
RURAL UTILITIES SERVICE

*Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program
Grant Application Guide
Fiscal Year 2005*



Rural Development
United States Department of Agriculture

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Rural Utilities Service Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program

Advanced telecommunications services play a vital role in the economic development, education and health care of rural Americans. The Rural Utilities Service's (RUS) Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Program is specifically designed to meet the educational and health care needs of rural America through the use of advanced telecommunications technologies. With DLT loans, grants, and loan-grant combinations, RUS helps rural communities enjoy enhanced educational opportunities, improved health care services and greater economic development.

RUS' partnership with rural America is long-standing. For over 50 years, RUS has been at the forefront of providing the infrastructure financing that brought advanced telecommunications services to the most rural areas of our country. Today, RUS continues as an essential source of financing and technical assistance for rural telecommunication systems. The DLT Program strengthens that partnership and commitment by continuing to improve the quality of life for rural citizens.

Through its telecommunications infrastructure loan program and DLT Program, RUS has helped build community partnerships that provide both the infrastructure needed to reach the schoolhouse or clinic door and the equipment required inside that door.

Your organization is to be commended for its interest in providing rural residents—students, teachers, parents, patients and physicians—with innovative and affordable educational and health care opportunities which were once only available in urban areas. By submitting an application for financing under the DLT Program, you take a significant step toward improving the quality of life in rural America.

In this guide, you will find information on eligibility requirements; funding purposes and types of financial assistance; the how, when, and where to submit an application; and tips that will be useful in preparing your application.

Section I. General Information

This application guide will help you apply for a grant under the DLT Program. Where appropriate, the application guide includes suggestions and samples. Please note that the suggestions and samples are not a recipe for a successful application. We urge you to use your unique understanding of your community and your project to prepare a compelling case for grant financing.

A. Types of Financial Assistance

The DLT Program provides three kinds of financial assistance:

1. 100% grant
2. 100% loan
3. combination loan-grant

This guide covers the application requirements for a 100% grant. Please use the *FY 2005 Loan and Combination Loan-Grant Application Guide* for combination loan-grant or loan applications.

B. Fiscal Year 2005 Funding

At the time we prepared this guide, the full amount available for grants had not been determined. When this amount is available, we'll issue a Federal Register Notice and post an update on the DLT website:

www.usda.gov/rus/telecom/dlt/dlt.htm

The **minimum** amount of a grant is **\$50,000**.

The **maximum** amount of a grant is **\$500,000**.

C. Who's Eligible?

To be eligible for a grant, your organization must:

1. Currently deliver or propose to deliver distance learning or telemedicine services.
2. Be legally organized as an incorporated organization or partnership; an Indian tribe or tribal organization; a state or local unit of government; a consortium; or other legal entity, including a private corporation organized on a for profit or not-for profit basis. You must also have the legal capacity to contract with RUS. Please see 7 CFR 1703.103(a)(1) & 1703.125(k) for specific legal definitions and citations.
3. Operate a rural community facility or deliver distance learning or telemedicine services to entities that operate a rural community facility or to residents of rural areas at rates calculated to ensure that the benefit of the financial assistance passes through to such entities or to residents of rural areas.

Note: RUS electric or telecommunications borrowers are not eligible for grants, but are eligible for loans. See the *Loan and Combination Loan-Grant Application Guide* for more information.

D. Scoring Criteria

The DLT Grant Program is competitive. Applications are scored in **objective** and **subjective** categories. Objective criteria are straightforward indicators. Subjective criteria are more comparative in the sense that each subjective score is based on comparison to other applications received that year. For each category, these tables display the shorthand name in bold, a simple summary, and the maximum points available. Details can be found in Section IV of this guide.

Objective Criteria

Rural Area (Rurality)	Referred to as “rurality,” this criterion measures how rural a project service area is. To be eligible for a grant, an application must earn a minimum score in this category based on data from the 2000 Census. (45 Points)
Economic Need (NSLP)	General economic need of the project service area is measured by statistics from the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). (35 Points)
Special Communities (EZ/EC)	This criterion awards points to projects with sites located in a USDA Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community (EZ/EC) or Champion Community. (15 Points)
Leveraging (Matching Funds)	The DLT program requires a minimum match of 15%. Higher matches may receive additional points. There are special matching provisions for American Samoa, Guam, Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands. (35 Points)

Subjective Criteria

Additional NSLP	An applicant with an NSLP eligibility percentage below 50% may request additional points based on a well-documented demonstration that the NSLP percentage is not an accurate indicator of the economic need of the area. (10 Points)
Need for Services and Project Benefits (Needs and Benefits)	This criterion measures the specific needs of the community and how the proposed project will meet those needs, not the generalized need captured by the NSLP score. (45 Points)
Innovativeness	This criterion assesses how the objectives of the proposed project are met in new and creative ways. (15 Points)
Cost Effectiveness	Evaluates the efficiency of the proposed project’s delivery educational and medical benefits to beneficiaries. (35 Points)

E. Contacts & the Web

The DLT Program staff is available to answer questions about the application process and program requirements. We also post the latest DLT developments, including the FY 2005 application guides, program regulations, toolkits and the notice of application filing deadline on the DLT Web page. Contact us at:

Phone: 202-720-0413

Fax: 202-720-1051

Email: dltinfo@usda.gov

www.usda.gov/rus/telecom/dlt/dlt.htm

Section II. Application Submission

A. DLT Program Regulation and FY 2005 Application Guide

The regulation that governs the DLT Program is 7 CFR 1703, Subparts D through G (Part 1703). This guide is designed to be an easy-to-use version of Part 1703. Should there be any difference in interpretation between the guide and Part 1703, **the regulation takes precedence.**

New for 2005

Although the regulation is unchanged, we've reorganized its requirements in this guide for ease of use and to provide better guidance based on Program experience. In particular, the organization of Section IV, *Requirements of a Complete Application*, now precisely follows the order in which you must tab and assembled your application (described in Section V, *Putting It All Together*). We hope that this makes the guide easier to use.

Also, the volume of DLT applications makes it impractical for reviewers to search through the entire application to find required information. **We ask that all information relevant to a category be included under that category's tab. If that information is relevant to another category, it should be repeated under that category.** We have also eliminated the *Attachments and Supplemental Information* category and ask that any such materials be included under the relevant tab.

B. FY 2005 Application Deadline – February 1, 2005

All applications must have a proof of shipping (or electronic submission, if applicable) by February 1, 2005 to be eligible for funding under the FY 2005 DLT program. If you want a

courtesy review of your application's eligibility, submit it by January 3, 2005. (Please see "Courtesy Review" under Section III for details.)

Note: Applications will not be accepted by fax or e-mail. Late applications will be returned without being considered for funding.

C. How to Submit a Paper Application

Paper applications must show proof of shipping no later than February 1, 2005. Provide one of the following:

- A legibly dated U.S. Postal Service postmark,
- A legible mail receipt with the date of mailing stamped by the USPS, or
- A dated shipping label, invoice, or receipt from a commercial carrier

Ship an original and two copies of your application to:

**Director, ASD
RUS, STOP 1550, Room 2845
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-1550**

Note: Packages arriving at USDA via the USPS are irradiated, which can damage the contents and delay processing of your application. RUS encourages you to consider the impact of this procedure in selecting your shipping method.

D. How to Submit an Electronic Application

We accept electronic applications submitted by the deadline though we may request original signatures on paper later. Use the Federal government's e-grants web site (Grants.gov):

www.grants.gov

If you want to submit an application on-line, RUS strongly encourages you to obtain all the necessary sign-ups, credentials and authorizations well in advance of the deadline. You will need a Central Contractor Registry (CCR) registration before you can submit electronically. In addition, Grants.gov requires some one-time credentialing and online authentication procedures. These procedures may take several business days to complete. Please ensure that your credentials and authorizations are up-to-date if you went through the process within the last year. Some or all of Grants.gov's requirements require an annual update.

Please follow the instructions at Grants.gov. If you experience a technical problem retrieving or submitting an electronic application, make the Grants.gov customer support resources your first stop (click the “Customer Support” tab on any page of Grants.gov to get started). RUS staffers do not control the technical aspects of Grants.gov and won’t be able to help you if you experience a problem. However, we are happy to answer questions about the Program and the contents of an application.

Section III. Application Process

A. Courtesy Review

If you submit your application early in the application window, we will review certain aspects of it related to eligibility to compete for a grant. The courtesy review is designed to discover missing pieces that would exclude your application from consideration during the 2005 grant competition. Reviewers do not check the accuracy of the information or suggest changes that would improve an application’s score. In particular, we will look for:

1. All items and sections (as shown in Section V, *Putting it all Together*)
2. A complete SF-424 (Section IV, A)
3. Evidence of Legal Eligibility (Section IV, B)
4. Minimum Rurality Requirements (Section IV, E-1)
5. Eligible Match of at least 15% (may include a basic budget review to initially determine whether items listed for the match and the grant request are eligible)

If we find basic eligibility problems, we’ll tell you about them so that you can modify your application and resubmit it by the deadline. If we don’t find basic eligibility problems, we’ll inform you and move your application to the completeness review described later in this section.

Please submit your application as early as possible—but no later than January 3, 2005—if you want us to perform a courtesy review. Applications which provide proof of shipping dated after that date (but within the overall application window) will not be returned. Although too late for the courtesy review, we will treat such applications as on-time, and move them to the completeness review.

The Federal government’s electronic site, Grants.gov, does not support a courtesy review or pre-application phase. If you want a courtesy review, please submit your application on paper (see Section II, C - How to Submit an Application on Paper).

B. Review Process

RUS reviews each on-time grant application to determine whether you included all required items. In cases where RUS has questions about an item, we may request clarification or additional information from you. At this point, we return incomplete and ineligible applications and we score complete applications as described in the regulation and this guide.

C. Appeal Process

After scoring, we will notify you in writing of your preliminary score. RUS will also include an estimate of the minimum score necessary to receive a grant.

You have the right to appeal your application's score. You must appeal in writing, within ten days after we notify you of your application's scoring results. Appeals must be based on erroneous scoring of the application by RUS. **Information that was not included in the original application, or was not submitted in response to requests from RUS for clarification or additional information, is will not be considered.**

D. Grant Awards

Following the appeals process, RUS ranks applications by the final scores. Applications are selected for funding based on scores, availability of funds, and 7 CFR 1703.127.

Regardless of the number of points your application receives, the RUS Administrator may take any of the following actions:

1. Limit the number of applications selected for projects located in any one State during a fiscal year.
2. Limit the number of selected applications for a particular project.
3. Select an application receiving fewer points than another application if there are insufficient funds during a particular funding period to select the higher scoring application. If the Administrator makes this kind of selection and it affects your application, RUS will provide you an opportunity to reduce the amount of your grant request to the amount of funds available.

Section IV. Requirements for a Complete Application

Tips:

- **An application that does not include each item listed in this section is incomplete and will not be considered for DLT grant financing.**
- Use the *Grant Application Guide Toolkit (Toolkit)*. It contains forms, sample certifications, and worksheets that will help you assemble your application. Get a copy of the *Toolkit* at the DLT Web site.
www.usda.gov/rus/telecom/dlt/dlt.htm
- Reviewers are unlikely to have first-hand knowledge regarding your specific locale or circumstances; always provide source documentation to substantiate your assertions.
- Place all of the information supporting a scoring criterion together in the section of the application that responds to that criterion.

A. Standard Form 424

Use the Standard Form 424, Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424), to apply for DLT grants. You can find a copy of the form in the *Toolkit*. It is important that you complete every relevant entry. Please use the following notes in conjunction with the SF-424 instruction page.

Block 1: We've already checked the Non-construction box for you. DLT grant awards may NOT be used for construction. Leave the Pre-application boxes blank.

Block 2: For your organization's use.

Block 3: Not Applicable – leave blank

Block 4: For RUS use – leave blank

Block 5. There are multiple entries in this block. We will use the contact information provided in this box for all contact and correspondence. Please complete this in full and attach a sheet if you want to provide additional contacts. **It is crucial that we have accurate information, and in particular, a reliable fax number for rapid correspondence.** If you do not have a fax number, we will need a reliable e-mail address. Otherwise, correspondence will be sent by mail. Given that timeframes allowed for responses are based on the date of RUS correspondence, relying on mail exchanges may reduce the time available for you to respond to RUS. **You must provide full, accurate contact information, including a fax number for someone with the authority to answer any questions RUS staff may have about your application.**

If you wish to supply a contact from outside your organization, attach a letter immediately behind the SF-424 listing these items: person's name, organization, contact information (phone, fax, email, mailing address), relationship to your organization. Make sure the letter contains language granting authority to the person to answer our questions or provide additional information on your behalf, and any time limit you wish to apply to that person's authority. This letter must be signed by the signatory on the SF-424.

As required by the Office of Management and Budget, **all applicants for grants must supply a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number.** Obtaining a DUNS number costs nothing but requires a telephone call to Dun and Bradstreet (1-866-705-5711). Please see this website for more information for more information:

http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/duns_num_guide.pdf

Block 6. Enter your Employer ID.

Block 10. The Catalog of Federal Assistance Number is **10-855**

Blocks 12 & 14. The room provided in these blocks is seldom sufficient. We recommend you provide this information on an attached sheet. Please provide the town, county and state and Congressional District for each hub or end-user site in your project.

Box 15: (Estimated Funding):

- a. Federal Show the amount requested from RUS as grant.
- b. Applicant Show the total matching contributions, regardless of source.
- c, d, e, & f. Leave Blank
- g. TOTAL Show *Total Eligible DLT Grant + Matching Purposes* from your budget. (Line F on Sample Budget shown under Section IV, D-2 of the Application Guide.)

Block 16. The DLT Program is subject to Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs. The Order requires consultation with State and local officials if that state has a state Single Point of Contact (SPOC). You must submit a copy of your application to the SPOC at the same time you submit your application to RUS. Check this website to determine if your state has a SPOC:

www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html

Block 17. You must supply an explanation of the delinquency if you check "yes."

Block 18. The application must be signed by an authorized representative of the organization that will manage the project if a grant is awarded. If the signer is not a corporate officer, you must include evidence that the signer is authorized to obligate the organization. In the case of a consortium, the consortium agreement should be attached.

B. Legal Eligibility

You must provide evidence of legal existence and legal authority to contract with RUS:

1. Evidence of legal existence. Demonstrate that your organization is legally recognized under state and/or Federal law (Federal recognition mainly, but not exclusively, applies to Native

American Tribes). Satisfactory documentation includes but is not limited to, certificates from the Secretary of State, or state statutes or laws establishing your organization. **Do not** submit tax-exempt status letters from the IRS; they are **not** adequate evidence.

2. Evidence of legal authority to contract with RUS. Satisfactory documentation includes but is not limited to, articles of incorporation, bylaws, board resolutions, excerpts from state statutes, or an attorney's opinion of counsel.

C. Executive Summary

The Executive Summary gives reviewers their first overall view of the project area, the problems that residents face, and how the proposed project will address those problems. This is your opportunity to discuss the core aspects of the project. It should contain a **concise** (no more than two pages) description of the project including:

1. A general **overview** of the telecommunications system to be developed, including the types of equipment, technologies, and facilities proposed.
2. A description of the participating hubs and end-user sites, and the number of rural residents who will be served at each end-user site.
3. A description of the **types of educational or medical services** proposed.
4. An explanation of **how the project will address community needs, why your organization requires financial assistance** and the **benefits to the rural residents**.
5. A summary of the total project cost including a breakdown of the grant required, the source of matching contributions, and other financial assistance for the remainder of the project.

D. Project Information

Eligible match purposes are identical to eligible grant purposes (7 CFR 1703.121). In other words, if RUS cannot fund an item if the item were part of a grant request, the same item cannot be used as match.

Eligible Purposes for Grant and Match

There are three categories of eligible purposes:

1. The **first** includes acquiring eligible equipment. Examples:
 - Computer hardware and software
 - Audio and video equipment
 - Computer network components
 - Terminal equipment
 - Data terminal equipment
 - Inside wiring
 - Interactive audio/video equipment

The following two categories must be subcontracted from an entity that is not affiliated with your organization (or consortium).

2. The **second** provides for acquiring instructional programming (including the purchase or lease of instructional programming already on the market).
3. The **third** includes technical assistance and instruction for using eligible equipment, including any related software; developing instructional programming (including the development and modification of an existing instructional programming package); and providing engineering or environmental studies relating to the establishment or expansion of the phase of the project to be financed with the grant. The costs for this category **cannot exceed 10% of the grant amount requested or 10% of the eligible matching contributions.**

Ineligible Purposes for Grant or Match

None of the following purposes are eligible (see 7 CFR 1703.123):

- Salaries, wages, or employee benefits to medical or educational personnel.
- Salaries or administrative expenses of the applicant or the project.
- Acquiring, installing or constructing telecommunications transmission facilities.
- Medical equipment not having telemedicine as its essential function.
- Purchasing equipment that will be owned by a local exchange carrier or another telecommunications service provider unless that service provider is the applicant.
- Duplicating facilities already in place which provide distance learning or telemedicine services.
- Reimbursing your organization or others for costs incurred prior to the date RUS received the completed application.
- DLT application preparation costs.
- Projects that only provide links between people located at the same physical facility.
- Site development, or the destruction or alteration of buildings.
- Purchasing land or buildings or for building construction.
- Projects located in areas covered by the Coastal Barrier Resources Act.
- Recurring or operating project expenses or costs; however, leases provided for in 7 CFR 1703.121 are permitted.
- Any other purposes not specifically contained in 7 CFR 1703.121.
- Any other purpose that the RUS Administrator has not specifically approved.
- Except as otherwise provided in 7 CFR 1703.112, grant funds cannot finance a project, in part, when success of the project is dependent upon the receipt of additional financial assistance under Part 1703, Subpart E, or is dependent upon the receipt of other funding that is not assured.

D-1. Telecommunications System Plan & Scope of Work

The Telecommunications System Plan (TSP) will aid RUS in comprehending and evaluating your project.

The TSP Should Provide:

A description of the types of educational or medical services proposed and a statement that the project is either for a distance learning or telemedicine purpose. If the project provides both distance learning and telemedicine services, you must identify the predominant use of the system.

1. Describe the telecommunications facilities proposed for the project, where the equipment will be located, and an explanation of how the telecommunications facilities will enable the project's interconnection with other networks.
2. Provide a map and a network diagram of the telecommunications system, and show how the distance learning or telemedicine equipment relates to that system.
3. Supply detailed descriptions of:
 - Proposed purchases or leases of telecommunications terminal equipment, data terminal equipment, audio or video equipment, computer hardware and software systems. See 7 CFR 1703.102 for definitions of these terms.
 - Components that process data for transmission via telecommunications, computer network components, and communication satellite ground station equipment.
4. Describe the capabilities of the telecommunications terminal equipment that will deliver the proposed service:
 - Document discussions with various technical sources, such as consultants, engineers, product vendors or internal technical experts.
 - Include detailed cost estimates for operating and maintaining the end-user equipment.
 - Show evidence that you evaluated alternative equipment and technologies.
5. Briefly discuss whether the project will duplicate any adequate, established telemedicine or distance learning services. Sign and include the Nonduplication of Services Certificate as part of this section (a sample certificate is included in the *Toolkit*).
6. Describe consultations with the appropriate telecommunications carriers (including interexchange carriers, cable television operators, enhanced service providers, providers of satellite services and telecommunications equipment manufacturers and distributors) and the anticipated role of such providers in the proposed telecommunications system.

Scope of Work

The scope of work explains what you plan to do. It is your opportunity to make a clear and convincing presentation of the goals of your project. The scope of work completes the picture for

the reviewer. It discusses how your organization proposes to proceed with the project, if funded. The scope of work must include, *at a minimum*, the following:

- The specific activities to be performed under the project.
- Who will carry out the activities.
- The timeframes for accomplishing the project objectives and activities.

D-2. Budget

This section shows how to present a budget for your organization's proposed project. Your budget should show each cost as a **line-item** similar to the sample below. RUS strongly recommends that you follow the sample's example of breaking out each hub and end-user site's costs.

The **Total Eligible DLT Grant and Matching Purposes** of the budget you submit to us (**Row F** of the Sample Budget below) should match Line 15g of the SF-424. It comprises two parts:

1. The costs for eligible purposes (see Eligible Purposes, p. 10) to be financed with a DLT grant, and
2. The costs for eligible purposes for all matching contributions from all sources (your organization or others).

Projects typically require resources that are not eligible for grant or match funding and, as a result, are not part of the eligible costs described above. Costs incurred by your organization or contributed by others for ineligible purposes typically include salaries, fringe benefits, supplies, office space, Internet access charges, utility expenses and other recurring charges (see Ineligible Purposes, p. 11). Record these costs in the far right column of the budget under "Other." The sum of the total eligible costs and ineligible costs is the **Project Grand Total** (shown on row H of the Sample Budget below)

Sample Line-Item Budget

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Row	Description	Unit Cost	#	Extended Cost	DLT Funds	Matching Funds	Source **	Other Funds	Source **
	Hub Site (Urbanopolis)								
a-1	Video Webcasting/streaming software	\$14,000	2	\$28,000	\$14,000	\$14,000	A		
a-2	Video camera package	7,500	2	15,000		15,000	A		
a-3	Computer projection panel	25,000	1	25,000		25,000	A		
a-4	Server – Web server	5,800	1	5,800		5,800	C		
a-5	Server – Video broadcast	3,100	1	3,100	3,100				
a-6	Initial Installation	12,000	1	12,000	7,000	5,000	A		
a-7	Instructional Programming Development (contractor)	25,000	1	25,000	18,600	4,900	A	\$1,500*	A
a-8	Training use of equipment	12,000		12,000	6,300	5,500	A	200*	A
A.	Urbanopolis Subtotals			\$125,900	\$49,000	\$75,200		\$1,700*	
	End-User Site #1 (Burghville)								
b-1	ITV video classroom equipment	\$16,000	5	\$80,000	\$80,000				
b-2	Webcast stations	12,000	2	24,000		\$24,000	B		
b-3	VCRs for classrooms	100	4	400		400	B		
b-4	32” monitors with connector boxes	1,000	2	2,000		2,000	B		
B.	Burghville Subtotals			\$106,400	\$80,000	\$26,400		\$0	
	End-User Site #2 (Villemont)								
c-1	ITV video classroom equipment	\$16,000	6	\$96,000	\$96,000				
c-2	Webcast stations	12,000	2	24,000	24,000				
c-3	VCRs for classrooms	100	4	400		400	B		
c-4	32” monitors with connector boxes	1,000	2	2,000		2,000	B		
C.	Villemont Subtotals			\$122,400	\$120,000	\$2,400		\$0	
D.	Total Eligible DLT Grant (A5 +B5+C5)				\$249,000				
E.	Total Eligible DLT Matching Purposes (A6 +B6+C6)					\$104,000			
F.	Total Eligible DLT Grant + Matching Purposes = \$353,000								
	Ineligible Purposes								
	<i>Salaries</i>	\$40,000	2	\$80,000				\$80,000	A
	<i>Recurring line costs/year</i>	12,000	3	36,000				36,000	B
	<i>*from Line A8 (Smithville)</i>							1,700*	
G.	Total Ineligible							\$117,700	
H	Project Grand Total (D5+E6+G8)			\$470,700					

* Costs exceeding the 10% limitation on third category expenses (See next page and Section IVE.3 of this guide)

** Fund Source: A = Applicant; B = Cash from Apex Corp (see commitment letter tab E-3); C = In-kind from Acme Corp (see commitment letter tab E-3)

Notes for Sample Budget

Total Grant Request: \$249,000
 Total Match: \$104,000

DLT grants require a 15% minimum match. To calculate the match percentage:
 (Matching contributions ÷ Proposed Grant Amount) x 100 = Match %
 (\$104,000 ÷ \$249,000) x 100 = 41.77%

*** Calculation of 10% Rule per See Section IV.D**

Limited Costs:

Development of Instructional Programming	\$25,000
Training on use of Equipment	<u>\$12,000</u>
Total	\$37,000

Programming and training are among the items that may comprise no more than 10% of a DLT grant or 10% of the match.

10% of \$249,000 is \$24,900 (10% of the total grant request)

10% of \$104,000 is \$10,400 (10% of the total matching contributions, or “matching funds”)

In the sample budget, the applicant has correctly limited the request for these funds to 10% of both the grant request and the matching funds, recording the balance in “Other” funds and identifying the source of those other funds.

From DLT Grant \$18,600 (Dev. of Instr. Programming) <u>\$ 6,300</u> (Training on use of Equipment) \$24,900 (10% of the grant request)	From Matching Funds \$4,900 (Dev. of Instr. Programming) <u>\$5,500</u> (Training on use of Equipment) \$10,400 (10% of the match)
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D-3. Financial Information and Sustainability

Provide a narrative description that demonstrates your project’s feasibility. Address the technical and programmatic expertise necessary to undertake and complete the project. Show how this expertise will ensure a sustainable project. You should also address the resources devoted to the project, and whether these resources will sustain the project. Your narrative should include all assumptions and the following information:

1. A description of the project’s revenues and expenses.
2. Evidence of cost sharing arrangements among hub and end-user sites, if applicable.
3. Identification of any other items that may affect feasibility or sustainability of the project.
4. A demonstration that the benefits, including cost savings, of the DLT grant pass through to those receiving services from the project.

Note. Information about matching funds and other assistance is discussed in Section E-3 below.

D-4. Statement of Experience

You must provide a written narrative (no longer than three single-spaced pages) describing your organization's demonstrated capability and experience in operating an educational or health care endeavor and any project similar to the proposed project. Experience in a similar project is desirable but not required. If your organization does not have experience with projects similar to the proposed project, you should explain how you plan to overcome this.

E. Objective Scoring Supporting Documentation

E-1. Rurality

Rurality is the term we use to describe how rural an area is. This category is scored on average population as described below. It is significant in two ways:

- Your project must score at least 20 points to qualify for the DLT Program.
- Your project may obtain a higher score, up to a total of 45 points, depending on the relative rurality of the project service area.

How to Determine Rurality

The *Toolkit* provides a Rural Calculation Table to assist you with this process. Base your project's rurality calculation on 2000 U.S. Census data available at this Web site:

www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html

We use the following four definitions to evaluate rurality:

1. **EXCEPTIONALLY RURAL AREA – 5000 and under.** Any area of the United States not included within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough having a population in excess of 5,000 inhabitants. This includes cities, villages, and boroughs of 5000 and under as well as the areas that are outside of any city, village, or borough.
2. **RURAL AREA – 5,000-10,000.** Any area of the United States included within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough having a population over 5,000 and not in excess of 10,000 inhabitants.
3. **MID-RURAL AREA – 10,000-20,000.** Any area of the United States included within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough having a population over 10,000 and not in excess of 20,000 inhabitants.
4. **URBAN AREA. Over 20,000.** Any area of the United States included within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough having a population in excess of 20,000 inhabitants.

Criterion Point Value and Allocation

Up to **45 points** may be awarded for this criterion. Specifically, each end-user site will receive points based on the site's population. The final score for this criterion is the **average score for all end-user sites included in the project**. If a hub also serves as an end-user site, it must be included in the average.

In cases where the end-user site is not fixed (such as a telemonitoring equipment owned by a visiting nurse association or a health screening van owned by a hospital), please contact RUS for assistance in determining rurality.

<u>End-User Site Location</u>	<u>Points Awarded</u>
Exceptionally Rural Area	45
Rural Area	30
Mid-Rural Area	15
Urban Area	0

Example of Rurality Calculation for a Project:

ABC Hospital proposes providing teleradiology services to 4 rural clinics. The hospital will be the hub site as well as an end-user site.

<u>End-User Site</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Points</u>
ABC Hospital (hub)	Town A	21,000	0
Clinic #1	Town B	4,200	45
Clinic #2	Town C	10,500	15
Clinic #3	Town D	7,500	30
Clinic #4	Town E	7,900	<u>30</u>
Total Points			120
Average (120 total points divided by 5 sites)			24

Under the rurality scoring criterion, this example project would receive 24 points—the average of all end-user sites. (Remember, to be eligible to apply for a grant, the project must score at least 20 rurality points.)

E-2. National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

This criterion measures the financial need of a project's proposed service area, as estimated by National School Lunch Program (NSLP) eligibility. For purposes of the DLT Program, the NSLP percentage reflects the percentage of students **eligible** for reduced-price or free lunches for each area served by an end-user site, **not the percentage of actual participation**.

Background of the NSLP

The NSLP is a Federally-assisted program that provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to millions of children in thousands of schools and childcare institutions. School districts and independent schools in the program receive cash subsidies and donated commodities from USDA for each meal they serve. In return, they must serve lunches that meet Federal requirements and they must offer reduced-price or free lunches to eligible children. The Food and Nutrition Service of USDA administers the program at the Federal level. At the State level, state education agencies and local school districts usually administer the NSLP.

Determining the NSLP Percentage

Use the following five guidelines to determine your project's NSLP percentage.

1. **Public schools or non-profit private schools of high school grade or under** should use the actual eligibility percentage for that particular school.
2. **All other entities** must calculate their NSLP score based on the eligibility of **all students in the school district where the end-user site will be located**. This category includes everything not listed under item 1, *i.e.*, institutions of higher learning and non-school end-user sites such as hospital, libraries, and clinics, etc.
3. As with the rurality calculation, in cases where the end-user site is not fixed (such as telemonitoring equipment owned by a visiting nurse association or a health screening van owned by a hospital), please contact RUS for assistance in determining rurality.
4. **Use rounding:** Percentage ratios should be rounded up for fractions of percentages equal to or greater than 0.5, or rounded down for fractions of percentages less than 0.5.
5. The **project NSLP percentage** is the **average of the NSLP end-user sites**. See the example below "Required Documentation" for a sample NSLP calculation.

<u>NSLP Percentage:</u>	<u>Points</u>
NSLP < 25%	0
25% ≤ NSLP < 50%	15
50% ≤ NSLP < 75%	25
75% ≤ NSLP	35

Determine the average NSLP eligibility percentage for all of your project's end-user sites. Assign NSLP points to the average, based on the table above. The ***Toolkit*** provides an NSLP Calculation Table to assist you with this process.

Required Documentation

You may obtain the NSLP percentage from the state or local organization that administers the program. That organization must certify the percentage as correct.

Example of NSLP Calculation:

An applicant proposes distance learning services for 3 end-user sites at schools located in Town A. In this example, the applicant would **score 15 points**.

<u>End-User Site</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>NSLP %</u>
ABC High School	Town A	24
ABC Middle School	Town A	28
ABC Elementary School	Town A	32
Total NSLP Percentages		84
Average NSLP for the three sites		28

E-3. Leveraging (Matching Funds and Other Assistance)

This criterion demonstrates the level of commitment in the local community for the project.

A DLT project that is widely supported within a rural community is more likely to be strong and successful. The criterion is significant in two ways:

- **Your project must have non-Federal matching contributions equal to at least 15% of the DLT grant requested to qualify for the DLT Program.** The minimum match receives no points.
- Your project may obtain up to 35 points, depending on the level of non-Federal matching contributions in excess of the 15 % minimum.
- **Except as provided under Federal law, funding from other Federal sources cannot be used for matching.**

Note: Eligible purposes for grant and matching funds are identical. Frequently, a complete project requires items that are ineligible as grant or match. Although not eligible as matching funding, financial support and in-kind contributions from the local community (other than the applicant) that goes toward such items shows evidence of the commitment of the community to the project. Provide evidence of this type of support under F-1, *Needs and Benefits*.

Funding Commitments

The applicant should document the project’s additional contributions from non-Federal sources. Identify the source and amount of matching contributions in your application. Provide evidence that all funds other than those requested from RUS are committed and will be used for the proposed project. A letter from each organization detailing the specifics of its provision of matching funds is an example of the evidence required.

Matching contributions are generally cash, but in-kind contributions are also acceptable. You must verify that any in-kind contributed items are non-depreciated or new assets with established

monetary value. The letter from the organization providing the in-kind items should include a description of the item, a specified value of the item and the purchase date.

Note: Projects located in Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Counties may be eligible for grants from the ARC and, if so, these grants may be used as matching funds under the DLT grant program. Please see www.arc.gov for a list of eligible counties under the *Counties in Appalachia* heading. Applying ARC funds as a match requires coordination with ARC State Program Managers and States in the Region. See the *ARC Members, Partners and Staff* link at www.arc.gov for ARC State Program Managers contact information. DLT applicants considering an ARC match are strongly encouraged to contact their ARC State Program Manager(s) to explore the feasibility of an ARC grant.

Criterion Point Value and Allocation

Up to **35 points** are available under this criterion. Points are awarded as follows:

<u>Percentage of Match Compared to Grant Requested</u>	<u>Points</u>
15% < Match % ≤ 30%	0
30% < Match % ≤ 50% of the grant requested.	15
50% < Match % ≤ 75% of the grant requested.	25
75% < Match % ≤ 100% of the grant requested.	30
Match > 100% of the grant requested.	35

Example: Applicants receive different scores based on their proposed matching funds:

	<u>Grant Requested</u>	<u>Matching Funds</u>	<u>% of RUS Funds</u>	<u>Points Scored</u>
Applicant #1	\$100,000	\$15,000	15%	0
Applicant #2	\$100,000	\$45,000	45%	15
Applicant #3	\$100,000	\$60,000	60%	25
Applicant #4	\$100,000	\$80,000	80%	30
Applicant #5	\$100,000	\$105,000	105%	35

E-4. USDA Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities & Champion Communities (EZ/EC)

This criterion documents project participation in USDA’s Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community (EZ/ECs) and related Champion Community programs, based on end-user site locations within these designated areas.

How Points are Awarded?

Up to **15 points** may be awarded for this criterion. If your project has:

<u>At Least 1 End-user Site Located in a USDA:</u>	<u>Your Application will Receive</u>
EZ/EC Community	10 points
Champion Community	5 points

Check these Web pages to find out whether any of the communities in your project are located in one of the EZ/EC or Champion Communities:

EZ/EC: www.ezec.gov/ezec/mainmap.html

Champion Communities: www.ezec.gov/Communit/champions.html

For further information on the EZ/EC and Champion Community Programs, contact:

USDA Office of Community Development
1400 Independence Ave., SW Stop 3203
Washington, DC 20250-3203
202-619-7980 or 800-645-4712
www.ezec.gov
Email: ocd@ocdx.usda.gov

F. Subjective Scoring Supporting Documentation

In the four subjective scoring categories (*Additional NSLP, Needs and Benefits, Innovativeness and Cost Effectiveness*), scoring is relative, not absolute. The scoring mechanism is intended to create a ranking of projects within these categories. This means, for example, that an applicant's score is dependent on the qualities of documentation presented by all other applicants.

Applications tend to improve from year to year, so an applicant who uses the same quality of documentation year after year can expect to receive progressively lower scores.

The best applications provide self-contained arguments in each of the four subjective scoring categories. It is unwise to expect a reviewer to recognize and consider information outside a category's write-up. For example, all information that the applicant believes could support its *Needs and Benefits* score should be in Section F-2 of the application.

Each of the four subjective scoring categories assesses a unique characteristic of the project which is not captured by the other scoring categories. For example, *Needs and Benefits* assesses the specific educational or health care needs, not the general economic needs, of a project's beneficiaries. Economic need is captured by other scoring categories. *Needs and Benefits* also does not attempt to assess the *Rurality* of a project's area, although an applicant can argue that an unusual rural characteristic of its area contributes to its needs in a way that does not affect rural areas in general.

Generally speaking, applicants who apply to the DLT Program are rural and share relatively high levels of need. For a project to receive a competitive score in this program, the applicant must successfully demonstrate that it exceeds the norm for rural projects in a particular category.

Applicants are reminded that this is a national competition. Arguments showing only comparisons with other areas *in a state* are not compelling in this program. Comparative data should be both local and national in coverage.

In presentation in each of the four subjective categories, statements supported by numerical data receive the higher scores. Statistics about a project should be compared to national averages and ranges. These comparisons help reviewers understand statistics presented about a project. Presenting a spreadsheet showing, for example, statistics about end user sites, with national references, is an especially effective way to support subjective scoring arguments.

F-1. Additional NSLP

The primary measure of general economic need for an area served by a proposed project is based on the National School Lunch Program (NSLP as described above under E-1) and is captured in the *NSLP* score. **The *Additional NSLP* category is intended to provide an opportunity to correct for an *NSLP* score that understates the relative economic need of a project's beneficiaries.**

If an applicant has an NSLP eligibility percentage below 50%, and the applicant can demonstrate that the area it would serve, or the subset of the public it would serve, is not accurately captured by the NSLP percentage, it may request *Additional NSLP* points. **Based on the strength of the evidence provided by the applicant, RUS may award up to ten points in this category.** To score well, it is not sufficient to demonstrate, for example, above average unemployment compared to the state average without putting that statistic into context. **The key to scoring points in this category is providing a convincing demonstration that the economic plight of the applicant's target beneficiaries is more challenging than that of other areas with similar NSLP scores.**

To gain points in this category, the applicant must specifically request them in Section F-1 of the Application (See Additional NSLP worksheet in the toolkit.). If not requested in the original application, points will not be awarded on appeal.

F-2. Community Needs and Project Benefits

This criterion measures the extent to which the proposed project meets the goals and objectives of the DLT Program. RUS may award up to **45 points** in this category. You must **document the specific needs of the community and how the proposed project will address those needs.** You must also document evidence of support from the community.

Tip: Remember, this category is not intended to capture the general economic need of the area served by the project. That need is captured by the *NSLP* score, and, if applicable, *Additional NSLP* scores described above under E-2 and F-1. While a brief overall sketch of the local economy and geography is useful for context, extended discussions of the overall economic health of a region generally do not help tell the story of the specific needs to be addressed by your project.

Define the Community

In some cases, projects propose serving specific communities – the entire population of a town; all adults in several towns; or students in a particular school district. In others, the community to be served is a subset of the entire community. Whatever the nature of the community, your narrative should give RUS a clear picture of it.

Need for Services

Clearly state the economic, educational, or health care challenges facing the project's respective communities, and provide documentation that explains the challenges. Use verifiable data and statistics to substantiate and quantify these challenges. **Demonstrate how the proposed project will help resolve these challenges**, and why the applicant cannot afford the project without a grant.

Document support for the project provided by experts in the educational or health care fields. Remember that the more specific the expert opinion is to your project, the more compelling it is. Substantiate the underserved educational or health care nature of the project's proposed service area; and **justify, explain and document the specific educational or medical services that will provide direct benefits to rural residents.**

You should demonstrate that rural residents and other beneficiaries want the educational or medical services from the project. In other words, **show that the reason for the project is to meet local community needs, not simply to install technology that will probably benefit the community.** Willingness of local end-users or community-based organizations to contribute to the costs of completing, operating, or maintaining the project is a strong indication of community support. Documentation of support includes letters of financial and non-financial commitment towards the project from local organizations.

Address the participation by local residents and organizations in planning and developing the project. Include evidence of this participation in your application. Examples of evidence of community involvement include community meetings, public forums and surveys.

RUS will also consider the extent to which the application is consistent with the State strategic plan prepared by the USDA Rural Development State Director. (See IV-G, *Contact With USDA State Director.*)

Benefits Derived from Services

In addition to documenting the need for services, describe how the project would assist the community in solving these challenges. **Document the specific benefits of your project and quantify them in terms of expected outcomes.** Tie the benefits of your project DIRECTLY to

the stated needs you intend to address. Provide measurable targets or goals such as estimates of the number of people that will benefit from the project.

Tip: Do not address benefits to your organization in this section, unless they are directly tied to community benefit. Benefits of the project that accrue primarily to your organization are addressed under *Cost Effectiveness*.

Examples:

For a distance learning project that serves secondary schools, provide the **number of schools and students** that will benefit. You should also **document and quantify** all other benefits provided by the project with quantifiable goals when possible such as:

- four-year foreign language availability up from 300 to 1200 students
- organic chemistry offered for first time to entire district
- expanded educational facility use, like evening vocational training
- reducing the dropout rate from 17 to 12%

For a telemedicine project that serves a consortium of hospitals, provide the **number of health care facilities and the potential number of patients** to benefit. You should also **document** all other benefits provided by the project such:

- time and monetary savings to the community from telemedicine diagnoses
- 400 patients receiving at-home monitoring
- 4 doctors retained in your community
- lives saved due to prompt medical diagnosis

Document ancillary benefits or multiple uses that create value in the rural communities which the project will serve. Examples include training, information resources, library assets, adult education, lifetime learning, community use of technology, jobs, and connection to the local and global information networks. If applicable, you should address particular community problems such as out-migration and the extent to which the project would reduce or prevent population loss.

Tip: Do not restrict your supporting documentation to the guidance and examples cited here or be tempted to use them as templates for your application. The material in this section is intended only to provide a starting-point. You, the applicant, are the expert about the needs of your community and how your project will meet those needs. Use that expertise to paint a compelling picture of what your project can accomplish.

F-3. Innovativeness of the Project

This criterion assesses how the objectives of the proposed project are met in new and creative ways. Up to **15 points** may be awarded for this criterion. There are two obvious ways that a distance learning or telemedicine project can be innovative, *i.e.*, technical and in application.

Technical innovation is rare but possible in rural distance learning and telemedicine projects. Most of the innovativeness we encounter is in the application of state-of-the-art technologies to solve problems in new ways.

Innovation Issues

Technical innovativeness occurs where a new type of device is used to provide a capability. Examples of innovative technologies are the mobile presentation of a capability that previously had only been available in fixed locations, or where a new transmission medium (such as the Internet) is used to deliver data, replacing leased or dial-up telecommunications facilities. We expect applicants to use state-of-the-art equipment, so doing this alone does not contribute to a high score in this category. Technical innovativeness can be risky, so wherever it is truly present, the applicant should address any risks inherent in the approach.

Application innovativeness occurs where a tried and true technology is applied in a unique or unusual way to provide a new capability, or to provide a familiar capability in a new way. Presumably, all proposed projects will provide new capabilities to their beneficiaries, so an application with this characteristic alone would not earn a high score in this category.

The application should explore the following sources of evidence of innovativeness:

- Does the project employ technical innovation?
- Are there educational and medical programmatic innovations proposed?
- Does the project use unique adaptations of technology to better meet the special needs or circumstances of the project's proposed service area or beneficiaries?
- Does the project have the potential to influence or promote changes in how distance learning or telemedicine services can be delivered in other areas?
- Does the project use existing resources (telecommunications facilities) in a new way

Tip: The best examples of innovativeness will come from the imagination of applicants and cannot be suggested here. Technical and application innovativeness are by no means the only forms of innovativeness that will be credited by the reviewer.

F-4. Cost Effectiveness of the Project

This criterion evaluates the efficiency with which the proposed project delivers educational and medical benefits to beneficiaries. Up to **35 points** may be awarded for this criterion. Generally, efficiency of delivery is accomplished by studying every technology option, considering the use of available resources and using them wherever possible, creating a project that not only accomplishes the primary service delivery, but accomplishes many other functions as well. The emphasis in this criterion is *value*, not lowest cost alone.

How is Cost-Effectiveness Evaluated?

Scores are based on:

1. The extent to which your organization considered alternative technological options for delivering the proposed services. An application should

- explain and **provide technical and financial studies** performed in choosing a technology as the most cost-effective option.
2. The extent to which the project uses existing telecommunications transmission facilities. Supporting information may include evidence of considerations of the use of existing facilities, agreements between the applicant and other entities for sharing transmission facilities, and all other measures taken to lower the project's costs for using such facilities.
 3. The extent to which the project will use existing networks at the regional, statewide, national or global levels. Most projects connect to the Internet, so this use of an existing network has a minimal effect on an application's score.
 4. The extent to which the requested financial assistance will extend or enhance the benefits of the project.
 5. Whether buying or leasing specific equipment is more cost-effective.
 6. Whether a proposed project will accomplish purposes beyond the primary objective. Although the applicant is asked to specify whether distance learning or telemedicine is the predominant use of the project, the facilities funded by the project may benefit the community in other ways. Generally, a multi-use facility will be a greater asset to a rural area than a single-use facility if the two are equally efficient at performing the project's primary function.
 7. Whether the proposed project creates the appropriate level of capability to reasonably meet the community's needs. This refers to a matching of project capability to the defined need.

Tips:

- A spreadsheet showing initial cost and annual costs of all considered alternative technologies and implementations can offer strong support for a good score in this category. Don't forget to explain all assumptions and sources for cost information used in the comparison.
- Be sure that the facts presented are meaningful to the reviewer. For example, a statement that a telemedicine project will provide the capability for 42,000 rural residents to have access to teleradiology facilities at a cost of 29¢ per resident is not meaningful, but a statement that the teleradiology project will reduce the cost in this area of a chest x-ray from \$125 to \$20, and will save the patient 6 hours of driving time, is meaningful.

G. Contact with USDA State Director

You must provide evidence that your organization has consulted with the USDA State Director for Rural Development about the availability of other sources of funding available at the State or local level. Include this evidence as part of your application.

You must also provide evidence from the State Director for Rural Development that your application conforms with the State strategic plan as prepared under section 381D of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C. 1921 *et seq.*). Not all states have a strategic plan, so you should indicate if such a plan does not exist. See Section IV, F-2, *Community Needs & Project Benefits*, for RUS' use of this evidence in scoring your application. Include the evidence in your application.

Note: Applicants should contact the USDA State Director as early as possible in the application process. You can find a listing of the State Rural Development Offices here:

www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd_map.html

H. Certifications

The *Toolkit* contains certifications that you should use to demonstrate compliance with other Federal statutes and regulations.

- Equal opportunity and nondiscrimination
- Architectural barriers
- Flood hazard area precautions
- Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970
- Drug-free workplace
- Debarment and suspension rules
- Lobbying for contracts, grants, etc.
- Non-duplication of services
- Environmental impact

Section V. Putting it all Together

Assemble and tab your grant application in the following order, which is the same order as described under Section IV, *Requirements for a Completed Application*. Material not located under the proper tab will not be considered by reviewers. If material is relevant under more than one tab, it should be repeated under each relevant tab. Any supplemental information that the applicant wants to submit should be included under the relevant tab. An alternative tab arrangement is provided in the far right column. The *Toolkit* provides forms, worksheets, sample certifications, and Web resources to help you find information you need for your application.

TAB	ITEM	alt. tab
A	SF-424 – Application for Federal Assistance	A
B	Legal Eligibility	B
C	Executive Summary	C
D	Project Information	D
D-1	Telecommunications System Plan and Scope of Work	E
D-2	Budget	F
D-3	Financial Information and Sustainability	G
D-4	Statement of Experience	H
E	Objective Scoring	I
E-1	Rurality Calculation Worksheet and Supporting Documentation	J
E-2	NSLP Worksheet and Supporting Documentation	K
E-3	Leveraging Worksheet and Evidence of Funding Commitments	L
E-4	EZ/EC Worksheet and Supporting Documentation (If Applicable)	M
F	Subjective Scoring Supporting Documentation	N
F-1	Request for Additional NSLP Points (If Applicable)	O
F-2	Need for Services and Project Benefits	P
F-3	Innovativeness of the Project	Q
F-4	Cost-Effectiveness of the Project	R
G	Contact with USDA State Director—Rural Development	S
H	Certifications	T