband Development Grant Program can pay up to 50% of the total costs for a qualifying project. The Low-Density Population Broadband Development Grant Program can pay up to 75% of the total costs for a qualifying project. Eligible costs refer to the costs associated with the acquisition and installation of middle mile and/or last mile infrastructure that can support broadband service to speeds of at least 100 Mbps down and 20 Mbps up, scalable to 100 Mbps down and 100 Mbps up.

## Matching Funds Requirement

To obtain a Broadband Development Grant, the applicant must provide for the funding not covered by the grant with matching funds. The match can come from any private and/or public sources that allow for such use and are available to the applicant. The state grant funding period begins after the grant application is received, evaluated, and officially approved by the DEED Commissioner with an award letter and executed grant contract agreement.

## Required Pre-Application Outreach to Other Providers

Minnesota Law 116J.395, subd. 5(9) requires that an application include evidence that no later than six weeks before submission of the application the applicant contacted, in writing, all entities providing broadband service in the proposed project area to ask for each broadband service provider’s plan to upgrade broadband service in the project area to speeds that meet or exceed the State’s broadband speed goals in section 237.012, subd. 1, within the time frame specified in the proposed grant activities. The application is also to include the broadband providers written responses. This means that the required notification to other providers must be completed by April 23, 2024, for an application to be submitted by the last day of the filing window of May 10, 2024. This requirement is in statute and cannot be waived; an application that does not contain the necessary information will not be considered for funding.

## Minnesota Government Data Practices Act

Under Minn. Stat. § 13.599:

* Names and addresses of grant applicants and the amount requested will be public data once proposal responses are opened.
* All remaining data in proposal responses (except trade secret data as defined and classified by § 13.37) will be public data once OBD has completed negotiating all grant contract agreements with the selected Grantees.
* All data created or maintained by OBD as part of the evaluation process (except trade secret data as defined and classified in § 13.37) will be public data once OBD has completed negotiating all grant contract agreements with the selected Grantees.

## Selection Criteria

Applications will be reviewed by Office of Broadband Development staff. Border-to-Border applications are eligible for a maximum 120 reviewer scoring points; Low-Density Program applications are eligible for a maximum 140 reviewer scoring points and will be ranked on the following categories:

* Anticipated broadband improvements – up to 20 points
* Grant funding request amount – up to 10 points\*
* Critical need/Community participation – up to 15 points
* Project readiness – up to 25 points
* Project sustainability – up to 25 points
* Economic development and community impact – up to 15 points
* Broadband adoption assistance – up to 10 points

*\*only applicable to traditional Border-to-Border grant applications*

Additional scoring for Low-Density Program

* Passings per mile – up to 10 points
* Explanation of need for higher funding – up to 15 points
* New application area – up to 5 points

## Application Window and Deadlines for 2024 Grants

The Minnesota Broadband Grant Program is a competitive grant award cycle for funds appropriated by the 2023 legislature. The grant application for the 2024 round will be available on March 12, 2024. The Grant Instructions and Application Guide can be found on DEED’s website <https://mn.gov/deed/programs-services/broadband/grant-program/> and under the “2024 Application Process” tab.

***All applications must be submitted to DEED on or before the application deadline of
May 10, 2024, no later than 1:30 p.m. Central Time***

Applications MUST be COMPLETED and SUBMITTED via [DEED’s Grants Management System](https://mndeedgrants.mn.gov/) on or prior to 1:30 p.m. Central Time on May 10, 2024, to be deemed eligible for funding. The Grants Management System will require an Organization Representative who has contract signing authority for grant contracts with the State of Minnesota to register themselves and their organization in the online Grants Management System as a new user. Once the registration has been approved by DEED, the registrant will have access to log into the Grants Management System and apply for the grant opportunity. Grant opportunities are listed under My Opportunities on the user’s dashboard once they are logged in. The window for registering new users and completing applications begins on March 12, 2024. To comply with Pre-Application Outreach requirement, the window to submit your completed application will begin April 23, 2024. The instructions to accessing and completing and submitting your application via the DEED’s Grants Management System will be located on the same Office of Broadband Development (OBD) web page as above: <https://mn.gov/deed/programs-services/broadband/grant-program/>

Announcement of awards is anticipated in Summer 2024, and awards will have contract end dates of December 31, 2026.

## Application Information Sessions

OBD is hosting an online webinar on Thursday, March 21 at 11:00 a.m. via TEAMS. Registration will be required, register here: [Webinar Registration](https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/1f81c49f-9363-48f0-9448-1aed3890c32b%40eb14b046-24c4-4519-8f26-b89c2159828c)

In the webinar, staff will provide background on the Broadband Infrastructure Development grant programs, walk through the application requirements, and give an overview of the application process utilizing DEED’s Grants Management System. At the end of the session, there will be time for questions. While not required, prospective applicants are encouraged to participate in the information session. A recording of the session along with questions and answers from the webinar will be posted under the Applicant Resources tab of the OBD webpage. <https://mn.gov/deed/programs-services/broadband/grant-program>

## Important Deadlines

* **March 12, 2024** – DEED’s Grant Management System opens to applicants
* **March 21, 2024** –Broadband Grant Round 10 Webinar
* **March 29, 2024**– last day to notify existing providers of applicant’s intent to file an application [required by Minn. Stat. 116J.395, subd. 5(9)]
* **April 23, 2024**– first day an applicant may submit a completed application in DEED’s Grant Management System based on when they completed their pre-application notification
* **May 10, 2024** – window closes so completed applications must be submitted in DEED’s Grant Management System by 1:30 p.m. Central Time
* **May 15, 2024** – challenge process begins
* **June 14, 2024** – challenge process ends at 4:00 pm Central Time
* **Summer 2024** – awards are anticipated to be announced
* **December 31, 2026** – projects need to be competed (contract end date)

## Contact Information

For more information and Grant Instructions and Application Guide, consult our website, under Broadband Grant Program – 2024 Application Process tab. Questions should be submitted to deed.broadband@state.mn.us and will be included in the FAQs posted on the website. Questions may be asked until the submission deadline of 1:30 p.m. central time on May 10, 2024

For technical assistance for the Grants Management System, contact: Grants System Administrator Email: GMS.DEED@state.mn.us.

Individuals with disabilities who need alternative formats can contact DEED at 651-259-7578 for assistance.