



Iowa Institute for  
Cooperatives

# CO-OPVIEWS

News and information for the benefit of Iowa cooperatives.

June 2021 Vol. 51, No. 3

## Building Connections **Broadband Grant Spells Big Opportunities for Rural Iowans**

By: *Katie Hall, Director of Government Affairs*

Throughout the United States, rural communities struggle with a lack of high-speed internet infrastructure, connectivity and opportunities.

Iowans have been working hard to lay the foundation for communicating how important broadband access is to our state. Nearly 500 of Iowa's 947 communities have fiber-optic broadband service. Roughly 400 of those communities connect fiber to every rural and urban person and business.

Hollee McCormick, General Manager of Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative (ACEC) said, "Recently, the need for improved rural (and urban in many instances) internet is front and center. Federal and State grant opportunities are becoming more readily available, and we have been paying close attention and responding."

She also shared, "Allamakee-Clayton was awarded a grant from the State of Iowa to deploy roughly 200 miles of fiber to portions of northern Allamakee County. Our goal is to go where connectivity is needed while being a good neighbor to other telecommunications businesses and making economically sensible decisions. With those ideas in mind, we intend to keep moving forward and seek opportunities to improve our area's connectivity."

Steps are being made in Iowa policy to connect rural communities and farms to reliable broadband. The state has funded a broadband grant program since 2018—spending nearly \$170 million over four years (includes funds from the federal CARES Act). Governor Kim Reynolds recently signed HF 848 – the latest update on the Broadband Grant Program. The legislature also sent an appropriation for those broadband grants and maintenance costs worth \$100 million which will provide a tiered approach to grant funding based on current broadband access and capabilities.

"Wiatel recognizes the critical role reliable and affordable broadband plays in the lives of its customers," said Heath Mallory, CEO of Wiatel, Lawton. "Because of this, we have always been active in both legislative and regulatory lobbying efforts at the state and federal level. The importance of

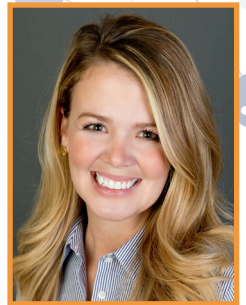
ensuring administrative rules, codes, and tax policies to encourage the deployment of broadband cannot be overstated."

He continues, "We work closely with both the Iowa Institute for Cooperatives and other telecommunication organizations to collaborate with state and federal governmental partners on the importance of sound public policy. Just recently, these collaborations have created new broadband funding mechanisms and brought faster access to the internet for Iowans across the entire state."

Tom Conroy, General Manager of Harlan's Farmers Mutual Cooperative Telephone Company (FMCTC), explains how they are doing their part to provide greater internet access. "FMCTC is proud to have extended our fiber broadband out to customers that were not able to get 100/20 megabytes previously. This broadband grant funding allowed FMCTC to extend service to these locations and keep our rates equal to all subscribers of our Fiber Fast Broadband. We are glad that the State of Iowa has invested in the future."

The State of Iowa is making progress on this issue. However, time, money, and building materials still create barriers to connecting rural Iowans. A recent report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimated that bringing high-speed internet to unreached parts of the country would cost \$130-\$150 billion over the next five to seven years. A study done by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Technology Engagement Center additionally found "better adoption of online tools and digital services by businesses outside metropolitan areas could create 360,000 new full-time jobs in rural areas and add more than \$140 billion to the U.S. economy over the next three years."

We applaud our members that have and continue to connect Iowans across the state. Thank you for what you do to provide more opportunities for those who call our state home.





## DR. JAY HARMON JOINS THE IIC BOARD

The IIC Board is excited to welcome Dr. Jay Harmon as an ex officio member. Dr. Harmon has been a part of the Iowa State University (ISU) faculty since 1993 and currently holds the positions of Associate Dean for Extension and Outreach and Director of Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension and Outreach. Over the years, Iowa State University and IIC have worked closely on cooperative and member issues. ISU was instrumental in the development and presentation of IIC's Director Certification Program.

Dr. Harmon has a diverse background in swine housing engineering, focusing on environmental management and ventilation of swine facilities. In his time as Director of Iowa State University's Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension department, Dr. Harmon shared that they have been involved with many co-ops through training experiences on the latest research for their staff and clients.

"I am interested in learning more about the issues that co-ops face as they support their customers throughout the state of Iowa," Dr. Harmon said. "This will help extension to understand the opportunities to support co-op business and the co-ops and the customers they serve."

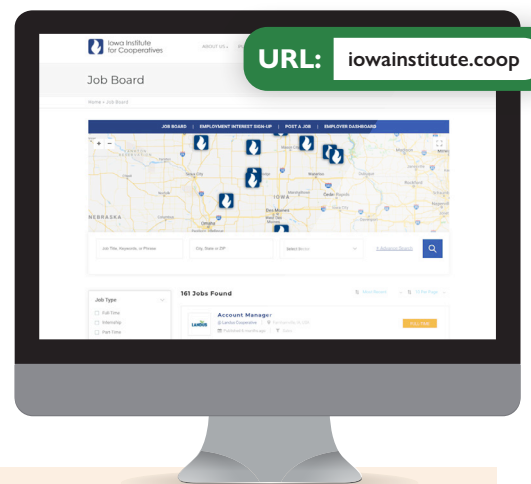
Dr. Harmon's appointment to the IIC Board further strengthens the partnership with ISU and provides another valuable perspective.

## Find Your Next Great Hire Using the IIC Job Board

Since its launch in 2019, the IIC Job Board has provided a centralized location to post and seek numerous career opportunities at Iowa cooperatives. With 33 IIC member cooperatives signed up, 100+ jobs are typically available at any given time. Members post a variety of jobs including administrative, accounting, computer services, customer service, transportation, sales, seed, merchandising, and operations. Job postings are located throughout the state of Iowa, but also wherever members have locations.

"The job board helps our members find good employees through social media ads that drive engagement and connect them with potential new hires," Katie Hall, Director of Government Affairs for IIC, shared.

This free service allows members to diversify the platforms where they can connect with job seekers. Log in or create an account to post a job and find your next great hire!



**The IIC job board gives us another source for finding qualified people for our coop, in a tight, hard to find job environment! It's yet another free benefit to membership.**

**RICH ANSTEY** General Manager at 21st Century Co-op

**Just like in all industries in the labor market, the agricultural world has the need for candidates with specific talents, attributes, and abilities. To help agriculture employers exhibit their opportunities to candidates, Iowa Institute of Cooperatives has developed a unique job board for cooperatives to present their opportunities to candidates that fit those specific needs. IIC has done a tremendous job putting the job board together and simplifying the process for employers' use. If you are a cooperative that has job openings you want to get out in front of potential candidates, I would highly recommend you check out the Iowa Institute of Cooperatives new job board, which serves our niche needs well.**

**JIM HILZENDEGER** Recruiting Manager at Heartland Co-op



# Honoring Cooperative Industry Impact- NOMINATIONS NOW OPEN



DEADLINE:  
**AUGUST 20, 2021**

The Iowa Institute for Cooperatives established the Iowa Cooperative Hall of Fame in 1999. Since that time, forty-nine individuals have received this prestigious award. This distinction recognizes the extraordinary service to Iowa cooperatives provided by these individuals throughout the course of their public and private lives.

The Iowa Institute for Cooperatives will be selecting two individuals for the Hall of Fame this year. The award will be presented following lunch at Iowa Institute for Cooperatives' Annual Business Meeting on November 23.

Nominees are selected based on their significant contributions to cooperatives. Individuals nominated:

- Have demonstrated commitment to cooperatives and to the principle of cooperation
- Are/were willing to serve in leadership positions

- Have demonstrated leadership in growth and service to their respective cooperative's members
- Fostered and promoted cooperative education and a better understanding of cooperatives
- Have achieved innovation and change to improve and promote cooperatives
- Are/were involved in civic or community activities and
- Are/were affiliated with the Iowa Institute for Cooperatives as individuals or through their cooperative.

The deadline to receive nominations is August 20, 2021. Find more information on Iowa Institute for Cooperatives' website under the "About Us" tab.

## A Recap of the 2021 Legislative Session

*By: Katie Hall, Director of Government Affairs*

Iowa's 2021 Legislative Session ended in overtime, nearly two weeks past the 110-day targeted end date. Overall, this session was a good one for our cooperative members.

As covered on Page 1, we saw an updated broadband grant program with a tailored approach that focused efforts on deployment to Tier 1, or Iowans with speed services of less than 25/3 with various grant matches available based on level of service provided. In 2021, Iowa will also invest another \$100 million in broadband grants and Office of Chief Information Officer program maintenance plus \$50 million from CARES Act funds.

IIC also supported a bill creating an annual overweight permit for milk haulers to haul up to 96,000 lbs. on interstates (with the appropriate axles) and assisted on legislation that prohibits cities and counties from limiting propane service or sales.

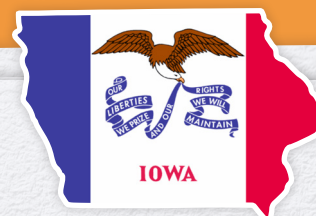
Legislation was also passed this year that would provide childcare cliff relief helping people receiving state assistance by gradually reducing their assistance as they receive promotions and/or higher wages.

We saw a few things stall this year including a vegetation management bill that would have allowed RECs the opportunity to trim trees within specific boundaries to maintain reliable service. There was also a renewed attempt to correct a sales tax issue for RECs that was introduced but did not make it across the finish line in 2021.

Next year, we can expect to see central filing come back and will continue connecting with legislators about what the actual impact will be if Iowa moves to central filing from direct notice. We anticipate seeing a familiar bill on renewable fuels and 2022 would be a new opportunity to make progress on the Invest in Iowa Act (formerly IWILL), as most Iowans support increased water quality and conservation efforts.

On the federal side of things, we are continuing discussions on 199A and the implications to Iowa if that increased tax burden becomes a fixture from the reinterpreted 2020 U.S. Treasury rules. We're also engaging on the renewable fuels infrastructure bill introduced by Representative Cindy Axne (IA-03), and the impact on agriculture of changing a local highway to an interstate that would move large equipment onto other nearby, congested roadways.

A huge thank you to each of our members who talked with legislators and connected with them on co-op issues. Thank you to leaders that were able to assemble board of directors to meet last minute and those that individually attended virtual subcommittee meetings—thank you for showing up. Your voices made the difference in connecting legislators with the impact to agriculture and specifically, our farmer-members.



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## Come Learn With Us This Summer!

### 2021 SUMMER INTERN DAY

THURSDAY, JULY 8, 2021

10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

*FFA Enrichment Center in Ankeny*

This one-day program is designed to help your interns better understand the cooperative business model and gain valuable skills and insights to succeed in their career. Interns will learn what a cooperative is, why cooperatives matter, what makes cooperatives different from other business structures, and career opportunities within the cooperative system.

The day will include four sessions:

- Cooperative 101 with IIC Staff
- Evaluating a Job Offer with Mike Gaul, ISU CALS Career Services
- Tips to Get in the Door with Cooperative HR Panel
- How Cooperatives Interact with Other Ag Groups

### 2021 SUMMER WORKSHOP

TUESDAY, JULY 13, 2021

9:00 AM - 3:30 PM

*FFA Enrichment Center in Ankeny*

An event for co-op directors and management, this one-day program covers current issues and trends that aid in decision making at the local cooperative level.

This year's topics include:

- Carbon
- Electric Vehicles
- Iowa Legislature Update
- Solar Power
- Iowa Infrastructure

### FINANCIAL STATEMENT WEBINAR SERIES

JULY 15, 20, & 22, 2021

10:00 AM

*Virtual Meeting*

IIC is offering a series of three webinars that will cover balance sheets, income statements, statement of source and use, and key financial ratios.

These webinars are best suited for:

- Staff new to the cooperative
- Staff that have moved into a leadership role
- Anyone needing a refresher on financial statements

For registration and additional information, visit our Events page on [iowainstitute.coop](http://iowainstitute.coop) or contact Nancy Cyr at 515-292-2667.