Champion Report

Theme Area: **Connectivity**

Champions: Pam Mahling, Janelle Riley, Kevin Larson, Kristi Westbrock, Stacey Stockdill, Sally Fineday, Paul Drange, Anna Gruber, Janet Johnson, Rich Utech, Michael Amick, Matt Killian, Mary Gottsch, Sheila Haverkamp, Megan Rehbein, Maureen Ideker

REPORTING PERIOD: October 15, 2014 through January 5, 2015

What NEW success have you had in moving your theme goals forward over the reporting period?	
Goal 1: All Action Steps	**We prepared a proposal for the state Border to Border broadband application.** The Resilient Region/Virtual Highway project proposal is for Consolidated Telephone to build a strategic fiber backbone down to Fort Ripley Township and up through Fairview Township, as part of a longer-range plan for reaching the unserved and underserved broadband "last miles" of our region. This first step was chosen because, given the short timeline for this application, that this was the backbone area that was truly shovel ready, ready with an engineering plan.
	We received a $100,000 investment from NJPA to support the work of the Virtual Highway Project. CTC, WTCA, Todd County and LLBO all bid on the **FCC Rural Broadband Experiment** auction but were not winners. However, "it isn't over till it's over" and there is still money available as 6 winners didn't provide the required information (3 years audited financials and engineering plans) and several others are asking for waivers. So the FCC asked all of the bidders to send in that information and will continue with the auction for all that do, and also reserve those areas for a later auction if they don't win this one. So we shall see!
	We were successful in becoming a Blandin Broadband Community. This will provide technical training and up to $40,000 a year for the next 2 years to support regional projects. We were asked to develop a steering committee, so the Connectivity Champions have been expanded to include: Michael Amick (CTC), Matt Killian/Mary Gottsch Brainerd Lakes Chamber of Commerce, Sheila Haverkamp/Megan Rehbein Brainerd Lakes Area Economic Development Corporation (BLAEDC), and Maureen Ideker Director of Telehealth for Essentia Health. BTW: Maureen Ideker has been very busy moving telehealth forward in rural Minnesota with this recent USDA grant. Congratulations Maureen! http://ehrintelligence.com/2015/01/05/usda-grant-adds-21-rural-clinics-to-telehealth-network/
	Many members of the Connectivity/Virtual Highway Project attended the Blandin Foundation's Border to Border Broadband conference in November 2014. We continued to develop relationships with Blandin foundation staff, other Blandin Broadband Communities, and Danna Mackenzie and Diane Wells (Office of Broadband). The Virtual Highway Project video was featured at the opening session https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aGx572Juvc&feature=youtu.be
	We prepared a press release to support Governor Dayton's proposal to use a portion of the state's surplus to build rural broadband infrastructure.
	We connected with Bill Stroot (**Pequot Lakes** Broadband task force), Darwin Hanson (former **Long Lake** Township Supervisor), Councilman Alex Weego, **City of Hewitt**, and Terry Anderson, Senator Carrie Ruud and Commissioner Paul Theide (**Jenkins**) regarding broadband infrastructure needs in their region-five communities.
	We supported proposals prepared by Long Prairie, BLAEDC, and Lakewood Health Systems and identified federal funding opportunities to support broadband expansion.

How are you working with any of the other RR Theme areas?
All champions have been asked to hold March 17 for a community-wide visioning session (a requirement for the Blandin Broadband Community project to be facilitated by Bill Coleman and Karl Samp to identify projects.

List any Goals or Recommendations within the plan that your team of theme Champions are struggling to address?
How to truly serve the needs of the region and make sure that the system is sustainable and scale-able.

Connectivity

Connectivity Issue
Connectivity: Extending high-speed internet access to the entire region increases telecommuting opportunities, provides greater access to customers and markets for businesses, and allows all residents access to civic resources and commerce.

Connectivity Issue Goal
Connectivity: The number of households in the region served by high-speed internet services rises from the current level of 40% to 95% served. The (region/rural areas) community is willing to invest to increase coverage. This will include both public and private investment in service.

Recommendation 1
*Access across the region***: Ensure all households in the region have high-speed internet access which meets common state standards.**
Action Step 1A
Access: Promote, support and develop high-speed internet access throughout region for telecommuting, educational benefits, and supporting business activity.

Recommendation 2
Efficiency: **Local units of governments will work across political boundaries to share equipment costs/facilities for more efficient delivery of high-speed internet.**
Action Step 2A
Efficiency in installation: Lay conduit for fiber optics when upgrading sewer and water or digging trench.

Recommendation 3
*Access for entrepreneurs***: Provide access to technology needs and support to retain businesses and encourage potential entrepreneurs**

Action Step 3A
Economic development: Determine the compatibility and interface between communications, smart grid technologies, and internet systems. Develop a recruiting initiative encouraging technology-oriented companies to explore opportunities offered in non-urban spaces.

Telecommuting: Create a business plan that facilitates legitimate telecommuting jobs and promotes high-speed internet connection in the region. Upgrade and expand high-speed internet infrastructure in housing so residents may work from home.
Action Step 3C
Map of access sites: Develop map or list of accessible sites within region to conduct web-type meetings, free Wi-Fi etc.

Action Step 3B

Recommendation 4
Access for children: **All school aged children will have access to a computer with high-speed internet capabilities.**
Action Step 4A
Support sites: Make available sites providing educational, internet, support, financial resources, etc.

Recommendation 5
Funding: **Identify and pursue state, federal, and philanthropic grants to fund connectivity recommendations.**