U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service Distance Learning & Telemedicine (RUS DLT) Grant Program

This overview document provides you the keys to creating a strong proposal and becoming grant ready for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service Distance Learning & Telemedicine (RUS DLT) application. ePlus will work with you every step of the way to provide technology and grant writing consulting services, helping you to win funding from this competitive grant. Our team's application success rate is over 90 %, and we have helped hundreds of schools participate in this grant program!

RUS Grant Overview

The RUS DLT Grant provides funding for distance learning and telemedicine equipment—primarily to public and private schools, healthcare organizations, and non-profit organizations. More information about the grant can be found at www.rurdev.usda.gov/UTP_DLT.html.

How Much Funding is Available?
+ Awards can range from $50K to $500K.
+ About 120 grants are awarded nationally each year, making this a highly-competitive grant.
+ Approximately $23M is awarded annually through this grant program

What Equipment is Eligible for Funding?

The RUS Grant funds the acquisition of eligible capital assets—equipment that is used primarily for distance learning or telemedicine purposes, including (but not limited to):
+ Audio and video equipment: monitors, projectors, sound systems, document cameras, interactive white boards, etc.
+ Network Infrastructure: switches, wireless APs, network security appliances
+ Network data cabling
+ Technical training for equipment and software
+ Interactive video equipment
+ Acquiring real-time live learning software
+ Any other provisions that further DLT services

Who is Eligible?

Almost any type of organization is eligible, but the RUS Grant's rurality and poverty guidelines are scored strictly and objectively. Content providers and hub sites may be urban, but the beneficiaries of the grant funds must be able to demonstrate:
+ Rurality
+ High economic need for projects
+ Innovative use of cost-effective distance learning equipment or unique applications for grant-funded equipment

Grants Sponsorship Program

RUS DLT Grant Scoring Criteria

RUS Grant Objective Data			
Rurality - 2010 factfinder Census	NSLP	Match	Special Designation: Strike Force, Tribal Designation Partner, Promise Zone
up to 5,000 - 45 pts	>75 % - 35 pts	over 100 % - 35 pts	Yes- 15pts
5,000 - 10,000 - 30 pts	50-74 % - 25 pts	75 % - 99 % - 30 pts	No- 0 pts
10,000 - 20,000 - 15 pts	25-49 % - 15 pts	50 % - 74 % - 25 pts	
>20,000 - 0 pts	<25 % - 0 pts	30 % - 49 % - 15 pts	

The RUS DLT program focuses on projects that benefit residents in highly rural areas. "Rurality" scores determine an applicant's rural need, which dictates corresponding points. Applicant's rurality is determined by 2010 census data, which creates a score for each site. Hub-end user and end-user site scores are then averaged together to create a total rurality score for the application.

Part two of the objective scoring criteria is economic need. The RUS DLT program uses the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) eligibility statistics as measurement for economic need of the applicant. All proposals must provide an estimated NSLP score in the application by providing the average of the relevant NSLP eligibility percentages for all sites. Hub-end user and end-user site scores are then averaged together, which fall into one of the four scoring brackets determining the overall application point allocation.

Part three of objective score is determined by "Leverage" scoring. This is based eligible matching fund contribution of the all grant partners. Up to 35 points are eligible under this criterion and are determined based on the percentage of match from the total grant amount.

Example:

Applicant	Grant Requested	Matching Funds	% of Grant Funds	Points Scored
Applicant #1	$500,000	$75,000	15 %	0
Applicant #2	$500,000	$225,000	45 %	15
Applicant #3	$500,000	$300,000	60 %	25
Applicant #4	$500,000	$400,000	80 %	30
Applicant #5	$500,000	$525,000	105 %	35

Grants Sponsorship Program

The DLT Grant Program is a competitive program. Applications are scored in **objective** and **subjective** categories. The table below lists each DLT category, and the maximum points available.

Objective Criteria

Objective scoring is upfront controllable data that is supplied by partners.

Rural Area *(Ruality)*	This criterion measures rural benefit. The score threshold for the application to be considered in the competition at all is 20 points. This category based on Census data (up to 45 Points).
Economic Need *(NSLP)*	This criterion measures the general economic need of the area through the use of statistics from the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)(up to 35 Points).
Matching Funds *(Leveraging)*	The DLT program requires a minimum match of 15 %. Higher matches receive more points. There are special matching provisions for American Samoa, Guam, Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands (up to 35 Points).

Subjective Criteria

Subjective data is based on the scoring of the narrative criteria requested by the application.

Additional NSLP	An applicant with NSLP eligibility below 50 % may request additional points, and could receive additional points if they can document that the NSLP percentage is not an accurate indicator of the economic need of the area. (up to 10 Points)
Need for Services and Project Benefits *(Needs & 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. (up to 45 Points)
Innovativeness	This criterion assesses how the objectives of the proposed project are met in new and creative ways. (up to 15 Points)
Cost Effectiveness	This criterion evaluates the efficiency with which the propsed project and its technology deliver educational and/or medical benefits to beneficiaries. (up to 35 Points)
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; Strike Force Area; or Promise Zone. Such applications will be awarded 15 points.

Scoring Tips and Tricks:

+ Aim for objective scores > than 100, this may require increasing your matching funds to increase your competitive value.
+ Ensure eligibility of all funds listed in your proposal –items must be procured from a third to be eligible and fit with in the guideline regulations.
+ Ensure all partners supply specific matching letters documenting their contribution.
+ All attachments must be consistent.
+ Demonstrate sustainability and technical expertise through documentation of quotes, vendors, and consultants.
+ Bring innovative creations to your proposal!
+ Develop comprehensive and detailed project need and scope that is supported by evidence and facts.
+ Score one section from the whole proposal, so restating the project can be helpful to frame the section.
+ Remember the mission of the DLT is to provide live learning. Any project detailing static, one-way delivery will not be eligible expenses.
+ Develop partnerships external to your traditional realm, ensure your partners have need and rurality required to increase your objective score.

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Steps to Take in Preparing Your RUS DLT Grant Application

Ensure that your organization has obtained a DUNS number and registered with the Federal Central Contractor Registration site.

Review RUS DLT application guidelines, eligibilty requirements, budget and matching contributions, and determine grant team members.

Determine project's focus - is it Distance Learning or Telemedicine? Determine type of sites - are your sites Fixed or Non-Fixed?

Determine RUS DLT partners, their locations and secure/finalize all MOUs.

Reach out USDA representatives and start collecting all necessary paperwork with signatures for proposal.

Discuss project scope details with grant team, develop task list, delegate all responsibilities to team members.

Write first draft, review and discuss edits.

Write second draft, review and discuss edits.

Write final draft.

Obtain final required signatures and submit grant application.

Grants Sponsorship Program

The Master Tracking

In order to sustain a viable project, be sure to engage a team, implement timelines, and delegate tasks for all necessary items. Be sure to provide padded dates just in case of emergency!

Pre-release work	Due	Responsible party

Pre-release work

Running initial project demographics_____

Project Summary_____

Fiscal Agent Forms

Signed MOU_____

Grants.gov, SAM Reg, MPIN, DUNS_____

Telecom Provider Letter_____

Approval to Apply from Board_____

SF424_____

Fiscal Agent Certs_____

USDA Rural Development Letter_____

Emails from RUS DLT leadership_____

Demographic and Site Worksheets

Early Partner List with Dems, NSLP sheets, Rurality proof_____

Site, NSLP, Rurality Worksheets_____

Additional NSLP_____

Quality Control Review Prior to submission_____

Special Consideration

Strike Force/Promise Area/ Tribal Designation Vetting_____

Creation and Collection of Tribal /Strike Force/Promise
area Letters Participation/Match_____

Tribal Maps/Proof of Special Consideration_____

Narrative information_____

Partner Paperwork

Certification Distribution and Collection_____

Letters of Participation_____

Supplemental Paperwork

Letters of Support_____

Resumes_____

Other as needed_____

Check all Documentation for appropriate signatures_____

Match Tasks

Match Request Letter Distribution and Collection_____

Match Compilation_____

Appalachia Documentation where applicable_____

Additional Non-federal Grants Awards/Applications_____

Conversion of Match Info to Budget Worksheet_____

Leverage Worksheet_____

Leverage and Budget Worksheet Review_____

Updates to Worksheet per review_____

Budget Tasks

Creation of Budget Quote_____

Budget Worksheet Review_____

Obtaining Alternate/Competitive Vendor Quotes_____

Grant Narrative

Executive Summary _____

Needs Sections_____

Writing of Section G/TSP_____

Scope of Work Table_____

Visio/ Network Diagram_____

First Draft Narrative_____

External narrative proofing_____

Submission	Due

Submission

Submission of full Draft including attachment for Review_____

Review_____

Updates and Changes to draft_____

FINAL PDF Draft- All Attachments_____

Review of final grant before mailing to USDA_____

ePlus Grant Sponsorship Program

It's as simple as A, B, C. The ePlus Grant Sponsorship Program supports your grant seeking and fund development efforts, to enable the forward mobility of your strategic and technological plans. No matter your size, service model, or needs, we can help position your organization for strategic success—especially related to the RUS DLT Grant.

Once the ePlus Grants Sponsorship Team has assessed our ability to sponsor you, our process consists of three clear steps.

Research: Our Grants Team researches numerous private and government funding agencies, identifying the technology-related grants to which you are eligible to apply. Once the right grant(s) have been found, we sponsor full development of grants.

Grant Development: Our Grants Team will walk your organization through the grants submittal process—working with you well before the grant deadline to create a plan for grant submission and help prepare you for this sometimes-technical and complex process.

Post-Award Services: Once your award has been confirmed, we will aid your organization in preparing to implement the program and equipment proposed in the grant, grant reporting, and establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with the funding agency representatives.

Put ePlus' grant expertise and winning track record to work for your organization.
Contact us today.

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