

PRESS RELEASE



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New North partners with national leaders for broadband access study

Design Nine, MSA, GEO Partners to engage with stakeholders with goal of world-class network

NEW NORTH, September 16, 2021 – New North Inc., the regional economic development corporation serving Northeast Wisconsin, has partnered with a nationally recognized broadband planning firm, along with one of the largest engineering firms in the state, to execute a fast-track broadband internet gap analysis for the 18 counties in the region. The work is funded by a \$500,000 EDA CARES Act Recovery Assistance grant, announced this past May, and \$125,000 in matching local funds.

Top broadband planner Design Nine will oversee the project and will be joined by Midwest-based consulting firms MSA Professional Services and GEO Partners, LLC. The scope of their collaborative work will include asset evaluation, gap analysis and data collection, ownership and governance, business and financial planning, affordable technical designs, and recommendations on next steps.

“We are excited to partner with Design Nine, MSA Professional Services and GEO Partners with the goal of delivering high-quality broadband internet access through the entirety of the 18-county New North region. We understand the necessity of affordable broadband to collective economic success,” says Barb LaMue, president and CEO of New North Inc. “Design Nine has a strong track record of developing successful world-class networks. It also has experience on similar projects in size and scope, including a recent 14-county, EDA-funded effort in East Texas, and in other rural areas.

“We also were attracted to the ‘clean sheet start’ approach of Design Nine, which will deliver a custom plan specific to the New North region. It also understands our desire for the work to be completed on an accelerated schedule.”

The collaborative program of work will include an assessment of service areas with an emphasis on identifying coverage gaps; mapping of infrastructure routes, including existing facilities and equipment, particularly in relation to high-demand areas; evaluation of community readiness and barriers; preparation of a detailed regional broadband access study report; and recommendations within a regional infrastructure development plan.

The Regional Broadband Access Study report will contain a detailed map set by county, to include existing fiber routes and infrastructure; local government facilities that may need improved access; K-12 and higher-education facilities; hospitals and other healthcare facilities; and major commercial and industrial areas. It also will have a gap analysis of current and future bandwidth needs.

[Design Nine](#) has a world-class team of broadband analysts and network engineers that help communities, regions and local governments improve internet and broadband access. Headquartered in Blacksburg, Va., the firm has had more than 300 local government engagements across 28 states, Canada and the Caribbean since the early 1990s – longer than any other company in the United States. It is one of a small group of U.S. planning firms with a track record of planning recommendations being turned into long-term infrastructure success, much of it in rural counties, including within Wisconsin.

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In early 2020, Design Nine completed a comprehensive broadband study for Marathon County in the north central area of the state, including the combined statistical area of Wausau-Stevens Point-Wisconsin Rapids. It currently is completing a study for St. Croix County along the western border of the state, and is undertaking a broadband feasibility study for Dodge County in the south central region.

[MSA Professional Services](#) (MSA) is an employee-owned consulting firm with approximately 350 engineers, architects, planners, funding experts, surveyors, GIS experts and environmental scientists. It has 17 offices in the Upper Midwest, including multiple locations in the New North, and has completed work within all 18 counties of the region. This project will be undertaken out of the firm's Appleton office.

[GEO Partners, LLC](#) will be part of the team to provide crowd-sourced speed testing. Using data obtained from residents, the Minnesota-based company can pinpoint areas that are most in need of reliable, affordable access to broadband service. GEO Partners recently worked with Brown County for its speed-testing efforts.

CALL TO ACTION: County and municipal leaders, along with broadband service providers, in the New North region should expect to be contacted in the coming months by consultants Design Nine, MSA and GEO Partners. Residents in Northeast Wisconsin are encouraged to respond to survey requests and broadband speed tests as those are launched. Involved parties wishing to ensure their participation in the process can share their information with New North at newnorth@thenewnorth.com.

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New North, Inc., is a 501(c)3 non-profit, regional economic development corporation fostering collaboration among private and public sector leaders throughout the 18 counties of Northeast Wisconsin, known as the New North region. The New North brand unites the region both internally and externally around talent development, brand promotion and business development, signifying the collective economic power behind the 18 counties. The counties include Outagamie, Winnebago, Calumet, Waupaca, Brown, Shawano, Oconto, Marinette, Door, Kewaunee, Sheboygan, Manitowoc, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Marquette, Florence, Menominee and Waushara.
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