



RESOLUTION # 12-7/23

TO: HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE LA CROSSE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

ITEM # 711

BOARD ACTION

Adopted: 
For: 24
Against: 0
Abstain: 0
Abs/Excd: 0
Vote Req: 1
Other Action:     

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ACTION

Adopted: 
For: 8
Against: 0
Abstain: 0
Abs/Excd: 1

RE: APPROVE USE OF AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) FUNDING FOR BROADBAND CONSULTANT

WHEREAS, La Crosse County was allocated \$22,923,224 through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, which must be obligated by the end of 2024 and spent by the end of 2026; and,

WHEREAS, the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin is committed to equitable access to broadband service as high-performance broadband is essential for participation on society, for health and for the economic development of our state; and,

WHEREAS, the State of Wisconsin has developed a plan to expand broadband access through the use of data, infrastructure investments, a digital equity and inclusion framework, and partnership and capacity building; and,

WHEREAS, La Crosse County became eligible to apply for and receive state grants by becoming a Telecommuter Forward! Community, a Broadband Forward! Community, and forming a Broadband Committee; and,

WHEREAS, as part of the February 6, 2023 planning meeting, the La Crosse County Board of Supervisors prioritized the use of \$100,000 of ARPA funds for a broadband consultant; and,

WHEREAS, a request for proposal (RFP) was released on April 12, 2023, proposals were received by May 10th, with vendor interviews held on June 6, 2023.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the La Crosse County Board approves the allocation of up to \$98,200 of American Rescue Plan Act funding for data collection, market analysis, stakeholder engagement, demand aggregation, marketing, an engineering assessment, digital equity and inclusion analysis, grant development services and a strategy plan; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the La Crosse County Board of Supervisors approves Design Nine as the vendor for the project; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the County Administrator, County Board Chair, Finance Director and County Clerk are authorized to take all appropriate actions to effectuate the propose of this resolution subject to the approval as to form by County Corporation Counsel.

FISCAL NOTE:

Costs totaling \$98,200 will be tracked in division 295.770.3744 within the County financial system, Account 60755.00.

Date: 7/12/23
[Signature]
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Date: 7-12-23
[Signature]
RECORDING CLERK

Reviewed Only: [Signature]
Recommended: JK
Not Recommended:     
Requested By: County Administrator
Date Requested: July 3, 2023
Drafted By: County Administrator

Adopted by the La Crosse County Board this 20 Day of July, 2023

STATE OF WISCONSIN
COUNTY OF LA CROSSE

I, Ginny Dankmeyer, County Clerk of La Crosse County do hereby certify that this document is a true and correct copy of the original resolution required by law to be in my custody and which the County Board of Supervisors of La Crosse County adopted at a meeting held on the 20th day of July 2023.

[Signature]
Ginny Dankmeyer, La Crosse County Clerk

## Recommendation for Approval

Standing Committee: Executive Committee

Department: Zoning, Planning & Land Information and UW Extension

Subject: Broadband Community Assessment Study

### Background information:

The project provides a countywide assessment of current services and pinpoints areas that are unserved or underserved for broadband services as outlined by the Governor's Taskforce on Broadband. For this assessment project, "unserved" is defined as households or businesses lacking access to wireline broadband services. For this assessment project, "underserved" is defined as households or businesses lacking access to wireline broadband services, at speeds that meet the FCC threshold of 25Mbps of download and 3Mbps of upload speeds. The assessment will also look at digital equity and inclusion to inventory the programs and support available within the County to ensure that digital technologies are affordable and accessible to all.

This project could have a lasting and transformative impact on La Crosse County's residents by ensuring they have access to digital commerce, telehealth, online education, and digital media and will help to bridge the digital divide.

At present, according to the 2022 Wisconsin's Information System for Education data dashboard, La Crosse County has approximately 2,990 students that have partially or completely unreliable internet access, which is roughly 18% of the entire K-12 student population. According to one health services provider in La Crosse County, approximately 20% of video appointments are interrupted due to broadband and connectivity issues. Currently, they are working to quantify the costs to both the institution and the patient. According to a 2014 study (Sosa, 2014) MSA's with widely available (>50%) gigabit service access, the per capita GDP is approximately 1.1% higher. The La Crosse / Onalaska MSA does not fall into this category due to the < 50% availability of 1Gbps services. Based on these factors, the La Crosse County community and residents would stand to benefit from pursuing ways to increase broadband connectivity.

Funding would be used for:

- Data Collection
- Market Analysis
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Demand Aggregation
- Marketing
- Engineering Assessment
- Digital Equity and Inclusion Analysis
- Grant Development Services
- Strategy Plan

### Evaluation information:

The Request For Proposal (RFP) was released on April 12, 2023. The RFP was placed on the County RFP webpage and advertised in the La Crosse Tribune. The RFP was sent directly to five (5) vendors and posted on the Demand Star website. On April 26<sup>th</sup> a vendor conference was held. At the vendor conference the County presented expectations and conducted a question & answer session.

Proposals were due on May 10<sup>th</sup> and three (3) proposals were received. The Evaluation Team met on May 17<sup>th</sup> to review the proposals. The Evaluation Team consisted of the County Board Chair, County Administrator,

Zoning & Planning Administrator, IT Director, Community Development Specialist, UW Community Development Educator, and the Purchasing Manager. The Evaluation Team advanced two (2) vendors to the interview stage. Vendor interviews took place on June 6<sup>th</sup>.

Proposals were evaluated on the following criteria:

Qualifications	100
Scope of Work	100
Financial Plan	100
<u>Interview</u>	<u>300</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>600</b>

<b>Vendor</b>	<b>Evaluation Score</b>	<b>Financial</b>
Design Nine	556	\$98,200
Lit Communities	505	\$90,050
mPower Consulting	Did not Interview	\$165,000 - \$265,000

Primary strengths of the recommended vendor:

- 1.) Project management approach will be very engaged with county staff, the La Crosse County Broadband Committee (LCBC), and the public (including major stakeholders). Design Nine will utilize a state-of-the-art project management software that will allow staff and the LCBC to stay engaged and informed throughout the entire process.
- 2.) Strategic planning will include recommendations AND customized processes based on experience that will be crucial for staff and the LCBC to follow-through with projects and recommendations as a result of the final plan.
- 3.) Grant assistance and project financing approach will enable La Crosse County to take full advantage of the vast array of funding programs available, enabling La Crosse County to have the most impactful result that will achieve our goals.
- 4.) Experience is extensive and includes partnerships with other Wisconsin Counties that have had great successes. Design Nine also has extensive experience working with rural communities which will be a significant need of La Crosse County's.

**Recommendation / Action Requested:**

Based on the evaluation score, the Evaluation Team recommends Design Nine for the Broadband Community Assessment Study

# 3.1 ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

## A. LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

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***Design Nine has been in the business of helping municipalities achieve their broadband goals for over 25 years.*** We would look forward to the opportunity to work with La Crosse County in the effort to bring better broadband to the County. Our unique expertise allows us to look at your challenges and apply exactly the right resources to deliver an integrated solution that helps you successfully obtain better broadband for all your residents and businesses.

We have worked in 29 states and recently completed an eighteen county study in the New North Region of Wisconsin, as well as studies Marathon, Dodge, and St. Croix counties. New North's project was completed in four months and included a direct mailing of a broadband survey to 500,000 homes.

We provide the following services:

- Assessment of your current broadband infrastructure and services
- Realistic business, financial, and grant planning for a network in your unserved/underserved areas
- Technical designs that are "grant ready" and that will help attract and retain jobs and businesses
- Detailed recommendations for management and operations of the new infrastructure
- Expert advice and the right technical specifications for grant applications
- Public/private partnership development, ISP and WISP negotiations, and evaluation of ISP/WISP proposals

High speed broadband is a critical infrastructure component of 21st century communities. Design Nine specializes in assisting local governments with the development of a strategic broadband road map. We will help you identify grant opportunities. Then we provide the data, maps, and cost estimates that you will need for grant applications. We also help you develop public/private partnerships with Internet Service Providers who can effectively utilize grants to extend high speed broadband to under served and unserved citizens. We are experts at providing infrastructure recommendation that improve broadband without the County having to get into the retail broadband business.

Our planning studies have led to tens of millions of dollars of successful grant applications. We look forward to helping La Crosse County develop affordable options for providing better Internet connectivity to all your citizens, businesses, and institutions. Those solutions will fit in with your goals of enhancing the County's quality of life while helping close the digital equity gap.

***Broadband planning is what we do every day and it is our only business.***

Best regards,



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