

Progress Report

2020 - 2023

Prepared Feb 2024



BLUE SKY NET

ONTARIO • CANADA

BLUE SKY ECONOMIC GROWTH CORPORATION



Federal Economic Development
Agency for Northern Ontario

Agence fédérale de développement
économique pour le Nord de l'Ontario

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Message from our Executive Director

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Blue Sky Net is here to advance technology. To grasp its power as we all work toward a prosperous future.

When thinking about what to say in this message, there was one common thought that keeps coming back. We are clearly at a junction in time, where the need for technology adoption and availability must meet in the middle.

Rural and remote Ontario will be left behind if we are not paying close attention to what we can do to not only bridge the digital divide, but also to ensure that our citizens are able to learn new technology and use it for good.

There is much that we can do in rural communities to respond to this process of change and to take a direct hand in shaping our future. That's what Blue Sky Net is all about. There are many communities we support under our umbrella but what exactly does it mean. In rapidly urbanizing environments, the healthiest and most quickly growing communities are not the urban cores of large metropolitan areas, but rings of smaller communities surrounding those metropolitan areas. These communities that are growing up within circles of urban economic influence are very strong and independent. They are strong because of their ability to provide quality, human-scale, and social living environments for people.

When you analyze what attracts industry to an area now, you'll find that its decision makers are not looking to locate their enterprise in communities. They are looking to locate in regional economies with strong supply chains that can provide the labour and resources they need. And so, astute communities are banding together into well-coordinated regional networks, which can offer the resources needed by footloose industry.

So how can we continue to support these regional areas, how can we work to support remote Indigenous communities? We will band together with communities and offer help to work together so that we can attract new industry, retain our young talented minds, and grow our communities in whatever sector that may be. We can't give you anything; we are not a funding agency. We can however lay the groundwork for you to work together and prosper. Facilitating better Broadband network builds across the North is one example. Providing information, studies and maps for agriculture, forestry, mining, or tourism economic impact is another. Providing training or business supports. It is for all of you. It is for our region.

To advance the future of Northern Ontario and protect the communities in which we live, we must learn to trust one another. We have moved from competitive behaviour, which caused many communities to focus exclusively on our own benefit regardless of what the cost might be to the adjoining communities, to collaborative behaviour based on an ability to see our future as being shared. It means trusting and sharing in an entirely new way.

That trust became a powerful enabler. Once we learn to share resources and decision-making; once we grasp the idea of a shared future; once we develop trust – we will have a foundation for resolving issues and problem solving on many different fronts.

Blue Sky Net is here to advance technology. To grasp its power as we all work toward a prosperous future. Let us know how we can help.

Susan Church
Executive Director

Mission

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Our mission is to improve access to technology for business and residential users, to expand and strengthen the region's innovation ecosystems by facilitating the technical access to do so, to enhance delivery of support for businesses to scaleup and to help communities respond to the challenges of today.

We operate with three main objectives:

EXPAND **INFRASTRUCTURE**

Bring together service providers in the private sector and government programs from all public sectors to help understand gaps in Broadband/Cellular service and develop strategies to overcome these service gaps.

IMPROVE **KNOWLEDGE**

Help to improve the skillsets of Northerners with ICT through workshops, information sharing, and digital resources.

DEVELOP **APPLICATIONS**

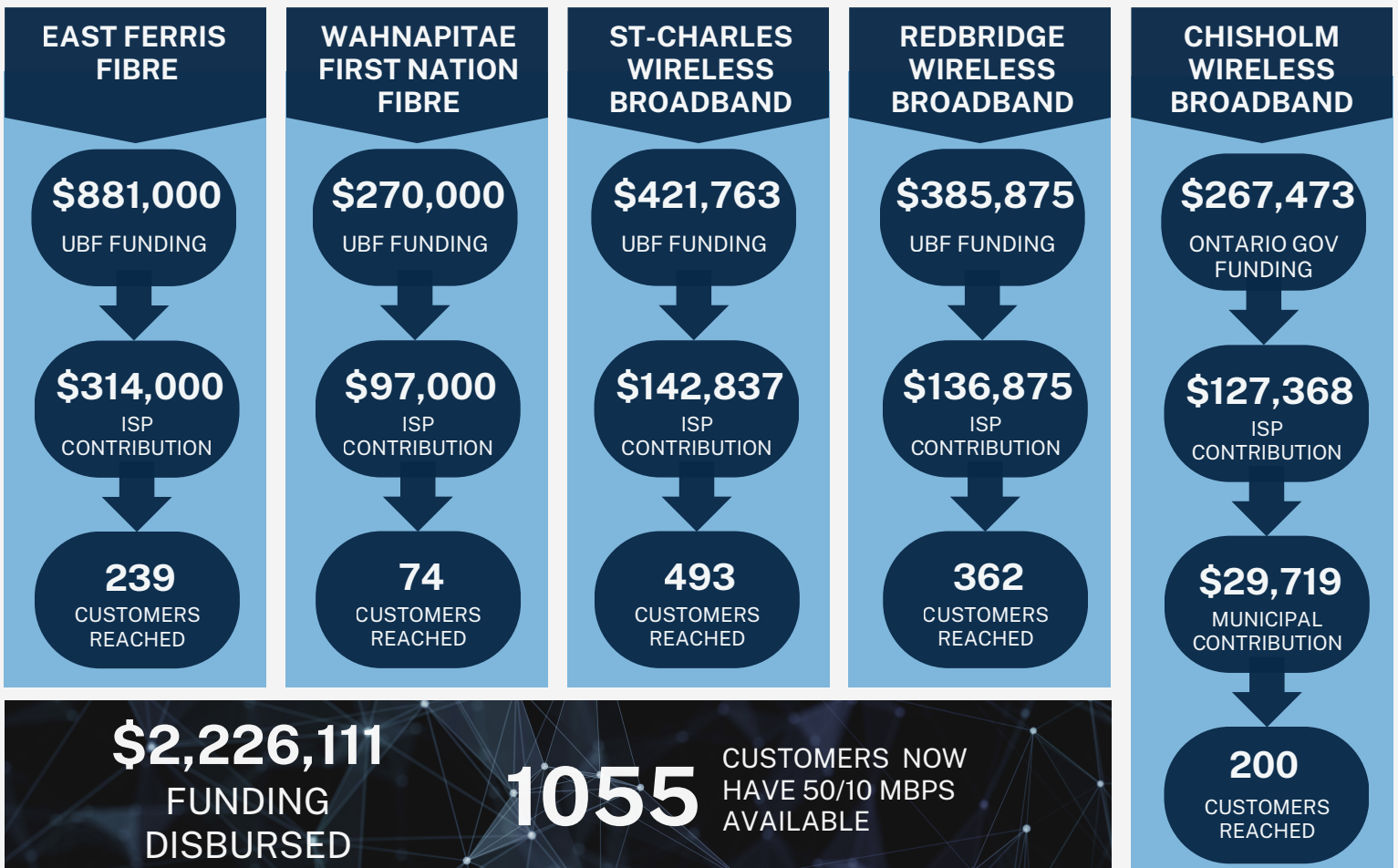
Work with stakeholders within Northern Ontario to develop beneficial applications that utilize Information Communication Technologies (ICT) to provide real benefit to those who use it.

Broadband Outcomes ⁴

Broadband Infrastructure Expansion

Since 2020, Blue Sky Net has facilitated the applications and funding for four completed broadband projects in the Nipissing District. Three were funded through the Universal Broadband Fund (UBF - Rapid Response) and one funded through the Ontario Government administered through the Ministry of Infrastructure.

In addition to the approved projects, we also assisted with three other funding submissions to the CRTC, ICON and UBF. Our additional efforts included providing communities with broadband education, mapping assistance and gap analysis.

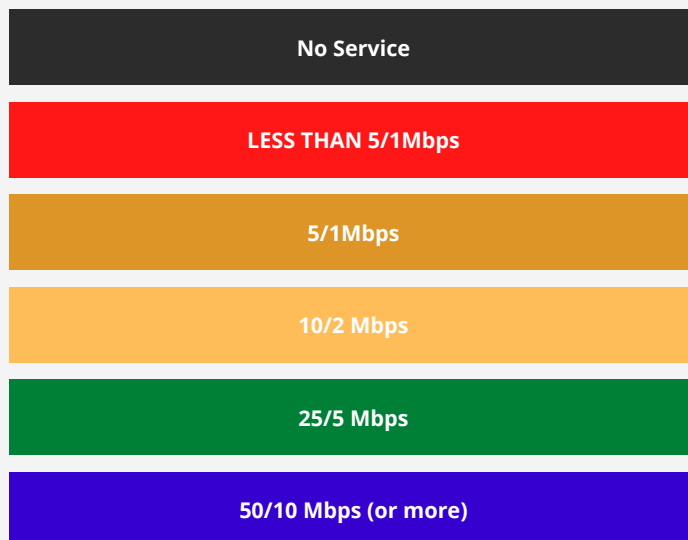
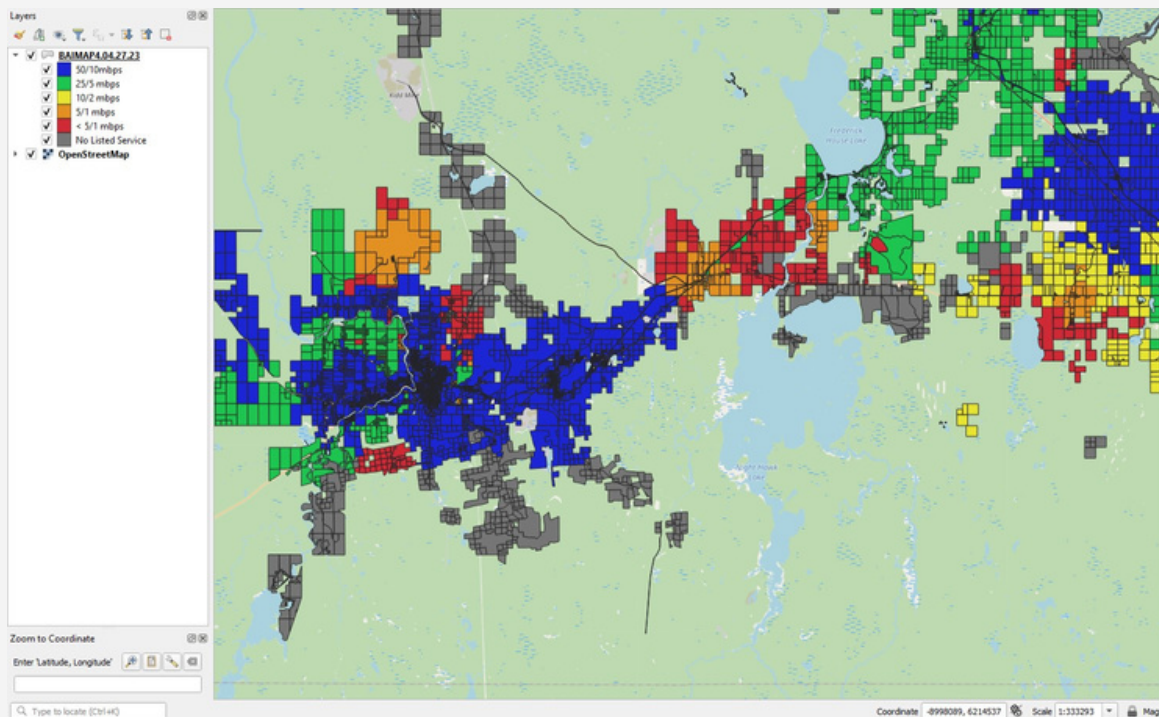


Broadband Outcomes ⁵

Broadband and Associated Infrastructure Map (BAIMAP)

BAIMAP is an internal tool Blue Sky Net developed to assist with mapping broadband availability across Northern Ontario. BAIMAP was updated in 2021 with incorporated information from the Government of Canada via the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Economic Development's (ISED) National Broadband Service Availability Map.

BAIMAP was also updated to include the new speed ranges and minimum speed target of 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload set out by the Federal Government.



50/10 Mbps represents the minimum speed target the government has set to see every Canadian have affordable access to by 2026.

Broadband Outcomes ⁶

connectednorth.ca and Ontario Internet Access Map (OIAM)

Connectednorth was re-launched in June 2021 and the new Ontario Internet Access Map was also launched at this time.

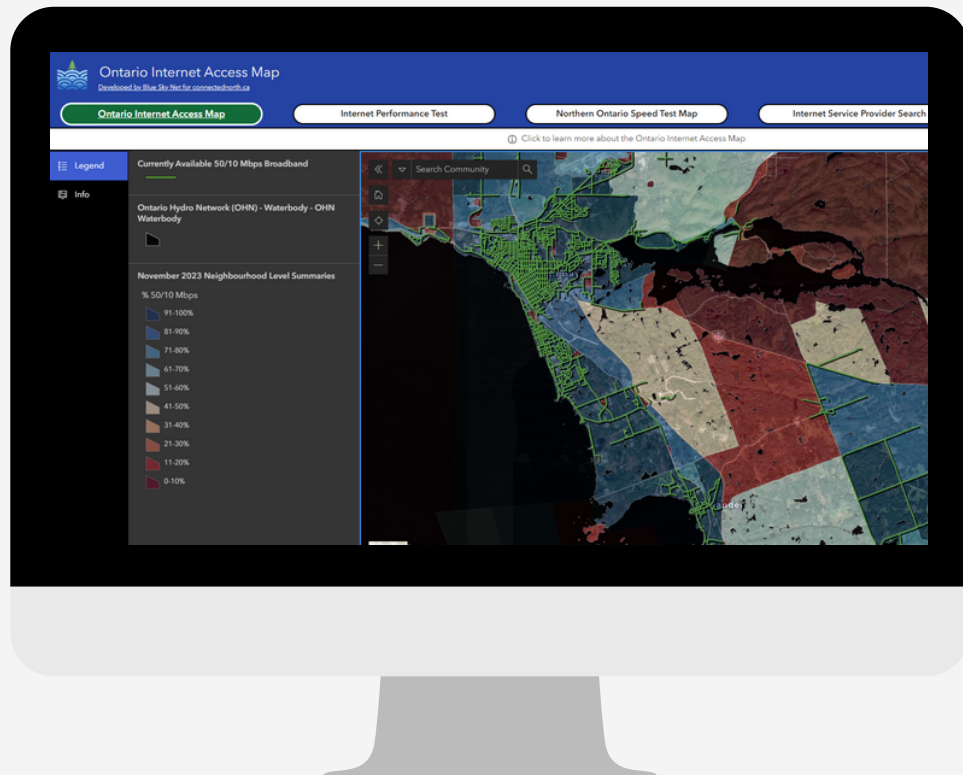
OIAM SHOWS BROADBAND SPEED AVAILABILITY STATISTICS DOWN TO NEIGHBOURHOOD LEVEL

SPEED TEST TOOL FROM CIRA FOR USERS TO TEST AND REPORT THEIR SPEEDS AND CONNECTION INFORMATION

MAP OF SPEED TEST RESULTS WITH ABILITY TO FILTER RESULTS BY YEAR

INTERNET PROVIDER SEARCH TOOL

MAP OF ANNOUNCED BROADBAND PROJECTS AND INFORMATION



Community Broadband Action Toolkit

The toolkit is centred on providing municipalities with the information and media to promote data collection and speed test campaigns. The intended outcome is to have regionally relevant and robust information that can help decision-makers consider potential broadband projects.

Community Broadband Action Toolkits have been used in partnership with communities such as Greater Sudbury, French River, St-Charles, Serpent River First Nation, and Gore Bay.

What are the Community Action Toolkits?

- We develop all social media collateral (and written messaging)
- Provide an individual splash page for each community
- Assist to spread the word on our own networks
- Provide before and after results (if data was present before the campaign)
- Can provide specific Broadband Access Survey by community for tracking of engagement and community specific results

54,384 Sped Tests Run as of Feb 2024

Broadband Outcomes ⁷

Ontario Broadband Resource Hub








The Ontario Broadband Resource Hub was launched in December 2023 and includes:

- GIS open data sets created in house
- Links to GIS open data files created by other agencies, organizations, and other government ministries
- Internal and external broadband and GIS reports
- Quick reporting tools for communities and regional Ontario districts
- Linking to Ontario Internet Access Map on connectednorth.ca
- Embedded external broadband coverage, availability and projects maps



Funding Outcomes

Between 2020-2023, Blue Sky Net administered the Covid-19 Technology Adoption Fund (CTAF) and the Business Technology Innovation Fund (BTIF), both funded by FedNor.

	 BUSINESS . TECHNOLOGY . IMPROVEMENT . FUND 2020-2023 BLUE SKY REGION	 COVID-19 Technology Adoption Fund 2020-2022 NORTHERN ONTARIO	TOTALS  2020-2022
FUNDING DISPERSED 	\$888,038.34	\$2,096,993.03	\$2,985,031.37
 PROJECTS SUPPORTED	116	382	498
LEVERAGED INVESTMENTS FROM BUSINESS 	\$1,151,975.44	\$1,017,705.64	\$2,169,681.08
 TOTAL PROJECT SPENDING	\$2,040,013.78	\$3,114,698.67	\$5,154,712.45

Each BTIF and CTAF recipient received an average of 90 minutes of personalized feedback, direction and guidance – from initial funding conversations to the reviewing of quotes to help them better understand the costs and services they would be receiving.

255 post BTIF exit surveys, 6 month project completion surveys, and 1 year program completion surveys have been collected.



182 post CTAF exit surveys, 6 month project completion surveys, and 1 year program completion surveys have been collected.

Additional Outcomes ⁹



18 Tech Talk Newsletters sent between 2022-2023



Executive Director appointed as a member of the AMO/Ministry of Infrastructure working table and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Infrastructure Ontario Broadband Committee



Regular attendance of monthly (previously bi-weekly) NOHFC Funder's Roundtable



6 Tradeshows & Conferences Attended



Developed the Northern Ontario Broadband Report



830 Internet Access Surveys Collected



Re-design and re-launch of the blueskynet.ca website alongside the development and launch of the Northern Ontario Business Support Search Tool



>150 One-on-one training sessions with SMEs



6 Community Broadband Consultations



Featured in >13 news articles



Engaged in refurbishment of the Municipal GIS Road Counter Equipment

Next Steps

ENGAGE THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION AND BROADBAND UPGRADES

Broadband empowers the business community to perform daily operations, to support innovation and to promote growth.

The lack of broadband access and telecommunication infrastructure creates a barrier for local businesses. It is through expanded deployment that new markets for customers and talent opens. BSN will work with network providers to position them to be ready to meet new market demand.

Phase One of the provincial Accelerated High Speed Internet Program has been announced and yet there will be many rural and remote areas of Northern Ontario that will still require broadband projects to be completed.

TECHNOLOGY SKILLS TRAINING

Community organizations like BSN are key in bridging the digital divide. We can be strategically engaged in training residents and businesses in digital literacy and awareness. Broadband and device access is necessary for educational enhancement, job searches, telemedicine and more.

We will continue to help with the adoption of technology and offer training that will help to grow business online offerings.

Domestic cloud-based services are growing exponentially and most SME's are not ready or growing their understanding of how to use them. Adequate broadband access remains crucial to accessing these indispensable services in this digital economy. We will continue to support a technology presence for SME's with an emphasis on e-commerce, software/hardware adoption and innovation through new abilities to connect with higher capacity.

ENHANCE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY OF PLACE

Northern Ontario is built on strong local communities and important change does not take hold without trusted community advocates. Most government leaders today understand the importance of broadband and technology, but that understanding does not turn into action for a myriad of reasons. Local broadband champions such as BSN can facilitate broadband deployment and help municipalities become a “Connection ready community”.

FOCUS ON TALENT ATTRACTION FOR TECHNOLOGY

Broadband and technology impact the job market. The access to Broadband enables telecommuting and a work from home option expanding the talent pool for companies across the North. This benefits both existing small businesses who are looking to grow along with new businesses who are looking to relocate and leverage a rural workforce.

BSN will advocate for programs that positively impact talent attraction. Examples of these programs include expanding technical certification programs and apprenticeship for youth, growing vocational training for adults, and developing creative partnerships with employers to develop needed skills.

Acknowledgements

The support from Fednor, our Board of Directors and Advisors, dedication of our staff and all our community partnerships are what make Blue Sky Net continue to thrive, innovate and advocate for Northern Ontarians.

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We thank you for your continued
support in our efforts.

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