ConnectedMN Communications FAQ

To: ConnectedMN Applicants, Minnesota Community Members, and Media Outlets
From: Partnership for a ConnectedMN
Last updated: July 30, 2020

Overall Partnership

What is ConnectedMN?
- Partnership for a Connected Minnesota, also known as ConnectedMN, is a public-private partnership that aims to ensure that students from disinvested communities across the state, both rural and urban, have the technology necessary to participate in school and obtain access to essential resources like telemedicine. The group is raising funds from corporate, philanthropic and individual donors. The Partnership's first initiative is a round of grantmaking in support of bridging Minnesota's digital divide in education.

Who founded ConnectedMN?
- ConnectedMN was founded by Best Buy, Blandin Foundation, Comcast, Minnesota Business Partnership, and the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation, in collaboration with the Office of Minnesota Governor Tim Walz and Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan.

Are there other organizations helping this cause?
- Yes. To date, business and philanthropic leaders have collectively committed $1.93 million since ConnectedMN was launched in June. In addition to contributions made by the founding partners, other organizations have already committed dollars or resources to this important program.
- These organizations include Accenture, Andersen Corporation, Boston Scientific, Bush Foundation, Ecolab, EY, Fred C. and Katherine B. Andersen Foundation, Land O'Lakes, Mardag Foundation, Minneapolis Foundation, Protolabs Foundation, Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation, Securian Financial, SPS Commerce Foundation, Vantage Financial and Xcel Energy.

  You can find a list of all the companies that are supporting this partnership on the ConnectedMN website [here](#).

  Additionally, ConnectedMN accepts donations from individual donors at [GiveMN](#).

Why focus on devices and internet connectivity?
- Today, technology touches every aspect of lives, but not all have adequate access to it. A study published this year by Common Sense Media and Kids Action estimates that in Minnesota 250,000 students lack high-speed internet and 163,000 students lack adequate devices for remote learning, both of which are essential for academic learning, out-of-school activities and critical services such as telehealth.
- Through grants, ConnectedMN aims to help supply students with the tech tools they need for this school year. The partnership will fund innovative solutions to device and connectivity barriers, so students have the tools necessary to connect and engage

around school, boost their physical and mental health, and explore future career pathways.

How will ConnectedMN help students across the state?
- Partnership for a ConnectedMN provides funding to eligible applicants in Minnesota to support projects designed to ensure K-12 students in high-need and/or underserved communities have computing devices, access to the internet, and educational support.

Why did you decide to form this partnership now?
- Whatever school looks like this fall, this partnership will help us fill in the gaps that existed before COVID-19. We know there is an immediate need for technology whether kids are learning in schools, at home, or engaging in a hybrid learning model.
- The Governor and Lieutenant Governor have prioritized the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) dollars to meet technology and connectivity challenges, with approximately $14 million earmarked for districts to prioritize devices and connectivity. The goal of working together – the state and ConnectedMN – is to share information to ensure that each dollar stretches as far as possible to reach as many Minnesota students and families – ultimately ensuring more students are set up for success.

How has recent public focus on racial and systemic injustice contributed to the development of this partnership?
- Addressing structural racism and how it contributes to the inequity in our state is a critical component of this work. We commit to regularly evaluating and adjusting ConnectedMN tactics to ensure the work is relevant and responsive to the needs of Minnesota's communities that are inclusive of Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

When will devices be distributed to students and families?
- The process of technology distribution will be different on a grant-by-grant basis.
- For this round of funding, applicants will have one year to spend their grant dollars. We anticipate most will spend their dollars quickly due to the nature of the pandemic and immediate need of getting students connected.

The role of the Governor's Office

What role does the Governor's Office play in the partnership?
- The founding partners are working in collaboration with the Office of Governor Tim Walz and Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan to identify and focus resources on school districts, nonprofits and community partners that are most in-need of computing devices and internet connectivity.

Are taxpayer dollars being used for this initiative?
- No taxpayer dollars are being contributed to the fund, and the Governor and State do not have a role in fundraising or directing funds for ConnectedMN.

Is public sector funding being contributed to this fund?
- We are working in collaboration with the Governor's Children's Cabinet, but public sector funding is not being contributed to this fund.

In general, are public dollars being used toward devices and connectivity?
- The Governor and Lieutenant Governor have prioritized the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) dollars to meet technology and connectivity challenges, with approximately $14 million earmarked for districts to prioritize devices and connectivity.

  MDE has prioritized distributions of GEER and the discretionary Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund dollars to districts with the highest numbers of students receiving special education, students of color, homeless students, English language learners, and students who qualify for free-and-reduced-price meals. Districts applying for these funds should visit MDE's website.

Why a public and private partnership?
- The goal of working together – the state and ConnectedMN – is to share information to ensure that each dollar stretches as far as possible to reach as many Minnesota students and families – ultimately ensuring more students are set up for success.

Expertise

How were the founding partner organizations selected?
- Each founding partner was brought into the partnership due to their established expertise and dedication to ensuring students around the state have access to the technology they need to be successful.

What are each of the founding partners contributing to the partnership?
- In addition to donating dollars and in-kind contributions, founding partners are leading different workstreams with additional partners on several initiatives – from grantmaking to support local initiatives, securing partnerships with device providers to working on broadband connections in greater Minnesota.

Applying for funds

Who can apply for funds?
- This initial grant opportunity is available to:
  - 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations and programs focused on supporting the school learning experience of high-need and/or underserved K-12 students
  - Minnesota's tribal governments and four Bureau of Indian Education contract schools,
  - Organizations who are members of eligible telecommunications clusters (METN) under the Telecommunications/Internet Access Equity Aid statute MS 125B.26. These organizations are included in the current "Minnesota

Telecommunications/Internet Access Equity Aid Program Cluster Address List FY 2020" found on the MDE communications/Internet Access Equity Aid Program Cluster Address List FY 2020" found [here](#).

- These grants are designed to complement resources provided to schools in the State of Minnesota.

- Grants will not be made directly to schools or school districts. Organizations working in partnership with particular schools or districts are encouraged to apply.

How can I submit a proposal to receive technology and/or internet support?
- The RFP Application materials can be found at [connectedmn.us](#). Materials should be prepared simply and economically, trying not to exceed five pages, excluding attachments.
- Materials should be submitted electronically as Word or PDF documents via email. Materials must be emailed to connectedmn@spmcf.org by Tuesday, September 1, 2020.

When will the application for funds be available? When is the application deadline?
- The application for the funds will go live on Friday, July 31.
- Applications will be due Tuesday, September 1, 2020.
- Decisions will be made by Monday, September 14, 2020, and funds will be distributed by the end of September.

Are schools or school districts eligible to apply?
- Partnership for a ConnectedMN will provide funding to eligible applicants in Minnesota to support projects designed to ensure K-12 students in high-need and/or underserved communities have computing devices, access to the internet, and educational support.
- Applicants are defined as 501(c)3 nonprofits focused on supporting the school learning experience of K-12 students, tribal governments and Bureau of Indian Education contract schools, and METN telecommunication clusters.
- Grants will not be made directly to schools or school districts. Organizations working in partnership with particular schools or districts are encouraged to apply.

Can students and families sign up for the program?
- Partnership for a ConnectedMN provides funding to eligible applicants in Minnesota to support projects designed to ensure K-12 students in high-need and/or underserved communities have computing devices, access to the internet, and educational support.
- Applicants are defined as 501(c)3 nonprofits focused on supporting the school learning experience of K-12 students, tribal governments and Bureau of Indian Education contract schools, and METN telecommunication clusters.
- Families and individuals cannot apply directly to this fund.

Distributing funds

How will need be identified? How will need be prioritized?
- Partnership for a ConnectedMN will use the following criteria to determine project selection:
  - Impact on students in high-need and/or underserved communities, including students that are Black, Indigenous and People of Color, students from low-income families, and students residing in rural Minnesota.
  - Capacity of grantee to deliver on outcomes of the Partnership for a ConnectedMN:
    - Students in high-need communities have tech devices, ensuring more equitable access to educational resources – now and in the future;
    - Young people in both rural and urban communities have reliable, affordable broadband access;
    - Students and providers have the tools to connect and engage around school, physical and mental health and future career pathways.
  - Partnership: How does the proposal reflect the interests and input, talents and contributions of key local partners, including families, educators, school administrators and tribal entities?
  - Innovation: In what ways does the project reflect innovative approaches or collaboration?

- Geographic diversity will be taken into account to ensure that both rural and urban students benefit.

How many organizations will you give to?
- While the number of organizations that will be served by the first round of grantmaking by ConnectedMN is not fixed, ConnectedMN aims to help supply students with the tech tools they need for this school year. The partnership will fund innovative solutions to device and connectivity barriers so students have the tools necessary to connect and engage around school, boost their physical and mental health, and explore future career pathways.

What will the range of the awards be?
- The maximum grant size is $150,000. Funds must be spent within twelve months.

Should communities look to the Partnership as a source of funding for broadband infrastructure projects?
- No. To date the Partnership has raised $1.93 million toward a $2 million goal for its first round of grantmaking. These private donations are intended to augment the approximately $14 million of public funding earmarked for school districts to prioritize devices and connectivity through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief fund. Investing in network infrastructure is beyond the scope of this initiative. Look here for information on the state's border to border broadband grant program: https://mn.gov/deed/programs-services/broadband/grant-program/

Program Support

Will students and families have access to tech support?
- We are still working through details, but our goal is to make sure that families are supported with all of their needs, including tech support. Projects focused on tech support resources will be considered for funding.

Getting involved

I'm an organization. How can I contribute to the fund?
- If you are a company or philanthropic organization that wants to support this partnership, please reach out to Dustin Moretz at dustin.moretz@spmcf.org for more details, or visit connectedmn.us.

I have connections to devices and/or internet connectivity infrastructure. What's the best way to contribute?
- If you are a company or philanthropic organization that wants to support this partnership, please reach out to Dustin Moretz at dustin.moretz@spmcf.org for more details, or visit connectedmn.us.

I'm an individual. How can I contribute to the fund?
- If you wish to make a personal donation, please visit the ConnectedMN GiveMN website for more information.