



GOVERNOR'S
EMPOWER RURAL IOWA
INITIATIVE

Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative
Connecting Rural Iowa Task Force Virtual Meeting Agenda
Monday, September 27
2:30-3:30 PM

1. Roll Call & Introductions:

Lt. Governor Gregg	Sandy Ehrig	Barb Baker
Kevin Cabbage	Dustin Blyth	Katie LaBree
Dennis Fraise	Tom Petersen	Dave Duncan
Curtis Dean	Taylor Teepell	Brian Waller
Billi Hunt	Steve Simons	Michael Ott
Brittany Morales	Rachel Kinnick	Deb Lucht
Ryan Boone		

2. Approval of Minutes:

Minutes of the July 14, 2021 meeting had been distributed for review. Billi Hunt motioned to approve, and Dave Duncan seconded. Passed unanimously.

3. Welcoming Remarks from Lt. Gov. Gregg:

The Lt. Governor thanked all for attending and welcomed new members. Biggest news is the release of \$100 million in broadband grants this year. We have received over \$300 million in applications for those funds. The Governor is willing to use federal funds for broadband to help get more Iowan's connected.

4. Remarks by Co-Chair Sandy Ehrig:

Sandy remarked on the ongoing partnership between the IRDC and ERI, and joint meetings have been valuable. Looking ahead we are planning another joint meeting in December. The recent Iowa Rural Summit was a success, and we are planning to hold the 2022 Summit on April 12-13 at the Gateway Hotel in Ames. The ERI Grow task force has been working on the leadership exchange and will be holding it in person this year on October 26, with a leadership bootcamp on the 27th for those communities wanting to start a leadership program.

5. Overview of Broadband Forward and Telecommute Certificate Programs:

Lisa Connell with IEDA provided overview and status update on the two certification programs, with the Broadband Forward designed to improve community broadband, and the other to recognize a qualifying community as telecommute-ready. The bill points out what a community needs to provide and restrictions.

Rules were approved by IEDA board on August 30 and published last week. Now open for public comment through October 12. Will be presented to legislative rule committee on October 4th, then back to IEDA in November for final approval. We are very open to feedback as we work through process.

Next steps include seeking expertise of a consultant to develop criteria for certification and for review of applications. We are consulting with the OCIO to be sure we are not duplicating efforts. Look to start accepting applications early next year. Will be modeling after the IEDA Certified Sites program and will provide a webpage where someone can locate a qualified community, will provide community signage similar to Home Base Iowa, and will help communities to promote.

Liesl: There is no funding at present so this might be something this committee may want to put forth as a recommendation.

6. Broadband Grant Update:

Dave Duncan provided an overview of the broadband grant program, which was the largest one-time funding program in history with \$97.5 million in grants and \$2.5 million to admin, mapping, testing.

He provided background on previous funding for new members. Over the past three years the legislature has continued to examine and improve and passed broadband funding programs. Grants are based on TSA (targeted service area) map indicating current services available. This year a new map was released, and applications were based on tiers of least to best served areas. Additionally, there was a challenge process involved. There were 178 applications received ranging from \$2,080 to \$21 million, and many areas received multiple applications. On Sept. 15 the awards were announced, many in rural areas.

7. Roundtable Discussion:

Curtis: In discussions with communities, so much emphasis on grants and funding is centered on access and advertised speeds. Need to figure out other factors such as reliability. Some areas are served well above minimum, but are not reliably served at those speeds.

Michael: Fixed applications vs mobile. Looking to work with StarLink on a mobile solution. Fixed solutions for access to small towns. Is there a hybrid opportunity that is available? How to best solve and what is the most efficient use of capital.

Lt. Governor: We are constantly wrestling with the concept of future proofing, and having ubiquitous connectivity. What is the right policy to hit all goals? We've had constant refinements to legislation to try to hit some of those marks but there are many opinions.

Kevin: As a local provider, the grants are a great first step to get the fiber backbone in place. Believes there will always be a combination of wireless and fiber. Role is to build the backbone to handle the high data needs. Excited about precision ag opportunities. Wants to get the fiber to the farm so farmer can use it the best way possible.

Dustin: Agrees with Kevin. AT&T finishing a wireless build in Iowa for FirstNet and when done will allow use of spectrum outside of that. Once closer to finishing he would be happy to provide an overview. Lt Governor: That would be great for a future presentation on broader perspective. Could show where all new towers have gone.

Lt Governor: The \$100 million grant funds primarily went to tier 1 applications – those areas that didn't currently have 25/3 service. It presents a challenge as those are most costly to serve. Optimistic about future, whatever next round of funding looks like we will be making progress to 100/100 across the state.

Rachel: On reliability, in thinking about funding, can we go back to those awarded funding to be sure that reliability is not an issue? Dave: This is tough to define, but of all 39 apps, 38 were for FTTH. Once installed, this is highly reliable, especially if buried.

Kevin: Thinks Rachel is right – thinks we need to look at accountability. Requirements are advertised speed, so need to ensure that what is advertised is what is received. As a local provider, future will require them to do random testing of customers to submit to FCC. Thinks the state could require this too. Reliability hard to define, but accountability is easier. Curtis: Agrees. Requirements for federal could be implemented for state funding rounds. Deb: If they don't hit those requirements, it is a penalty and funds are taken back.

Taylor: Lumen (formerly CenturyLink) is in 50 states and 60 countries. They have been in Iowa for a long time and have invested over \$2.5 billion in the state. They see Iowa as a high growth state and an investment opportunity. Nationwide there is an immense growth in broadband investment.

8. Grant Updates:

In addition to the housing assessment and rural innovation grants, two new grants will also be launching on October 1 – child care assessment grants and a rural return pilot grant program. Applications open Oct 1 for each and are available at iowagrants.gov. Deadline for all is Dec. 1st. Review period will be about two weeks with decisions made by December 22nd.

9. Public Comment:

None

10. Wrap up & Next Steps & Adjourn:

The Lt. Governor asked members to please help spread the word on the grant programs.