

Minnesota Senate



Minnesota House of Representatives

March 7, 2022

Dear Governor Walz and Lt. Governor Flanagan:

We are writing to share Saint Paul's priorities for investment through the Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund.

The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the extent to which many households of Minnesota, including in the Twin Cities metro, are digitally disconnected. Many households are not connected to affordable, high-quality, high-speed broadband in their homes, do not have access to the technology devices they need, and/or do not have the skills or support needed to successfully navigate online. The pandemic highlights the ongoing need to make sure *everyone* in our state can fully participate in digital life.

The Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund (CCPF) provides Minnesota with a one-time opportunity to make investments that will have generational impacts. This letter outlines our policy priorities and identifies high-priority eligible projects in Saint Paul.

Invest in Racial Equity

We strongly urge you to use a racial equity lens by prioritizing investments that benefit Minnesota's BIPOC residents, including residents of our BIPOC-majority city.

According to the [National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#), policies which direct digital divide spending solely to rural infrastructure, without parallel investment in broader digital inclusion programs for both urban and rural residents, are inequitable to communities of color and help perpetuate the digital exclusion of those communities' members from employment opportunities, education, healthcare services, financial and commercial access, and social and civic participation.

The CCPF Treasury guidance states:

- Recipients are strongly encouraged to consider individuals and communities in greatest need.
- Historically disadvantaged communities have experienced disproportionately poor work, education, and health outcomes, in part due to lack of access to equitable resources and opportunities in these areas.
- Targeting relief is in line with Executive Order 13985, "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government," which laid out an Administration-wide priority to support "equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality."

Priority #1 - \$10M - Capital Investment in Hayden Heights and Riverview libraries

We request a \$10 million investment in the transformation of two public libraries to expand access to technology-rich community sites of education, work, and health monitoring.

- Hayden Heights Library: 58% BIPOC, 81% workers hold less than Bachelor's degree
- Riverview Library: 42% BIPOC, 68% workers hold less than Bachelor's degree
- Builds upon Saint Paul Public Library partnerships with Ramsey County Workforce and the University of St. Thomas Morrison Family College of Health.
- Exemplary model of CCPF's criteria for Multi-purpose Community Facilities that enable education, work, and health monitoring.
- Shovel-ready library renovation projects serving the Greater East Side and West Side neighborhoods of Saint Paul, as well as the surrounding areas of suburban Ramsey County, Washington County, and Dakota County.

To our knowledge, there are no other Federal resources that will fund the needs described in the Multi-purpose Community Facilities section of the CCPF guidance. Given the unique opportunity in this funding source, and we request that investment in this category be prioritized.

Relevant Treasury guidance:

- *Projects to construct or improve buildings that are designed to jointly and directly enable work, education, and health monitoring are eligible for funding.*
- *Projects to construct or improve libraries that provide public access to the internet for purposes including work, education, and health monitoring are eligible.*

Priority #2 - \$10M - Grant funding to support Digital Connectivity Technology Projects in Saint Paul

We request an allocation of at least \$10 million in grant funding to support digital connectivity technology projects in Saint Paul.

Many Ramsey County and Saint Paul residents lack the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy. For example, in Ramsey County:

- 22,492 households are without home internet
- 24,032 households have a cellular data plan only
- 7,668 of households with incomes lower than \$20,000, are without an internet subscription
- 11,211 of households with incomes between \$20,000 and \$74,999, are without an internet subscription
- 13,773 households are without any device
- 17,733 households have a smartphone as their only device.

The City of Saint Paul and Ramsey County are currently co-convening a "Connectivity Roadmap" project to develop actionable recommendations, grounded in community voice and data, that will advance digital equity for residents. The report will be complete by end of 2022. The recommendations will address current barriers to digital equity faced by Saint Paul/Ramsey County residents: affordability, device access, and digital skills/support.

Based on similar efforts in other cities nationwide, recommended digital equity solutions for Saint Paul are likely to include projects that meet the CCPF criteria for "Digital Connectivity Technology Projects." There will be funding needs for these projects.

Relevant Treasury guidance:

- *Where affordability has been identified as a barrier to broadband adoption and use, the purchase and/or installation of devices and equipment to facilitate broadband internet access are eligible for funding.*

Funding Program Model Recommendations:

As the State considers how to allocate CCPF investments, we recommend the following:

- Provide full funding for full projects.
 - Greatest impact will be in making full investments in full projects that will benefit many residents in sustainable ways over time and would not otherwise be able to be achieved but for CCPF.
- Do not require a local match.
 - Funding sources for these priority projects do not exist at the local level and requiring a match would become be a barrier to project completion.
- These Federal dollars are a one-time infusion of resources designed to make a generational impact.
 - Small amount of piecemeal funding for large number of projects will not be sufficient to get high-impact innovation projects off the ground.
 - View CCPF as a digital equity innovation fund. Use investments to catalyze opportunities for experimentation and scaling up successful models in the digital equity space.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests, and for your ongoing partnership in serving the residents of Minnesota.



Alice Hausman, State Representative



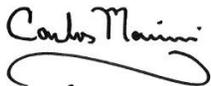
Founq Hawj, State Senator



Kaohly Her, State Representative



Athena Hollins, State Representative



Carlos Mariani, State Representative



John Marty, State Senator



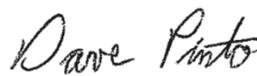
Rena Moran, State Representative



Erin Murphy, State Senator



Sandy Pappas, State Senator



Dave Pinto, State Representative



Representative Jay Xiong