



GOVERNOR'S
EMPOWER RURAL IOWA
INITIATIVE

Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative
Connecting Rural Iowa Task Force Meeting Minutes
Thursday, November 18
2-3 PM

1. Roll Call:

Lt. Governor Gregg	Sandy Ehrig	Dave Duncan	Caleb Housh
Hollie McCorick	Dennis Fraise	Kevin Cabbage	Michael Ott
Justin Wagner	Rachael Kinnick	Curtis Dean	Katie LaBree
Brian Waller	Barb Baker	Tom Petersen	

2. Approval of Minutes from October 11, 2021 meeting:

Minutes from the October meeting had been distributed for prior review. Justin Wagner motioned to approve with Rachael Kinnick seconding. Motion carried.

3. Welcoming Remarks from Lt .Gov. Gregg:

The Lt. Governor gave thanked members and gave recap of the Investing meeting held on the 17th at Buena Vista University..

4. Remarks by Co-Chair Sandy Ehrig:

Thanked members for attending and noted broadband has been part of the conversation in all task force meetings this week.

5. USDA Broadband Program Update: Tom Jensen and Darin Leach

Darin is acting USDA state director and Tom assists with loans in Iowa. Timing for today's meeting is good, as on Nov. 24, \$1.15 billion in USDA broadband funding will open for applications across the country through February 22nd. Applications will be competitive. This is round three of the Reconnect program. Iowa has been successful in past rounds with over \$50 million in funding awarded to 11 projects.

Tom did an overview on the Reconnect program. USDA continues to receive additional funds for broadband expansion, so this is ongoing appropriation of funds. This is the third funding round with the first two rounds completed, awarding 180 total projects nationwide. Iowa has done well with loans and grants. Reviewed requirements for

round 3 and who would be ineligible. Environmental reviews must be made, and costs incurred can be covered expenses under the award. Applicants must provide a network design certified by a professional engineer and the project must be able to be completed in five years, delivering the required service criteria including speeds at 100/100. Applications must be submitted online through the RUS application portal on the ReConnect website. Only one application allowed.

Questions:

LG: Is the round 3 funding part of regular programming or from other funds? Tom: We have had infrastructure loans limited to telcos in the past. As ReConnect was designed, there are still funding opportunities for telcos for that, and rounds 1 and 2 included additional federal funding, but round 3 will be more federal funds which dovetails with state funding.

LG: For Reconnect funding, are a certain amount set aside for Iowa or are we competing nationally? Tom: nationally, but Iowa is very competitive.

Justin: Who do you anticipate where most of applications will come from? We would love for this group to empower motivated communities to get something done. Realistically, most will be existing telcos that will build outside of traditional exchanges. They will be building on top of an incumbent who may not provide service.

6. Grant & Program Updates:

Liesl provided an overview of the grant programs and thanked members who are part of the review panel. All programs are now open and due by December 1. These include:

- Rural Innovation Grant Program – Provides up to \$200,000 in grants supporting creative, non-traditional ideas that focus on current issues and challenges faced by rural communities with the themes of community investment, growth, and connection.
- Rural Housing Assessment Grant Program – Provides up to \$100,000 to support the use of publicly available online information through the [“Profile of Iowa”](#) tool and rural community efforts to interpret this hard data with supplemental information, as well as to implement through changes to development codes, local ordinances and housing incentives specific to their community needs in partnership with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.
- Rural Child Care Market Study Grant Program – Provides up to \$100,000 to support the use of data and analysis by rural communities to determine the specific needs and solutions for their area. In partnership with First Children’s Finance, funding from the program will empower communities to assess their current child care market environment and develop strategies.
- Rural Return Program – Provides up to \$100,000 to support creative programming that attracts new residents to move and/or work in rural communities. Grant funding will support the development and implementation of incentive programs.

7. Public Comment: None

8. Adjourn