

Gov. Evers, U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Announces new investments to help expand access, affordability, and adoption of high-speed internet

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers, together with U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisconsin), the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA), and the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC), today announced that the U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury) approved the state's plans to utilize \$140 million of federal funds from the Capital Projects Fund (CPF) provided by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The funding will be used to support two new grant programs, the Flexible Facilities Program and the Digital Connectivity and Navigators Program, to support high-quality multi-purpose community facilities and help address high-speed internet access, affordability, and adoption in the state.

"We've come a long way to expand access to high-speed internet access in Wisconsin and build the local infrastructure needed to close the digital divide. Thanks to our efforts since 2019, more than 395,000 homes and businesses in Wisconsin will have new or improved service," said Gov. Evers. "Meaningfully investing in expanding high-speed internet access must be one of our top priorities to ensure our industries, families, and communities continue to grow and prosper. With these new programs, we will have more opportunities to invest in the services that ensure both Wisconsinites and our state are prepared to meet the needs of the 21st century."

"High-speed internet is a necessity for Wisconsinites across the state to run their businesses, attend school, manage their farms, and connect with friends and family," said Sen. Baldwin. "I am proud to bring home this investment to connect

families and businesses with reliable broadband—ensuring more Wisconsinites can fully participate in the economy, kids get the education they deserve, and families can connect with loved ones across the world.”

Since 2019, Gov. Evers has allocated more than \$345 million in state and federal funds to expand high-speed internet, including the largest state investment in state history, ensuring that more than 395,000 homes and businesses will have new or improved service. In his most recent budget, the governor recommended allocating \$750 million in state funding to supplement the federal funding being allocated to the state in coming years. Republicans in the Wisconsin State Legislature removed this provision from the final budget that was sent to the governor’s desk. More work remains as, according to the most recent estimates from the Federal Communications Commission, there are more than 224,000 unserved locations and more than 198,000 underserved locations in the state.

According to Treasury, the CPF provides support for critical capital projects that enable work, education, and health monitoring in response to a public health emergency. The investments will help address many challenges laid bare by the pandemic, especially in rural areas, Tribal communities, and low- and moderate-income communities, helping to ensure that all communities have access to the high-quality modern infrastructure, including high-speed internet, needed to access critical services.

Under the [Flexible Facilities Program](#), DOA will award up to \$107 million for local and Tribal governments to construct or improve buildings and purchase digital connectivity equipment. Eligible facilities include public libraries, community centers, and other anchor institutions designed to jointly and directly enable work, education, and health monitoring located in communities with critical need for capital projects.

“When local communities have safe, dependable spaces to work, learn, and gather, our state grows stronger,” said DOA Secretary Kathy Blumenfeld. “The Flexible Facilities Program invests in the development and improvement of these types of spaces, supporting our state’s pandemic recovery efforts.”

The allocation of these funds further demonstrates the commitment to pandemic-recovery community building. In addition to CPF, Gov. Evers has directed more than \$460 million in ARPA State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, which includes the Neighborhood Investment Fund, which is investing \$234 million in 46 competitively

awarded capital projects to help communities deliver innovative public services.

The grant announcement and associated application materials are expected to be available in early 2024. Interested parties can sign up to receive email updates for the Flexible Facilities Program by emailing FlexibleFacilitiesProgram@wisconsin.gov.

Under the Digital Connectivity and Navigators Program, the PSC will award up to \$33 million to non-profit organizations and other eligible entities to deploy computing devices, install Wi-Fi equipment in targeted apartment buildings, and provide digital navigation services to make use of the devices and Wi-Fi for work, education, and health monitoring.

“Access to infrastructure alone is not enough to bridge the digital divide. Connecting people with crucial tools and skills through these programs will allow us to make sure all can participate in the benefits of a more connected state and economy,” said PSC Chairperson Rebecca Cameron Valcq. “I am grateful for the continued state and federal resources that are helping us overcome the challenges brought on by the pandemic.”

In July 2023, Gov. Evers and the PSC announced the Broadband Infrastructure Program, the first of the three projects eligible for CPF grant funding. Last month, Gov. Evers and the PSC [announced](#) the Wisconsin Broadband Office received 124 applications requesting \$221.6 million for the Broadband Infrastructure Grant Program, with only \$42 million available to be awarded. The ratio of requested funding to available funding is the highest for any grant round since the first in 2014, demonstrating high demand for continued investments in the state’s broadband infrastructure.

More information and applications for funding will be available in Spring 2024. Additional background on Treasury’s Capital Projects Fund can be found [here](#).