



STATE OF WISCONSIN

CAPITAL PROJECTS FUND



2023 Annual Performance Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury) approved the State of Wisconsin’s (Wisconsin or State) Capital Projects Fund Broadband Infrastructure Projects program on October 6, 2022. The Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC) will award and administer the subrecipient grants on behalf of the State. On July 13, 2023, Governor Evers and the PSC announced the opening of the Broadband Infrastructure Program scheduled for August 14, 2023.

During the reporting period ending June 30, 2023, Wisconsin focused on program development, including data collection, hiring staff, and creating a grant application. Wisconsin hired two full-time positions dedicated to the program, a grant specialist-advanced, and a communications specialist.

Staff time has been dedicated to initial outreach and engagement efforts by the outreach staff. Much of this outreach has been paired with outreach efforts related to Digital Equity and Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) planning; the Capital Projects outreach staff has been participating in outreach meetings and engaging local communities in planning efforts for Capital Project Fund programs. Staff time has been dedicated to developing the grant application, including eligibility and scoring criteria, application questions, and program timelines. Pre-announcement activities are wrapping up, and the Broadband Office expects to open its Broadband Infrastructure grant round during fall of this year.

There have been staff capacity and sequencing challenges related to developing CPF programming and application materials while administering the annual State Broadband Expansion Grant round and planning efforts related to the BEAD, and Digital Equity programs. Additionally, the process to procure a contractor to collect affordability and access data that will inform program design, eligibility and scoring has been lengthy and complex.

Program Information

Approved Program Plan number	CPF_GP-000131
Program start date	October 6, 2022
Program end date	December 31, 2026
Actual CPF funds allocated to this Program	\$43,350,000 (\$42,000,000 in awarded subgrants)



Governor Tony Evers visits with stakeholders from the Vernon Communications Cooperative to highlight investments in Broadband Access Grants.

USES OF FUNDS

As of June 30, 2023, no funding has been awarded to subgrantees. The only incurred costs are administrative, related to staff time for a full-time grant specialist, a full-time communications specialist, and partial allocations of other PSC staff dedicated to data, policy, management, and compliance.

Since Treasury's approval, the PSC has hired several staff members to develop and execute the Broadband Infrastructure Projects program. Hired staff and their roles include:

- The Grants Specialist performs program management, program planning, data analysis, monitoring and evaluation, policy, and procedure development. The position provides technical assistance and outreach to eligible recipients on submission of grant applications and monitors and reports on the use of grant funds.
- The Communications Specialist performs program communications and outreach to communities, and target populations statewide, including developing outreach material, community engagement activities and events, and interpretation of federal and state laws, regulations, and policies.
- The Broadband Intelligence Product Owner manages vendor contracts related to data, mapping and analysis that provides the State granular data related to broadband access, affordability and adoption and communities most impacted by the pandemic.
- The CPF project also includes work by a broadband office program and policy analyst. The Broadband Analyst's work involves analyzing grant proposals and associated data considering federal and state requirements, draft memoranda and other materials for the record in PSC grant proceedings, developing spreadsheets, matrices, and other tools for the PSC to sort large amounts of data and information about grant proposals and researching CPF policy questions and developments.



Governor Tony Evers presents a ceremonial check for \$6 million to the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa to help expand access to high-speed internet in the area.

Additional allocated time from PSC management contributes to CPF program development.

During the next reporting period, the PSC expects to solicit and review grant applications, award \$42 million in funding for Broadband Infrastructure Project grants, and begin post-award functions related to reimbursement, compliance, and monitoring.

One challenge has been the inability to share Broadband Serviceable Location Fabric (BSLF) data with potentially eligible grantees because of delays in access to license agreements with CostQuest Associates (CQA). As of July 17, 2023, CQA licenses have not yet been made available for providers operating in Wisconsin, and the Broadband Office is prohibited from sharing BSLF data with providers operating under Treasury programs, despite July 31, 2023, reporting deadlines.

Issues due to staff capacity and sequencing challenges related to developing CPF program and application materials are expected to persist. The PSC must also administer the annual State Broadband Expansion Grant round and planning efforts related to the BEAD and Digital Equity programs. While capacity is growing as the Broadband Office recruits additional staff, strict BEAD program timelines will limit the ability to administer grants beginning in 2024. Additionally, there is a complex procurement process to hire a contractor that collects affordability and access data to inform program design, eligibility and scoring. A contractor has been procured and onboarded and will deliver relevant data within the next few months.

PROMOTING EQUITABLE OUTCOMES

The Broadband Infrastructure Program will seek to address the critical gaps in infrastructure access that has affected vulnerable communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the program will seek to address affordability barriers to meaningful internet access by prioritizing capital projects in areas with relatively greater broadband affordability challenges, where broadband subscription costs are shown to be burdensome for a significant share of residents. Eligible applicants must demonstrate that the proposed communities to be served have critical needs related to work, education, and health monitoring that their proposed project would address.



Governor Tony Evers visits the Reedsburg Utility Commission to discuss how Broadband Access Grants are helping to extend reliable, affordable, high-speed broadband communications services to underserved areas of the state.

LABOR

Each grant recipient will execute a grant agreement contract effectuating their grant award. The grant agreements incorporate requirements related to nondiscrimination in hiring practices, reporting of workforce plans and workforce practices, and appropriate treatment of overtime work.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The grantmaking process will occur as part of an open PSC proceeding, with all documents available for public viewing on the PSC docket [5-CPF-2023 through the Electronic Records Filing System \(ERF\)](#). Members of the public, potential grantees, and other interested stakeholders are welcome to submit letters of support with applications and participate in an objection period by filing comments through the system. The PSC will conduct outreach to potential grantees, including press releases, newsletters, webinars, and targeted engagement with stakeholders and current broadband grant recipients.

CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLIANCE

Each grant recipient will execute a grant agreement contract effectuating their grant award. The grant agreements will incorporate state and federal requirements related to nondiscrimination and affirmative action requirements, including but not limited to, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), 42 U.S.C. 2000d-1 et seq., and the Department's implementing regulations, 31 C.F.R. part 22; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), 29 U.S.C. 794; Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), 20 U.S.C. 1681 et seq., and the Department's implementing regulations, 31 C.F.R. part 28; Age Discrimination Act of 1975, 42 U.S.C. 6101 et seq., and the Department's implementing regulations at 31 C.F.R. part 23. The State intends to provide all information relevant to the applicable requirements to achieve Title VI compliance once the program grant activities commence.

