



## Transcript of the Distance Learning & Telemedicine Program webinar held in June 2015

### Slide 1-

Thank for tuning into to this presentation. This is a recording of presentation that we have been giving on a series of webinars for the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program. There has been extraordinary interest in those webinars, and each session keeps filling up and we have to turn people away, and so we are recording this session for those who have been unable to participate. Thank you for your interest in the program. My name is Scott Steiner and I'm an Engineering Branch Chief with the Loan Origination and Approval Division of our Telecommunications Program and our Division handles the initial application for all of our various loan and grant programs under the Telecommunications Program.

### Slide 2

The Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant (DLT) Program improves distance learning or telemedicine services in rural America and funds equipment that allows rural residents to access distance learning or telemedicine services from hub sites located in larger urban or suburban areas allowing greater access and reducing the need to travel long distances to access those services or opportunities.

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For the purposes of the DLT Program, distance learning means a telecommunications link to an end user through the use of eligible equipment to either:

- 1) To provide educational programs, instruction, or information originating in one area, whether rural or not, to students and teachers who are located in rural areas; or
- 2) Connect teachers and students, located in one rural area with teachers and students that are located in a different rural area.

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Telemedicine means a telecommunications link to an end user through the use of eligible equipment which electronically links medical professionals at separate sites in order to exchange health care information in audio, video, graphic, or other format for the purpose of providing improved health care services primarily to residents of rural areas.

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In terms of funding levels, there is \$19M in new funding available this year, and we are also expecting there will likely be some carryover from previous years (when previous projects rescind, that money becomes available). We don't have an exact amount, but it likely be some amount greater than \$19M, but at least \$19M.



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As with previous years, the minimum grant amount is \$50,000 and the maximum grant amount is \$500,000.

Only grant funds are available, no loan or loan/grant funds have been allocated and so if you go to the regulation, you will notice there are some different rules when loan funds are involved. This presentation is only going to focus on the rules for grant only projects, since we do not have funding available for loans or loan/grant projects.

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In terms of changes for 2015:

We are asking when applicants submit via paper, that they include an electronic copy of their application on a CD-ROM or flash drive to assist us in some of our internal review.

For non-fixed end user site scoring, that has been simplified from years past. The Rurality and National School Lunch Program scores are going to be based on the hub or hubs used in the project. We found it was very complicated when you had these non-fixed end user site projects trying to actually specify the end user sites, because the nature of the project is they could move around, depending on the need. The classic sort of application for that is home health monitoring, where it can get very complicated, it depends on what patients come to you.

Similarly, for hybrid projects, the non-fixed portion will be scored similarly to what we just talked about and then averaged with the fixed portion, and that's how you'll determine the scores for the application as a whole.

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In terms of applicant eligibility, the following entity types are eligible to apply:

- Incorporated organization or partnership;
- Indian tribe or tribal organization, as defined in 25 U.S.C. 450b (e);
- State or local unit of government;
- Consortium as defined in 1703.102; or
- Other legal entity, including a private corporation organized on a for-profit or not-for-profit basis.

**Each applicant must provide written evidence of its legal capacity to contract with the Rural Utilities Service to obtain the grant and comply with all applicable requirements.**

The thing I would like highlight on that, is that on our website for DLT under the "Form and Resources" tab there is actually a draft copy of the Grant Agreement that anyone who received a grant would enter



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into with our agency. Obviously there are some blanks in there that would get filled out particular to the project, but overall the terms and conditions would be the same to anyone who is applying, so if you have any doubt about whether you could comply, please go and read that agreement. It's not something you would have to fill out now, if you get a grant we'll fill it out and provide it to you, but just make sure you comfortable with all of the conditions that are in there, because that agreement gets used without modification. If there is something in there that is a deal-breaker for you, it's better to find that out now before you go through all the effort of applying.

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### Consortium

A consortium is a combination or group of entities formed to undertake the purposes for which the distance learning and telemedicine financial assistance is provided.

If the applicant is an existing established consortium with the legal ability to contract with the Federal Government, that organization can apply in the name of the formal consortium. All of the forms in the application would be signed by that existing legal entity.

We also see informal consortia which either don't legally exist or don't have the authority to contract with RUS. The informal consortium must have a legally organized host organization that will apply on behalf of the consortium or each individual entity must contract with RUS in its own behalf. Each member of the informal consortium must provide signed copies of certifications. See page 29 of the DLT Application Guide for more detail.

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Under the grant portion of the DLT program, which is all there is funding for, there are three categories of eligible grant purposes.

- 1. Acquiring, by lease or purchase eligible equipment.** If leased, the cost of the lease during the three year life of the grant is eligible.
- 2. Acquiring instructional programming** that is a capital asset (including the purchase or lease of instructional programming already on the market).
- 3. Providing technical assistance and instruction for using eligible equipment.** The costs for **this category cannot exceed 10% of the grant amount requested or 10% of the eligible matching funds calculated separately.**



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Here are some examples of equipment:

Computer hardware and software

Audio and video equipment

Computer network components

Telecommunications terminal equipment

Data terminal equipment

Interactive audio/video equipment

Inside wiring

All of those could potentially be eligible, however, the application must demonstrate that the predominant use, that is at least 50% of use, of every line item in the budget meets the DLT definition of distance learning and/or telemedicine. All equipment must be new. These are examples of eligible equipment, but it's up to you to demonstrate in the application you are going to be use it more than half the time for an eligible distance learning or telemedicine purpose, so there is no automatically eligible equipment, it's up to you to demonstrate that it is.

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In terms of ineligible equipment, here are some select ineligible purposes.

Acquiring, installing, or constructing telecommunications transmission facilities. That is, the actual connection between points in the network, so if the location doesn't already have broadband facilities that would support the distance learning or telemedicine purpose, the grant can't pay for constructing that connection.

Medical equipment not used primarily for telemedicine (50%+)

Salaries or administrative expenses

Application preparation costs

Purchase of land, buildings, building construction, site development, or destruction or alteration of buildings.

Others- See page 6 of the DLT Application Guide for a more comprehensive list.



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There are some additional eligibility criteria.

In order to be eligible to receive a grant, there is a minimum rurality score. An application has to get a minimum of 20 points as an average score when you average all the end user sites included in the project. There are instruction on page 11 of the application guide for computing the rurality score, and we'll also get into that a little bit on a subsequent slide on the population levels that tie to various scoring levels.

In terms of a matching contribution, the applicant must propose at least 15% in matching funds, and that has to be used on a purpose that would be eligible for grant funds. If something is to be included as match, it also has to have been eligible for inclusion in the grant request. There are special matching provisions for American Samoa, Guam, Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands for eligibility purposes, but that doesn't apply to the Leveraging score and we'll address that scoring component on an upcoming slide.

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Matching funds can either be cash, equipment, or in-kind contributions from a third party

Matching funds must be for an eligible grant purpose, so it can't be for one of those items that was a sample ineligible item and it has to be integral to the overall DLT project. You have to show it has a predominant DLT purpose that could be grant funded, but instead you're proposing to use matching funds for it.

The value of in-kind contributions must be supported. Vendor discounts are not an eligible in-kind contribution. So, if the vendor is going to mark down a piece of equipment and you want to count the value of that discount, that is not an eligible in-kind contribution.

Only new equipment may be used in a DLT project, so used or partially depreciated equipment may not be donated as match, since it would not be allowable as a grant funded purpose.

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There are a number of scoring criteria, they fall into objective and subjective elements. We're going to start with the objective criteria.

The first is rural area, and this measures the rural benefit of the project. The threshold for the application to be considered eligible is 20 points and this category is based on Census data, up to 45 points are available. Here is the rurality worksheet, that you will fill out when completing your application. For each of the sites, you'll give it a site number, name the site, designate whether it is a



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hub, a hub/end user, or end user site. Those terms are all talked about in detail in the application guide. You'll specify the city or town the site is in, the population, and assign rurality scoring points based upon this table. You'll see points range from exceptionally rural communities with a population of 5,000 or less, which get 45 points up to urban areas of 20,000 or more where 0 points are available. You will lay all of the sites out in this table, to be eligible, it needs to average out to be at least 20 points.

The next category is economic need and this is done using the National School Lunch Program data. This criterion measures the general economic need of the area. This is the NSLP worksheet, which works similarly, where you would fill it out and get scores according to this table. In terms of doing these points, there is also a table here that walks you through when you are going to use the NSLP data for an individual school and when you are going to use the data for the school district. That comes down to whether the site is located in a specific school, or in the case of a lot of telemedicine projects where it's not. Projects that aren't distance learning don't tend to be located in a specific school, although that is possible. Similarly, you would average out your sites and end up with a score for the overall application.

For the leveraging score, the DLT program requires a minimum match with the exception of projects in American Samoa, Guam, Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands for eligibility purposes. Additional points are available if you go above the minimum. This is the leveraging worksheet, where you'll document where the match is coming from. If the match is coming from a donor, you'll provide documentation letter from them committing that. If special areas take advantage of the lesser match amount, they would receive 0 points per this table.

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Now we move on to subjective criteria

Additional NSLP: when an applicant has an NSLP eligibility below 50% they can request additional points if they can document that the NSLP score is not an accurate indicator of the economic need of the area. Up to 10 points are available and this is not available to every applicant. They have to have been below 50% NSLP eligibility to claim these points.

Need for Services and Project Benefits: ): This criterion compares the specific need for the technology in the proposed service territory, and how the proposed project will address those needs and benefit the residents of the area affected. This is a subjective criteria, up to 45 points are available, and there is a discussion in the application guide on what you would want to address if you were trying to maximize your points on this criterion.



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**Special Consideration:** RUS will offer special consideration to applications that contain at least one end-user site within a trust area or a tribal jurisdictional area. Such applications will be awarded 15 points. It's either 0 or 15 points.

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### ***'Special Consideration'***

Projects that contain at least one end-user site within a trust area or a tribal jurisdictional area will gain 15 extra points if...

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the applicant can document:

- 1) With a map that the end-user site is within the boundaries of the trust area or tribal jurisdictional area.
  
- 2) With a map identifying the geographical coordinates and physical address of the end-user site.
  
- 3) With some form of legal reference or written evidence that the area where the end-user site is located in a trust area or a tribal jurisdictional area

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In terms of filling out an application, these are the various schedules we require be filled out. I'm not going to read each of them, a copy of this presentation is available on our web site. Also, you can go to page 9 of the application guide and it will lay it out what we're looking for on each of these schedules.

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Projects are required to consult with the State Director. All applicants must contact the State Directors in the project area and provide evidence of that. Schedule K is consultation with the USDA State Director. This is the section from the application guide. You can use that link to find the State Director contact for the various states, so find the one(s) that cover your project. This does have to be provided, so what I would like to highlight here is that you should make this contact early. If you contact them on the last day of the application window, obviously it is unlikely they would be able to turn that around and respond to you in time. Keep in mind they are busy people and know about this requirement, and



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are very interested in projects being funded in their states, so they will respond back to you, but you need to give them enough of an opportunity to do that.

We also have a project description, this is what it looks like. What I would note here is that anything you provide here should not have sensitive or proprietary information. We may share this information if your project is awarded.

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There are also a number of worksheets, we've talked about some of them already on previous slides when we were talking about the scoring criteria. I would highlight that on our website for the program, under the Forms and Resources tab there is an Excel workbook with copies of these worksheets. You may find that helpful in filling these out, you are also free to print out hard copies and fill them by hand, if you prefer. The Excel workbook has some linking where if you fill out a site on one tab, it populates that information in subsequent tabs, just remember that if you add rows, to copy those formulas or you will have to fill in the sites manually on the other tabs.

Here is the Site Worksheet, which you fill out similarly to the worksheets we've already discussed. Here's a link to our web site where you can get the Excel version.

The other worksheet we haven't already talked about is the budget worksheet. You'll list the sites and the equipment at each site, lay out whether it's grant or cash match funded or in-kind funded. Remember the requirement that the equipment be used predominately for DLT purposes. You'll need to provide detail to show this for each line item.

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This is our web site. You can find more information on the program here, including the application guide. I would highlight there are a couple of tabs on the page. When you first go you'll be on the Program 101 tab, remember there is the Forms and Resources tab where a lot of very helpful information is, including the application guide.

Another thing I would highlight here is that if you are interested in this program on a recurring basis, you can sign up to our ListServ. You can do that by going to the maroon email icon in the top right of the page. You'll provide your email address and establish a password, then select which RD program(s) you are interested in. You will then get emails anytime there is a change to a program web site you have subscribed to. We'll try to keep changes to the web site for this year to a minimum, but for a example when the program opens up next year, we would make that change to the web site and you'd get an email that same day letting you know. I would encourage anyone who has an ongoing interest in the program to go ahead and sign up for that.



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There are some additional registration requirements. Everyone who's applying to the DLT program does need a DUNS number. You can go to this link and register there. Once you have that you can go and register for the System for Award Management at SAM.gov. You do need the DUNS number before you can register through SAM. Applicants, whether applying by paper or grants.gov, do need to register in SAM, and this must be done PRIOR to submitting the application. Applicants also have to keep the registration current during the whole period we're considering the application, and if you get one you need to keep the registration current while the grant is outstanding.

What I would highlight here is that both of these registrations can take up to 10 days each, and so the takeaway here is to get those registrations out of the way as early as you can. If you get to the end of the application process and try to do your registrations on July 6<sup>th</sup>, I can assure you that you are not going to get a SAM registration, and that is an eligibility item. If you don't have an active SAM.gov registration before you turn in your application, we can't consider your application, so start that early because it could be a deal breaker for the application.

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Applications must be submitted or postmarked by July 6, 2015, electronically via grants.gov or postmarked, shipped, or hand delivered to our office. If the second option, we need three paper copies, at least one of which has original signatures, and we ask for an electronic copy on a CD-ROM or USB Flash Drive.

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Paper copies and the accompanying electronic version can be sent to this address, which is also in the application guide.

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This is our contact information. This is a recorded webinar, so I'm not taking any questions, but we do respond to phone calls or emailed questions, typically the same day.

That concludes the presentation. Thanks for your interest in the program, if there's anything we can help you with, please reach out to our office. We are somewhat constrained because it is a competitive program, we cannot pre-qualify information, however we can give program level answers to certain questions, more hypothetically. Thank you for your interest.

\*END PRESENTATION\*

For Presentation Slides: [http://www.rd.usda.gov/files/UTP\\_2015DLTWebinar\\_WebVersion.pdf](http://www.rd.usda.gov/files/UTP_2015DLTWebinar_WebVersion.pdf)

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