

February 28, 2022



Governor Tim Walz
75 Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard, #130
Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55155

Dear Governor Walz:

Over the past two decades, Minnesota residents have learned of the decisive role that high-quality Internet plays in unlocking boundless education, healthcare, public safety, job creation, and economic opportunities. Reliable and affordable broadband can bring a world of information and promise within reach. Likewise, a lack thereof can have a generational impact on families and rippling effects on their communities.

With unprecedented funding available for broadband access and adoption, collaboration between state and local leadership is imperative. Tribal and local governments are uniquely positioned to seek on-the-ground solutions tailored to their community's needs. State support enables local leaders to make the best use of the myriad of resources available to help achieve ubiquitous connectivity.

By elevating residents' voices and fostering increased collaboration between state and local leaders, the Governor's Office could equip local officials with the key resources necessary for achieving their community's broadband ambitions. Congress' historic investment could provide the backbone for monumental state broadband strategies. We strongly encourage the inclusion of Tribal and local perspectives in Minnesota's broadband and digital equity plans, ensuring maximum impact of this historic opportunity for decades into the future.

Next Century Cities supports community-based efforts to ensure that all residents have affordable, reliable, high-speed Internet access. We are a non-profit, nonpartisan organization born of the need to elevate community-level perspectives into broadband policymaking at every level of government.

Our organization is made up of more than 200 members in over 40 states, including Duluth, Gaylord, LeRoy, Monticello, Windom, and Winthrop. The mayors and other local officials in our network have demonstrated expertise in expanding digital infrastructure and developing broadband adoption programs. Many have confronted those challenges in their hometowns, even without state and federal support.

Municipalities understand the far-reaching consequences when residents lack broadband access or cannot afford the subscription price. As Minnesota drafts a roadmap to spend the influx of federal resources, those plans must support local efforts to generate connectivity solutions for themselves, particularly in counties like Koochiching and Aitkin, where there is little financial incentive for traditional providers to build infrastructure.



Incorporating local insights through transparent processes with staff dedicated to support ongoing collaboration could help the state meet the demands of a largely online workforce, increased telemedicine offerings, and schoolwork that requires a fast, resilient Internet connection. State tools that empower local participation can bring resource-strapped communities to the table to determine their path toward widespread connectivity.

Public-private partnerships, free WiFi connection points, and municipally managed infrastructure are only a handful of the innovative solutions that local governments have employed to ensure that every resident and business can access the wealth of benefits and essential services the Internet offers. Local leaders are also determined to paint a more granular picture of what service residents want and need, filling persistent information gaps.

Across Minnesota, local governments are establishing inventive connectivity strategies.

Communities like Blue Earth County made information about residential broadband programs available, ensuring that Minnesota residents have the resources they need to access federal funding opportunities designed to keep them connected to essential services.¹ The City of Duluth is collecting information about residents' needs, painting a more accurate picture of where and why broadband gaps persist.²

The State is distinctly positioned to bolster local access and adoption efforts, expanding initiatives' impact far beyond the strides that any single community can make on its own.

The need is expansive. The timeline is unforgiving. Local governments have made broadband equity a priority and will rely on ongoing partnerships with state leadership to effectuate lasting change.

Respectfully,

Next Century Cities

¹ See Next Century Cities, *Next Century Cities Led a May 14th Emergency Broadband Benefit Day of Action* (May 24, 2021), <https://nextcenturycities.org/ebbdayofactionrecap/>.

² See Reece Lindquist, *City Seeking Public Input With Broadband Survey* (Oct. 8, 2021), https://www.fox21online.com/2021/10/08/city-seeking-public-input-with-broadband-survey/?utm_source=sendgrid&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Newsletters.