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Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program Application Guide

Bluum Application Guide | FY 2024

How to Use This Guide

Using this guide is a great way to stay organized and write a clear proposal when the SVPP grant is available. Take the time to read through the guide thoroughly. Schedule a time with a Bluum Grants Advisor or reach out to grants@bluum.com if something isn't clear or if you need more information about a certain topic covered in the guide. Use the steps provided in the guide as a framework for your work. We are here to support you through this process.

To access a fillable word document please download using this **link**.

Grant writing Tips

Writing a successful grant proposal requires research, planning, and persuasive writing skills. It is important to create an effective proposal that clearly outlines the purpose of the project, describes how it will be accomplished, explains why it is needed and how it will benefit the community or organization the project serves. Follow the tips below:

1. **Do your research.** Before you start writing the application, spend some time to understand what the solicitation is looking for and how they evaluate applications. This will help inform your approach when crafting a proposal that meets the criteria.
2. **Fully Read** the Application Guidelines.
3. **Start early.** Give yourself plenty of time before the deadline to plan, write, and revise your proposal. Keep in mind that the review process can take up to several months, so it's important to leave yourself enough time in advance of any deadlines set by the grantor.
4. **Stay organized.** Keeping all relevant information and documents together throughout the entire process helps ensure that you are well prepared when it comes time to submit your proposal on time and without errors or omissions.

Pre-Application Must Do
Consultation with USDA State Directors

The applicant must provide evidence that the organization has consulted with the USDA State Director for Rural Development in each state with end-user sites. Applicants are to inquire about the availability of other sources of funding at the State or local level. Evidence of these consultations must be included as part of the application.

When requesting evidence of consultation with the USDA State Director, an applicant should provide an executive summary of the project as well as the proposed grant and match amounts to enable the State Director to make an informed determination. Failure to provide this information may delay receipt of the State Director's response.

Note: Applicants should contact the USDA State Director as early as possible in the application process. A listing of the State Rural Development Offices can be found at: https://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/state-offices

Section A: Complete Standard Form 424

The SF-424, also referred to as the Application for Federal Assistance Form, is provided by Grants.gov as a required form. It is crucial that you use the exact name of the legal entity applying for the grant on the SF-424. All other application components must be uploaded with the SF-424 in Grants.gov.

Refer to page 42– 43 if the Application Guidelines on how to fill this form.

Section B: Site Worksheet

SAMPLE Description of Project Sites Worksheet									
Applicant's Legal Name									

(Insert additional rows as needed)

Site Number	Site Name	Site Designation (Hub; End-User; Hub/End-User)	Street Address	Town	County	State	5 Digit ZIP	Congressional District	# Rural Residents Served at each Hub/End-User or End-User Site

Section C: Executive Summary of the Project (COMPLETE FIRST)

The Executive Summary gives reviewers their first overall view of the project area, the problems residents face, and how the proposed project will address those problems. This is the applicant's opportunity to discuss the core aspects of the project.

It should contain a concise description of the project, including:

1	A description of why the project is needed.
2	An explanation of how the applicant will address the need(s) cited, why the applicant requires the financial assistance, the types of education or medical services to be offered by the projects, and the benefits to rural residents.
3	A description of the applicant, documenting eligibility.
4	An explanation of the total project cost including a breakdown of the grant required and the source of matching contribution and other financial assistance for the remainder of the project.
5	A statement specifying whether the project is either a distance learning OR telemedicine facility as defined in § 1734.3. If the project provides both distance learning and telemedicine services, the applicant must identify the predominant use of the system.
6	A statement specifying whether the project is proposing to reduce the morbidity and mortality that is associated with substance use disorder in rural communities.
7	A statement specifying whether the project is requesting special consideration points for Creating More and Better Markets by serving the most distressed tier of the Distressed Communities index or advancing Racial Justice, Place-Based Equity, and Opportunity by serving Socially Vulnerable Communities, providing service on Tribal Lands, or for projects proposed by a federally recognized Tribe. If no special consideration is being requested, applicant should state "No special consideration requested."
8	A general overview of the telecommunications system to be developed, including the types of equipment, technologies, and facilities used.
9	A description of the participating hub, end/user, and hub/end–user sites and the number of rural residents that will be served by the project at each end-user and hub/enduser site. Describe the source used to obtain the number and how sites labeled as hub/end-users will fulfill both roles.

10	Discussion of the relationship of the applicant with participating hub, end-user, and hub/end-user sites and if the application is being filed as an informal consortium. If the application is for an informal consortium with all entities requesting to sign the grant agreement (so that they can own certain grant-funded equipment and be jointly and severally liable for the entire grant project), a single fiscal agent must be identified as the applicant and all entities must meet program eligibility requirements, which includes providing certifications and documentation under Section J and Section K, respectively, including SAM registrations with Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications.
11	A certification by the applicant that facilities to be constructed with the grant do not duplicate adequate established telemedicine or distance learning services. To complete the Non-duplication of Services Certificate, select the appropriate box on item J-4 of the DLT Application Checklist. This form is provided in Appendix A.
12	A listing of the location of each end-user site and hub/end-user site (city, town, village, borough, or rural areas), as well as the State.

Publicly Releasable Project Description

At the end of the Executive Summary, please provide a section titled "Publicly Releasable Project Description" that contains the following information:

- Title of the Project

- Description of the proposed end-user and hub/end-user site(s)

- A brief description of project

- Total estimated number of rural residents to benefit from the proposed project and how you arrived at this number (The number included here should be consistent with associated column on project site worksheet.)

Example:

This Rural Development investment will be used to equip [number] hub sites and [number] end-user sites throughout [county name(s)] in [geographical direction] [State] with [equipment type]. Instructors at [entity name] in [county and state] will deliver [type of instructional content (example: Scientific, Technical, Engineering and Mathematics)] courses to [number] locations benefitting [number] students.

Section D:
Scoring Criteria Documentation

The DLT Grant Program is a competitive program. Applications are scored in objective and subjective categories.

D-1 Rurality

The Rurality score is based on the population size of each community where an end-user site is located and the proximity of urban areas to the site.

The following classifications define the various population levels determining the Rurality score.

EXCEPTIONALLY RURAL AREA – 5,000 and under	40 Points
RURAL AREA – 5,001–10,000	30 Points
MID-RURAL AREA – 10,001–20,000	20 Points
URBAN AREA – Over 20,000	0

SAMPLE Description of Project Sites Worksheet
Minimum Score of 20 points is required for eligibility
Applicant's Legal Name

(Insert additional rows as needed)

Site Number	Site Name	Site Designation (Hub; End-User; Hub/End-User)	Street Address	Town	County	State	5 Digit ZIP

D-2 Economic Need

The Economic Need score will be used to evaluate the relative financial need of the applicant, community, and project, and is based on the county poverty percentage of the end–user sites proposed in the application. The percentages must be determined by utilizing the U.S. Census Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) Program.

County poverty percentage > 30 percent	30 points
County poverty percentage > 20 percent but < 30 percent	20 points
County poverty percentage > 10 percent but < 20 percent	10 points
County poverty percentage < 10 percent – 0 points	0 Points

SAMPLE Description of Project Sites Worksheet
Applicant's Legal Name

(Insert additional rows as needed)

Site Number	Site Name	Site Designation (Hub; End-User; Hub/End-User)	Street Address	Town	County

D-3 Special Considerations

Special consideration points will be awarded for projects with at least one end-user in the areas listed below. Applicants may only receive special consideration points in one area (10 points max).

- Creating More and Better Markets (10 points): Projects that enable and improve distance learning and telemedicine services in Rural Areas to the most distressed tier of the Distressed Communities index are eligible for 10 points. The most distressed tier of the index are those communities with a score over 80. A list of Distressed Communities can be found on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programsservices/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

- Projects advancing Racial Justice, Place-Based Equity, and Opportunity (10 points): The following projects are eligible under this criterion:

  o Projects proposing to serve rural communities with a Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) with a score of 0.75 or higher. Puerto Rico, Guam, America Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Hawaiian Census Tribal areas are considered Socially Vulnerable Communities. A GIS layer identifying the Socially Vulnerable Communities can be found using the DLT mapping tool available website at: https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/telecommunications-programs/distancelearning-telemedicine-grants.

  o Projects that enable and improve distance learning and telemedicine services on Tribal Lands. Tribal Lands will be identified in GIS layers included in the DLT mapping tool available at: www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/telecommunicationsprograms/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

  o Projects proposed by a federally recognized tribe, including Tribal instrumentalities and entities that are wholly owned by Tribes are eligible for 10 points.

SAMPLE Special Consideration Worksheet				
Applicant's Legal Name				

Before Completing this Worksheet, PLEASE CAREFULLY READ:
Section E, (d), (i) - (iii) of the 2024 DLT Notice of Solicitation of Applications and
Section D of the Application Guide

Under the FY 2024 DLT NOSA, does this project qualify for special consideration points? If the answer above is **NO**, skip the remainder of the sheet. If the answer above is **YES**, complete the table below.	YES NO

Special Consideration Category	Category for Which Applicant is Seeking Special Consideration Points (10 Points Maximum) ONLY MARK ONE	Other Special Consideration Categories Addressed by this Project** (No additional points) MARK ALL THAT APPLY	Site Number(s)	Site Name(s)
One or more End-User(s) serving **Distressed Communities**				
One or more End-User(s) serving **Socially Vulnerable Communities**				
One or more End-User(s) serving **Tribal Lands**				
Project proposed by a **federally recognized Tribe (including Tribal instrumentalities and entities wholly owned by Tribes)**				

D-4 Need for Services and Benefits (Narrative)

Explanation of Need for Services

To receive these points, applicants must clearly state the economic, geographic, educational, or health care challenges facing the project's respective communities and provide any documentation that demonstrates the challenges. Applicants must use verifiable data and statistics to substantiate and quantify these challenges. Additionally, the application should address why the applicant cannot afford the project without a grant.

Applicants should include documentation of support for the project from professionals in the educational or health care fields. The professional opinion(s) should be as specific as possible regarding the situation and the proposed project. Applicants must also substantiate the underserved educational or health care nature of the project's proposed service area, as well as demonstrate demand by rural residents and other beneficiaries for the educational or medical services that the project would provide. Applicants must show that the project is designed to meet local community needs.

Please note, any economic data used in this section should not be duplicative of the data used for the D-2 Economic Need scoring criterion. Applicants should only submit economic data in this section if the economic data for the county used in D-2 Economic Need does not truly capture the economic condition of the end-user site locations.

Explanation of Benefits Derived from Services

In addition to documenting the need for services, applicants should describe how the project would assist the community in solving these challenges. Applicants must document the specific benefits of the project and quantify them in terms of expected outcomes. Applicants must tie the benefits of the project DIRECTLY to the stated needs the project is intended to address and provide measurable targets or goals such as estimates of the number of people that will benefit from the project.

Explanation of Local community involvement in planning, implementing, and financial assistance of the project.

Applicants should address the participation by local residents and organizations in planning and developing the project and include evidence of this participation in the application. Examples of evidence of community involvement include community meetings, public forums, and surveys. 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, but is not limited to, letters of financial and non-financial commitment towards the project from local organizations.

Section E: Matching Requirements

The grant applicant's minimum matching contribution must equal 15% of the grant amount requested. Matching contributions generally must be in the form of cash. However, in-kind contributions solely for the purposes listed in §1734.21 may be substituted for cash and appropriately identified in the in-kind section of the line-item budget.

Additionally, documentation submitted in support of the application should reflect all financial support for the project as required by §1734.22. The applicant must provide evidence, from authorized representatives of the sources, of a commitment that the funds are available and will be used for the project. Each match entry on the Matching Requirement Documentation must be supported by a signed letter from the entity proposing the match, unless the match is being provided by the applicant.

SAMPLE Match Calculation Worksheet

Applicant's Legal Name		
(Insert additional rows as needed)		

Donor (Documentation Letter from each donor must be provided)	Cash ($)	In-Kind

Total Proposed Matching Contribution (must equal Line B + Line C in the Budget Worksheet)	$ -	$ -	$ -
2. Total DLT Grant Request (Must equal Line D in the Budget Worksheet)			$ -
Match Percent (Line 1 ÷ Line 2), must be at least 15% of Grant Request			

Section F: Scope of Work

Applicants must provide a narrative (with charts, if needed) explaining the Scope of Work. The application should provide a clear and convincing presentation of how the goals of the project will be achieved. The scope of work completes the picture for the reviewer. It discusses how the organization proposes to proceed with the project. An application that does not include a scope of work and line–item budget cannot be evaluated and will be deemed ineligible.

The scope of work must include, at a minimum, the following:

Narrative Component

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

Budget Component

A budget for all capital expenditures reflecting the line-item costs separated by site for approved purposes for both the grant funds and the matching funds for the project. Separately, the budget must specify if there are any line-item costs that are nonapproved purposes for grants as contained in §1734.23, and how they will be funded.

Budget Guidance

a.   The Budget should show each cost as a line-item, separated by site. The items listed and described in the Telecommunications System Plan (Section I) should track line-by-line with the entries in the Budget. The site references in the Budget must match those used in the Description of Project Sites (Section B) so that it is clear which locations will be receiving equipment through the grant project.

b.   Do not combine items into lump sums that cannot be evaluated individually by the Agency. The individual parts must be evaluated for cost comparison and program eligibility. If an aggregated line item includes a component that is ineligible, the entire item will be deemed ineligible.

c.   If an application includes multiple costs on a single line of the application budget, one of which is subject to a cost limitation, as outlined in 7 CFR 1734.21, the items that are not subject to the cost limitation will be deducted when calculating the cost limitation percentage. However, the entire line item will be applied against the cost limitation if each cost cannot be determined.

d.   Provide detail such as the brand and model number used to prepare the budget; for example, "VideoKing TX-90, $5,600," as opposed to "One Video System, $75,000," Installation," $50,000," or "Wiring, $100,000." (Note that RUS approval of a project budget for application purposes does not constitute specific approval to purchase a particular brand of equipment if a grant is made. The procurement of equipment by a grantee must be performed in compliance with the grant agreement and applicable regulations, including 2 CFR Part 200).

e.   If a user fee or license fee is required to use grant or match purchased equipment, it must be presented as such in the application.

f.   Extended warrantees, site licenses and maintenance contracts should be broken out as separate line items for each hub and/or end user site, as applicable.

g.   The final Budget total should be rounded to the nearest whole dollar amount.

SAMPLE Line-Item Budget Worksheet

Applicant's Legal Name

(Insert additional rows as needed)

	Items being funded by Grant and Cash Match				
Line Item #	Site Number & Name	Description	Unit Cost	# of Units	Extended Cost
1					$ -
2					$ -
3					$ -
4					$ -
			Total Grant and Cash Match		$ -

	Items being contributed as In-Kind Match (if applicable)				
Line Item #	Site Number & Name	Description	Unit Cost	# of Units	Extended Cost
1					$ -
2					$ -
3					$ -
			Total In-Kind Match		$ -
A	**Overall DLT Project Budget** (Sum of Total Grant & Cash Match and Total In-Kind Match)				$ -
B	**Less Proposed Cash Match** (As documented on Match Calculation Worksheet)				$ -
C	**Less In-Kind Match**				$ -
D	**DLT Grant Request (A-B-C)**				$ -
		Grant to Match % (minimum of 15% required)			

Section G: Financial Information and Sustainability

The applicant must provide a narrative description demonstrating the feasibility of the project, including having sufficient resources and expertise to undertake and complete the project and how the project will be sustained following completion. The application must show that funding is available for the three-year period that it takes to put together the project (required for eligibility) and to ensure the project's continuance as a viable community resource. Applicants must provide a narrative description that addresses the project's feasibility. The narrative should include a description of the project's leadership, its technical expertise, and how leadership and technical expertise is distributed throughout all the sites or the service territory. Describe how the flow of funds and institutional financial support (local government, businesses, school system, university, or foundation) will sustain the project and maintain continuity of service.

The narrative should include all assumptions and the following information:

- A description of the project's expenses in the project Budget
- Evidence of cost-sharing arrangements among hub and end-user sites, if applicable; and
- Identification of any other items that may affect feasibility and/or sustainability of the project.

Section H: Statement of Experience

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

Section I: Telecommunications Systems Plan

Failure to provide a well-written and thorough Telecommunications System Plan may result in the application being rejected.

Component 1: System Plan Narrative

System Plan Narrative Provide a narrative describing the overall DLT network and use of the proposed equipment in the network.

- Detail each item in the Scope of Work Budget by line number – what it is, how it will be used in the network, and how it qualifies as a DLT use. Provide justification of the equipment based on discussions with technical experts. Discuss any possible duplication of other DLT efforts and how this project avoids such duplication. Discuss the applicant's involvement in any previous USDA DLT grants or current USDA DLT grant application.

Please Note:

- Some items requested for DLT funding will have more general uses than other equipment, which may have 100% distance learning or telemedical purposes. For each item, specify the percentage of use that can be attributed to purposes that meet the DLT grant definition of distance learning or telemedicine, explain how those percentages were determined, and address the capabilities of the proposed equipment/software. The percentage of use is only to be used for analysis as part of line–item explanations. Do not break out items in the actual Budget by percentage of use. Please note, the predominant purpose (50% or more of use) of every line–item in the grant and match budget meets the DLT Grant definition of distance learning or telemedicine. See the Eligible Grant Purposes section of this guide for more details.

- Document discussions with various technical sources, such as consultants, engineers, product vendors or internal technical experts.

- Address whether or not any part of the project will duplicate any adequate, established distance learning services already in operation. In particular, discuss how match and grant funding for this project, if approved, would complement previous efforts.

  o Describe the status of previous projects and, specifically, the extent to which the funds have been drawn for eligible grant purposes.

  o To complete the Non–duplication of Services Certificate, select the appropriate box on item J-4 of the DLT Application Checklist. This form is provided in Appendix A.

Component 2: System Plan Map/Diagram

Attach a map or a drawing, which is a spatial representation of the service area encompassing the project, displaying an overlay of the proposed distance learning or telemedicine system, including hub sites, end-user sites, and hub/end-user sites. This map can be displayed as a series of maps containing an overview, followed by close-up maps of individual sites. Each site, hub, end-user, and hub/end-user sites must be represented on the submitted map(s). This representation need not be to scale, but it must be representational of the project, not generic. Generic network diagrams, usually depicting some kind of campus architecture, are by themselves insufficient. However, applicants can provide network diagrams (without geographic references) if they can also provide geographic maps that reference the diagrams. Nevertheless, an application that does not contain a map that shows each site could be difficult to evaluate, thereby losing competitive value when compared to applications that present visual clarity of their project.

Section J, K, L, M: Federal Compliance Sections

The applicant will be required to comply with the following requirements:

Section J	Compliance with Other Federal Statues
Section K	Evidence of Legal Existence and Authority to Contract with the Federal Government
Section L	Environmental Impact and Historic Preservation
Section M	Consultation with USDA State Director(s)

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Schedule your Consultation Now!

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