

Connect Minnesota Launches New Maps and Data Tools for Tapping Broadband Stimulus Dollars



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Newly Released Census Block Data and Rural Map Will Help Applicants Compete for Stimulus Funds

St. Paul, MN: At 4 p.m. EDT, Connect Minnesota will release a new suite of publicly available data tools to enhance Minnesota's statewide broadband inventory map and provide GIS assistance for broadband stimulus applicants. Using ArcGIS technology in partnership with ESRI, Connect Minnesota has developed an interactive mapping feature for applicants to determine the number of households without broadband availability by Census Block. Additionally, a new map depicts rural and remote areas in relation to non-rural areas. These geographic data are required criteria for broadband infrastructure funds now available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

The new interactive tool will allow the general public to click on any Census Block within the state to obtain the number of households served and unserved by a broadband provider within that Census Block. In addition, Connect Minnesota has posted online the downloadable datasets of broadband availability information by Census Block.

The map of rural and remote areas illustrates which geographic areas in Minnesota are considered rural, remote, and non-rural, according to definitions in the federal broadband stimulus rules released on July 1.

Such granular broadband availability and associated geographic information is required to complete the applications for broadband infrastructure grants and loans through the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS.) The data tools will provide state leaders, community advocates, and providers in Minnesota with public access to this information, offering applicants a comprehensive, Census Block-level dataset of broadband availability and a better understanding of areas eligible for broadband stimulus funding.

Currently, approximately \$7 billion in stimulus funds have been designated to help expand broadband access to unserved and underserved communities across the United States. These funds are available through the NTIA's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) and the RUS's Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP).

To learn more or view the maps or data, visit www.connectmn.org.

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About Connect Minnesota: Connect Minnesota is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the broadband-based development of Minnesota. Connect Minnesota is working in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Commerce and other public agencies as well as technology providers to develop a broadband inventory map for the purpose of improving digital inclusion statewide. For more information about Connect Minnesota, visit www.connectmn.org.