

## Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program FAQs

**What resources are available for assistance in preparation of an application?**

Our Distance Learning & Telemedicine (DLT) website is the first stop for information on current funding opportunities, past awards demonstrating the types of projects we have funded, and other information.

On the website, you may download the current *Application Guides*-your best comprehensive source of information on program requirements and guidance on preparing an application for funding. The DLT Program produces a *Grant Application Guide* and *Loan and Combination Loan/Grant Application Guide* annually. Our intent in producing these guides is to present, amplify, and explain the regulatory requirements in a manner that provides even the most inexperienced applicant the resources it needs to prepare a high quality application. Among other things, it includes eligibility requirements, descriptive narratives, forms, and worksheets.

Utilities Services General Field Representatives (GFRs) are located throughout the nation. GFRs and our Washington, D.C. staffers are available to answer questions and provide guidance to applicants. Contact information can be found at:

[http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/UTP\\_ContactStaff.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/UTP_ContactStaff.html)

USDA State Directors for Rural Development are also available to answer questions and provide information about the DLT Program as well as the many other Programs offered by USDA's Rural Development. Contact information for the State Offices can be found at:

[www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd\\_map.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd_map.html)

## **b. What characteristics make up a successful Distance Learning or Telemedicine Grant Project?**

*(Along the same lines, we are frequently asked if there are "buzzwords" that help and some prospective applicants seek to obtain copies of a previous successful grant application to use as a pattern)*

There is no single key to preparing a successful application. The best advice we can give is to carefully follow the instructions and guidance contained in the *Application Guide*.

With regard to scoring, grant applications are scored in eight categories. Four are objective (based on publicly verifiable information) and four are subjective (based on the case made by the applicant in its narrative response to that subjective scoring category).

How an applicant scores in the objective categories is obvious. The more eligible matching funds your project has, the better it will score. However, some objective scoring categories, such as the one that measures how rural or poor your area is, are not under your control. Follow the *Application Guide* to make certain that you provide the correct data for these categories.

We can offer more guidance about the subjective categories. Again, we note that the best guidance is found in the *Application Guide*. Second, there are no buzzwords. Third, the best applications spring from the mind of the applicant and the special and unique knowledge that the applicant has about his or her area and what it is they want to accomplish. It is our experience that the common motivation for obtaining a copy of a previously successful DLT application is so that it can be used as a template. We do not believe that this is a productive approach to crafting a successful DLT application. While it might seem useful to see another's responses in the subjective scoring categories, the best scores in those categories are awarded for responses specific to that applicant's project. Good applications do not spring from a

template. As noted above, we endeavor to make the *Application Guide* a complete source of information on how to prepare a successful application and have designed it for the first-time applicant with no previous experience applying for grants. As an applicant, remember that no one knows your project and special circumstances as well as you. As a consequence, no one can do a better job of crafting an application than you.

**c. What is the deadline for DLT Grant Applications?**

Grant applications are accepted during an application window which is announced in the Federal Register. Typically, the window opens in the first quarter of the year and is open for 60 days. We do not provide specific information about the opening of the grant window in advance of publication in the Register except on our webpage. We do this so that all prospective applicants have the same information available to them and because the exact date of publication in the Register is outside our control. The window is announced on our DLT web page.

**d. What is the eligibility requirement for a grant applicant? What are the requirements to be eligible for funding with a grant?**

Refer to B, *Legal Eligibility*, and D, *Project Information (Eligible and Ineligible Purposes)* in Section IV of the current *Application Guide* (for current information, always use the most recently published *Application Guide*, which is posted on our website at approximately the same time as the opening of the application window.

**e. What is the application window for a Combination Loan/Grant or a 100% Loan.**

There is no window for Combos or Loans. Applications are processed on a non-competitive first-come, first-served basis. Applications may be submitted anytime. To be funded within a current Fiscal Year, which for the Federal Government ends on September 30, an

application should be received by July 31 of that year.

**f. How are Combo and 100% Loan Programs different from the Grant Program.**

The loan programs can fund larger projects. Generally, the maximum amount considered for a loan is \$10 million. However, we may fund a project greater than that subject to the project's feasibility and the availability of loan funds. Combination Loan/Grants will generally consist of a fixed proportion of loan and grant. The ratio is set annually in that year's Notice of Funds Availability as published in the Federal Register. Although the programs are not competitive, applicants must demonstrate a minimum *Rurality* score using the scoring method described in the *Grant Application Guide*. There is no matching fund requirement.

The purposes for combination loan-grant and loan financing include more than the fairly narrow range of equipment, software and technical assistance allowed with grant funding; particularly with regard to physical facilities, e.g., "bricks and mortar", transmission facilities, and project start-up costs. See the current year's *Loan and Combination Loan/Grant Application Guide*.

**g. What kind of interest rate is available with Loans or the Loan portion of Combination Loan/Grants**

The interest rate for a 100% loan (or the loan portion of a combination loan/grant) is based on the cost of money to the United States Treasury at the time of draw down of funds. The maximum amortization period for the loan (portion) is up to 10 years or the economic life of the facilities being financed, whichever is less. The interest rate is based on "Yields on Treasury Securities" at "constant maturity." Yields on Treasury securities at "constant maturity" are interpolated by the U.S. Treasury from the daily yield curve. For more information on estimating prospective interest rates, see the current year's *Loan and Combination Loan/Grant Application Guide*.