

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE****National Telecommunications and Information Administration****Docket No. 970103002-7304-03****RIN: 0660-ZA02****CFDA: 11.552; Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program****AGENCY:** National Telecommunications and Information Administration, Commerce.**ACTION:** Notice of availability of funds.

**SUMMARY:** The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) issues this notice describing the conditions under which applications will be received under the Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program (TIIAP) and how NTIA will determine which applications it will fund. TIIAP assists eligible organizations by promoting the widespread use and availability of advanced telecommunications and information technologies in the public and non-profit sectors. By providing matching grants for information infrastructure projects, this program will help develop a nationwide, interactive, multimedia information infrastructure that is accessible to all Americans, in rural as well as urban areas.

**DATES:** Complete applications for the Fiscal Year 1998 TIIAP grant program must be mailed or hand-carried to the address indicated below and received by NTIA no later than 9:00 p.m. EST, March 12, 1998.

**ADDRESSES:** Applications must be mailed to:

Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program,  
National Telecommunications and Information Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, 1401 Constitution Avenue, NW, HCHB, Room 4092, Washington, D.C. 20230.

or hand-delivered to:

Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program,  
National Telecommunications and Information Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, Room 1874, Herbert Clark Hoover Building, 1401 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20230.

Room 1874 is located at entrance #10 on 15th Street NW, between Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Stephen J. Downs, Director of the

Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program,  
Telephone: 202/482-2048. Fax: 202/501-5136. E-mail: tiap@ntia.doc.gov.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:****Program Purposes**

NTIA announces the fifth annual round of a competitive matching grant program, the Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program (TIIAP). TIIAP was created to promote the development, widespread availability, and use of advanced telecommunications and information technologies to serve the public interest.

To accomplish this objective, TIIAP will provide matching grants to state, local, and tribal<sup>1</sup> governments; non-profit health care providers and public health institutions; schools; libraries; museums; colleges; universities; public safety providers; non-profit community-based organizations; and other non-profit entities. TIIAP will support projects that improve the quality of, and the public's access to, cultural, education, and training resources; reduce the cost, improve the quality, and/or increase the accessibility of health care and public health services; promote responsive public safety services; improve the effectiveness and efficiency of government services; and foster communication, resource-sharing, and economic development within communities, both rural and urban.

**Authority**

Title II of the Department of Commerce, Justice and State, the Judiciary and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 1998 (set out in Pub L. 105-119, 111 Stat 2440).

**Funding Availability**

Approximately \$17 million is available for federal assistance. A small amount of additional funds that has been deobligated from grants awarded in previous fiscal years may also be available for Fiscal Year 1998 grants. Based on past experience, NTIA expects this year's grant round to be highly competitive. In Fiscal Year 1997, NTIA received more than 900 applications collectively requesting \$354 million in grant funds. From these applications, the Department of Commerce announced 55 TIIAP awards totaling \$20.9 million in federal funds.

Based on previous grant rounds, TIIAP anticipates that the average size of a grant award will be approximately \$350,000. An applicant may request up

to \$750,000 in total federal support over a period of up to three years.

**Eligible Organizations**

State, local, and tribal governments; colleges and universities; and non-profit entities are eligible to apply. Although individuals and for-profit organizations are not eligible to apply, they may participate as project partners.

**Matching Funds Requirements**

Grant recipients under this program will be required to provide matching funds toward the total project cost. Applicants must document their capacity to provide matching funds. Matching funds may be in the form of cash or in-kind contributions. Grant funds under this program are usually released in direct proportion to local matching funds utilized and documented as having been expended. NTIA will provide up to 50 percent of the total project cost, unless the applicant can document extraordinary circumstances warranting a grant of up to 75 percent. Federal funds (such as grants) generally may not be used as matching funds, except as provided by federal statute. If funds from a federal agency are to be used, the applicant should contact the federal agency that administers the funds in question and obtain documentation from that agency's Office of General Counsel to support the use of federal funds for matching purposes.

**Universal Service Discounts**

On May 8, 1997, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) released a Report and Order on Universal Service. Section 254(h) of the Communications Act of 1934 (the Act), also known as the Snowe-Rockefeller-Exon-Kerrey Amendment, requires that schools, libraries, and public and non-profit rural health care providers receive access to telecommunications services at discounted rates. NTIA requires that all TIIAP awardees eligible for the discounts under section 254(h) of the Act apply for all available discounts prior to purchasing telecommunications services with grant funds. Neither federal funds nor matching funds may be used to cover costs that could be avoided through the use of available discounts. In addition, the discounts received through the Universal Service Fund may not be used as matching contributions.

**Use of Program Income**

Applicants are advised that any program income generated by a proposed project is subject to special conditions. Anticipated program income

<sup>1</sup> American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages.

must be documented appropriately in the project budget. In addition, should an application be funded, unanticipated program income must be reported to TIIAP and the budget for the project must be renegotiated to reflect receipt of this program income. Program income means gross income earned by the recipient that is either directly generated by a supported activity, or earned as a result of the award. In addition, federal regulations prohibit any recipient or subrecipient receiving federal funds from using equipment acquired with these funds to provide services to non-federal outside organizations for a fee that is less than private companies charge for equivalent services. This prohibition does not apply to services provided to outside organizations at no cost.

#### **Policy on Sectarian Activities**

Applicants are advised that on December 22, 1995, NTIA issued a notice in the **Federal Register** on its policy with regard to sectarian activities. Under NTIA's policy, while religious activities cannot be the essential thrust of a grant, an application will not be ineligible where sectarian activities are only incidental or attenuated to the overall project purpose for which funding is requested. Applicants for whom this policy may be relevant should read the policy that was published in the **Federal Register** at 60 FR 66491, Dec. 22, 1995.

#### **Completeness of Application**

TIIAP will initially review all applications to determine whether all required elements are present and clearly identifiable. The required elements are listed and described in the Guidelines for Preparing Applications—Fiscal Year 1998. Each of the required elements must be present and clearly identified. Failure to do so may result in rejection of the application.

#### **Application Deadline**

As noted above, complete applications for the Fiscal Year 1998 TIIAP grant program must be received by NTIA no later than 9:00 P.M. EST, March 12, 1998. Postmark date is not sufficient. Applications which have been provided to a delivery service on or before March 11, 1998, with "delivery guaranteed" before 9:00 P.M. on March 12, 1998, will be accepted for review if the applicant can document that the application was provided to the delivery service with delivery to the address listed above guaranteed prior to the closing date and time. Applications will not be accepted via facsimile machine transmission or electronic

mail. NTIA anticipates that it will take between four and six months to complete the review of applications and make final funding decisions.

#### **Scope of Proposed Project**

Projects funded by TIIAP must meet the Program Funding Priorities described in this notice. Projects must involve innovative approaches to the delivery of useful, practical services in real-world environments within the grant award period. In Fiscal Year 1998, TIIAP will not support the following kinds of projects:

##### *One-Way Networks*

TIIAP will not support construction or augmentation of one-way networks, that is, networks which deliver information to a passive audience; all networks and services proposed for TIIAP support must be interactive.<sup>2</sup> For example, TIIAP will not fund one-way broadcast systems, tape duplication and/or delivery projects, or any project which does not permit the end user in some fashion to select the information he or she will receive.

##### *Single-Organization Projects*

TIIAP will not support projects whose primary emphasis is on the internal communications needs of a single organization, even if the organization may have a considerable number of offices in different cities or regions of the country. For example, TIIAP will not consider projects that create or expand Local Area Networks or internal e-mail systems whose end users are principally, or exclusively, staff members of a single organization. However, TIIAP will support applications that extend communications among multiple organizations and agencies within a governmental jurisdiction. Projects should, to the maximum degree feasible, include appropriate partnerships,<sup>3</sup> with plans for inter-organizational communications among the partners.

##### *Replacement or Upgrade of Existing Facilities*

TIIAP will not support any projects whose purpose is to upgrade or replace existing systems, add workstations or

servers to existing networks, or complete the installation of a network.

In addition, NTIA will not support projects whose primary purpose is to develop content, hardware, or software, or to provide training on the use of the information infrastructure.<sup>4</sup> TIIAP will, however, support projects that include elements of content development,<sup>5</sup> training, and hardware and software development, as long as they are integral to a broader project that will deploy and use information infrastructure to address community problems.

##### *Content Development Projects*

Many projects necessarily involve some modification or development of content. Therefore, TIIAP will support projects in which the creation or conversion of content is part of a larger effort to utilize information infrastructure technologies to address real-world problems. However, TIIAP will not support projects whose primary activity is to develop data resources, or in any other way produce information content. For example, TIIAP will not consider projects which are designed only to develop curriculum, create databases, convert existing paper-based information to a digital format, digitize existing graphics collections, or establish World Wide Web sites.

##### *Hardware or Software Development Projects*

Some projects may require limited software development or the customization or modification of existing software or hardware in order to meet particular end-user requirements or to enable the exchange of information across networks. However, the creation of a software or hardware product cannot be a project's primary activity.

##### *Training Projects*

TIIAP will not support projects whose primary activity is to provide training in the use of information infrastructure technology. TIIAP does consider training to be an essential aspect of most implementation projects; therefore, a training component is, in most cases, a necessity. However, TIIAP will not support projects which propose nothing more than instruction on software

<sup>2</sup> "Interactivity" is defined as the capacity of a communications system to allow end users to communicate directly with other users, either in real time (as in a video teleconference) or on a store-and-forward basis (as with electronic mail), or to seek and gain access to information on an on-demand basis, as opposed to a broadcast basis.

<sup>3</sup> A "partner" is defined as an organization that supplies cash or in kind resources and/or plays an active role in the planning and implementation of the project.

<sup>4</sup> "Information Infrastructure" includes telecommunication networks, computers, other end-user devices, software, standards, and skills that collectively enable people to connect to each other and to a vast array of services and information resources.

<sup>5</sup> "Content development" refers to the creation of information resources, such as databases or World Wide Web sites, for the purpose of dissemination through one or more on-line services.

applications, Internet use, or other use of information infrastructure.

### Program Funding Priorities

NTIA is committed to supporting innovative and exemplary projects that can serve as models for using information infrastructure in the public and non-profit sectors and thereby contribute to the development of an advanced National Information Infrastructure (NII).<sup>6</sup> NTIA believes that every project supported under TIIAP should be a nationally significant demonstration of how telecommunications and information technologies can be used to extend valuable services and opportunities to all Americans, especially the underserved. Underserved refers to individuals and communities that are subject to barriers that limit or prevent their access to the benefits of information infrastructure technologies and services. In terms of information infrastructure, these barriers may be technological, geographic, economic, physical, linguistic, or cultural. For example, a rural community may be physically isolated from circuits adequate to allow for data access; inner city neighborhoods may contain large numbers of potential end users for whom ownership of computer hardware is unlikely; or individuals with disabilities may have the need for different types of interfaces when manipulating hardware and software.

Each project should identify specific problems or needs in a community, use information infrastructure services and technologies to offer concrete solutions, and target measurable outcomes. TIIAP's emphasis is on the application of technology to meet the needs of end users, and not simply on the technology as an end in itself. In addition, the development of the NII depends upon the contribution of a wide variety of skills, ideas, and perspectives. Therefore, TIIAP-supported projects should, to the greatest degree possible, reach out to all members of a community and catalyze partnerships to help erase the distinction between information "haves" and "have-nots."

NTIA realizes that not every model will work equally well in every

situation or region; therefore, TIIAP will continue to support a variety of model projects among different application areas, geographic regions, and underserved populations. However, as already noted, each application must be innovative in its application of technology. Innovation can be conceived broadly: it can involve the use of new or untested network technologies that extend end-user capabilities or enhance service delivery; an imaginative partnership or organizational model; a new application of proven technologies; a creative strategy for overcoming traditional barriers to access; or a new configuration of existing information resources. As a program with a national focus, TIIAP expects each project to offer potentially new and useful insights into the use of network technologies.

Projects must also be exemplary in the sense that they serve as genuine models that can be emulated, replicated, or adapted to local conditions by other organizations and communities facing similar challenges. For this reason, many excellent projects proposed to TIIAP may not be considered competitive either because they (1) focus on a problem or issue that confronts only a single applicant organization; (2) can only be replicated at a prohibitively high cost; or (3) propose a conventional approach that, while new to the applicant, has been demonstrated or attempted in similar circumstances. Moreover, in order to add to the national understanding of how the NII can be used to benefit the public and facilitate widespread diffusion of lessons learned from TIIAP projects, each application must include a rigorous evaluation plan and effective documentation and dissemination strategies.

In some previous fiscal years, TIIAP has supported planning projects whose primary goal was to develop strategies for the enhanced application of existing NII technologies, rather than for the actual deployment or use of information infrastructure. Due to the limited amount of funds available to the program, the emphasis for Fiscal Year 1998 is on projects that deploy, use, and evaluate the use of information infrastructure applications. NTIA will, however, also consider allocating a limited amount of funds to support outstanding planning projects that explore potential uses of next generation network technologies in an application area. Applications for such projects will be evaluated against the same criteria applied to all other applications.

In Fiscal Year 1998, TIIAP will support projects in five application

areas: Community Networking; Education, Culture, and Lifelong Learning; Health; Public Safety; and Public Services. Each application will be reviewed with other applications in the same area. NTIA recognizes that many innovative projects cross the boundaries defined by these application areas and involve services and partnerships that combine different application areas. NTIA encourages the formation of such cross-cutting linkages.

### Community Networking

This area focuses on multi-purpose projects that enable a broad range of community residents and organizations to communicate, share information, promote community economic development, and participate in civic activities. Community Networking projects typically involve multiple stakeholder organizations that wish to link services, reduce duplicative record-keeping, simplify and/or expand end-user access to a variety of information resources, engage in initiatives that would not have been possible without networking technologies, or provide information across various application areas within a specific geographic region.

Examples of Community Networking projects may include, but would not be limited to: community-wide information and communication services available to residents of a local community; projects enabling a diverse array of organizations to share information infrastructure and resources; and networks or information services that promote community or regional economic development.

### Education, Culture, and Lifelong Learning

Projects in this area seek to improve education and training for learners of all ages and provide cultural enrichment through the use of information infrastructure in both traditional and non-traditional settings.

Examples of Education, Culture, and Lifelong Learning projects may include, but would not be limited to: projects that explore creative approaches to integrating computer-based learning and network resources in the classroom; projects that forge stronger links among educators, students, parents, and others in the community; projects linking workplaces and job-training sites to educational institutions; innovative distance learning networks providing educational, training, and literacy opportunities in remote areas; projects that enrich communities by delivering on-line informational, educational, and cultural services from public libraries,

<sup>6</sup>The National Information Infrastructure (NII) is a federal policy initiative to facilitate and accelerate the development and utilization of the nation's information infrastructure. The Administration envisions the NII as a seamless web of communications networks, computers, databases, and consumer electronics that will put vast amounts of information at users' fingertips. For more information on various aspects of the NII initiative, see The National Information Infrastructure: Agenda for Action, 58 FR 49,025 (September 21, 1993).

museums, and other cultural centers; and projects that allow users to collaborate in the creation of artistic works or participate actively in meaningful online cultural exchanges.

#### *Health*

Projects in this area involve the use of information infrastructure in the delivery of health and home health care services and the performance of core public health functions.

Examples of Health projects may include, but would not be limited to: systems that improve the care and treatment of patients in the home environment; telemedicine systems that offer new approaches to extending medical expertise to rural or underserved urban areas or non-traditional settings such as schools; projects designed to improve communication between health care providers and patients and enable consumers to participate more actively in their health care; projects to improve treatment of patients in emergency situations and extend trauma care services beyond the emergency room; and networks or information services aimed at disease prevention and health promotion.

#### *Public Safety*

Projects in this area will seek to increase the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies, emergency, rescue, and fire departments, or other entities involved in providing safety services that effectively respond to, prevent, or intervene in crises.

Examples of Public Safety projects may include, but would not be limited to: projects that facilitate information exchange among public safety agencies located in a single or multiple geographic area to increase efficiency and share resources; projects that provide information in a timely manner to "first-response officials," such as police officers, emergency medical technicians, and firefighters; projects that help public safety agencies provide community outreach services; projects that develop innovative ways to share scarce spectrum resources; and projects that aim to increase the safety and security of children and reduce domestic violence.

#### *Public Services*

Projects in this area aim to improve the delivery of services to people or organizations with a range of social service needs. This area includes, for example, housing, child welfare, food assistance, employment counseling, and other services typically delivered by state, tribal, and local governments or by

community-based non-profit organizations.

Examples of Public Services projects may include, but would not be limited to: projects that use information technology creatively to promote self-sufficiency among individuals and families; networks that facilitate coordination and collaboration among public and/or community-based agencies; electronic information and referral services that provide information on a variety of community-based or government services; projects that make public agencies more accessible and responsive to community residents; electronic benefits transfer projects; projects that employ geographic information systems to study demographic or environmental trends and target community strategies; and projects that focus on the needs of special communities, such as individuals with disabilities.

#### **Review Criteria**

Reviewers will review and rate each application using the following equally weighted criteria:

##### *1. Project Purpose*

Each application will be judged on the overall purpose of the proposed project and its potential impact on a community. In defining the purpose of the project, applicants must (1) identify a specific problem(s) or need(s) within the community to be served; (2) propose a workable and achievable means of addressing the community's problem(s) employing information infrastructure services and technologies; and (3) identify anticipated outcomes that are both realistic and measurable. The project purpose must convincingly link the three major elements—problem, solution, and outcomes—so that reviewers understand not only what the applicant proposes to do, but also (1) why the project needs to be done, (2) how the application will respond to the needs of targeted end users, and (3) how the community might be changed as a result of successful implementation of the project.

##### *2. Significance*

Each application will be rated on the degree to which the proposed project demonstrates innovation and is exemplary.

When rating the degree to which an application demonstrates innovation, reviewers will use their experience as experts in their respective fields to determine whether a proposed project introduces a unique or novel approach and extends the state-of-the-art in a given application area. As noted in the

section on "Program Funding Priorities," reviewers will assess innovation broadly, examining both the technology to be used and the application of technology in a particular setting, to serve a particular population, or to solve a particular problem. Reviewers will examine each project in a national context and ask what insight a proposed project will add to what is known about using network technologies in a given application area and how a project complements and/or improves upon other activities in their field.

With respect to identifying exemplary projects, reviewers will assess the degree to which a project has the potential for widespread replication. Applicants should describe how the needs or problems they propose to address are common or of interest to other organizations and communities. Reviewers will also assess the degree to which a project can be easily duplicated by or adapted to other organizations and communities. Applicants should discuss why a project would be easy to replicate and what types of organizations would be interested in copying the project.

##### *3. Project Feasibility*

Each application will be rated on the overall feasibility of the proposed project and its plan of implementation. In assessing project feasibility, reviewers will focus on the following issues: the technical approach; the qualifications of the applicant team; the proposed budget and implementation schedule; and the applicant's plan for sustaining the project beyond the grant period.

The technical approach should be consistent with the vision of a nationwide, seamless, interactive network of networks and must therefore address issues of interoperability<sup>7</sup> and scalability.<sup>8</sup> Applications must specify in detail how the proposed system would work, how it would operate with other systems, the technological alternatives that have been examined, and the plans for the maintenance and/or upgrading of the system. Applicants are expected to make use of existing infrastructure and commercially

<sup>7</sup> "Interoperability" refers to the condition achieved among information and communication systems when information (i.e., data, voice, image, audio, or video) can be easily and cost-effectively shared across acquisition, transmission, and presentation technologies, equipment, and services.

<sup>8</sup> "Scalability" refers to the ability of a system to accommodate a significant growth in the size of the system (i.e., services provided, end users served) without the need for substantial redesign. A scalable approach that is demonstrated on a small scale can also be applied on a larger scale.

available telecommunications services, unless extraordinary circumstances require the construction of new network facilities.

Applicants must describe the qualifications of the project team, including the applicant and its partners, to show that they have the resources, expertise, and experience necessary to undertake the project and complete it within the proposed period.

Reviewers will analyze the budget in terms of clarity and cost-effectiveness. The proposed budget must be appropriate to the tasks proposed and sufficiently detailed so that reviewers can easily understand the relationship of items in the budget to the project narrative. In addition to a clear and well-justified budget proposal, each application should contain a proposed implementation schedule that identifies major project tasks and milestones.

Reviewers will also examine the potential viability of the proposed project beyond the grant period. Applicants should therefore present a credible plan, including a discussion of anticipated ongoing expenses and potential sources of non-federal funds, to sustain the project after completion of the grant. In evaluating the plan, reviewers will consider the economic circumstances of the community or communities to be served by the proposed project.

#### 4. Community Involvement

Each application will be rated on the overall level of community involvement in the development of the project and the implementation of the proposed project. Reviewers will pay particular attention to the partnerships involved, the strength and diversity of support for the project within the community, and the support for the project's end users.<sup>9</sup>

Community involvement must include the development of partnerships among unaffiliated organizations, from the public, non-profit, or private sectors, as an integral part of each project. Partnerships must be clearly defined, mutually beneficial, and the commitments (including both cash and in-kind contributions) well documented in the application. Partners are defined as organizations that supply cash or in-kind resources and/or play an active role in the planning and implementation of the project.

<sup>9</sup> An "end user" is one who customarily employs or seeks access to, rather than provides, information infrastructure. An end user may be a consumer of information (e.g., a member of the public employing a touch-screen public access terminal); may be involved in an interactive communication with other end users; or may use information infrastructure to provide services to the public.

Reviewers will examine the steps the applicant has taken to involve a wide variety of community stakeholders in the planning of the project and the plans for ongoing community involvement in the project. Each application should contain evidence of demand, from the community, the end users, and the potential beneficiaries, for the services proposed by the project.

Reviewers will consider the degree of attention paid to the needs, skills, working conditions, and living environments of the targeted end users. Reviewers will also consider the extent to which applicants involve representatives from a broad range of potential users and consider the varying degrees of abilities of all end users, including individuals with disabilities.

Plans for training end users, upgrading their skills, and building community awareness and knowledge of the project must be clearly delineated. The application should also include evidence of a significant degree of end-user involvement in the design and planning of projects. NTIA expects applicants to safeguard the privacy of the end users and beneficiaries<sup>10</sup> of the project. Where relevant, applications must address the privacy and confidentiality of user data. For example, an applicant proposing a project dealing with individually identifiable information (e.g., student grades, medical records, etc.) will be required to describe the technical and policy mechanisms to be used for protecting the confidentiality of such information and the privacy of the individuals involved.

#### 5. Reducing Disparities

Every project proposed to TIAP should target underserved communities specifically and/or reach out to underserved groups within a broader community. Underserved refers to individuals and communities that are subject to barriers that limit or prevent their access to the benefits of information infrastructure and services. In terms of information infrastructure, these barriers may be technological, geographic, economic, physical, linguistic, or cultural. For example, a rural community may be geographically isolated from information resources and lack local technical expertise to help install and manage the network infrastructure; inner city neighborhoods may contain large numbers of potential end users who lack the financial

<sup>10</sup> Project beneficiaries are those individuals or organizations deriving benefits from a project's outcome(s). A project beneficiary may also, but not necessarily, be a project end user.

resources to access the information infrastructure; or people with disabilities may need a variety of special hardware or software interfaces to facilitate their use of the information infrastructure.

Each application will be rated according to the degree to which the proposed project will serve to reduce disparities in access to information infrastructure. Reviewers will assess each application by examining evidence of community need and the applicant's proposed strategies for overcoming traditional barriers to access. Disparities in access must be clearly described and supported by specific quantitative data. Beyond providing service to underserved communities, each application should also propose strategies for reaching out to targeted groups and for tailoring any services to their specific needs and circumstances. These strategies should reflect an understanding of why the barriers currently exist and a sensitivity to the learning mechanisms, attitudes, abilities, and customs of the community.

#### 6. Evaluation, Documentation, and Dissemination

Each application will be rated on the quality of its plans for evaluation, documentation, and dissemination and their potential to measure both the effectiveness and efficiency of the proposed solution(s) and the anticipated outcomes of the project. Applications must include the qualifications of any proposed evaluators and provide sufficient funds and resources to evaluate the project, document project activities, and disseminate project findings and lessons learned.

First, each evaluation plan must include an evaluation design, an implementation plan for the evaluation, and a discussion of how resources will be allocated for evaluation (i.e., budget, staffing, and management). The evaluation design should address the evaluation questions; the methodological approach for answering the evaluation questions; how data will be collected; how the data will be analyzed; and how the evaluation findings will be reported and disseminated. The evaluation should be linked to the overall formulation of project goals and objectives; it should relate directly to the problem, solution, and anticipated outcomes identified in the "Project Purpose" section. Finally, the research questions and data collection plan should take into account each of the "Review Criteria" treated above.

Documentation includes the basic record keeping for a project that will be required for analysis of the data and for meaningful reporting about the project. However, documentation goes beyond data collection to include information relevant to project history. The documentation plan should enhance evaluation and aid in information dissemination about the project. This plan should detail the methods and procedures of documentation. Although relevant documentation will vary with program type and application area, documentation should include, for example, demographic and background information on the population(s) to be served, implementation barriers, characteristics and descriptions of project partners, external databases, activity logs, and outreach efforts. Documentation will be very useful in the preparation of quarterly and final reports.

Applicants are also required to submit a plan for disseminating the knowledge gained as a result of implementing their projects. Such plans may include presentations at professional conferences, workshops, and symposia; hosting site visits and conferences; publications of findings in professional journals and World Wide Web sites; and other dissemination methods.

### Selection Process

NTIA will publish a notice in the **Federal Register** listing all applications received by TIIAP. Listing an application in such a notice merely acknowledges receipt of an application that will compete for funding with other applications. Publication does not preclude subsequent return or disapproval of the application, nor does it ensure that the application will be funded. The selecting process will last four to six months and involves four stages:

(1) During the first stage, each eligible application will be reviewed by a panel of outside readers, who have demonstrated expertise in both the programmatic and technological aspects of the application. The review panels will evaluate applications according to the review criteria provided in this notice and make non-binding written recommendations to the program.

(2) Upon completion of the external review process, program staff may analyze applications as necessary. Program staff analysis will be based on the degree to which a proposed project meets the program's funding scope as described in the section entitled "Scope of Proposed Projects"; the eligibility of costs and matching funds included in

an application's budget;<sup>11</sup> and the extent to which an application complements or duplicates projects previously funded or under consideration by NTIA or other federal programs. The analysis of program staff will be provided to the TIIAP Director in writing.

The TIIAP Director then prepares and presents a slate of recommended grant awards to the Office of Telecommunications and Information Applications' (OTIA)<sup>12</sup> Associate Administrator for review and approval. The Director's recommendations and the Associate Administrator's review and approval will take into account the following selection factors:

1. The evaluations of the outside reviewers;
2. The analysis of program staff;
3. The degree to which a proposed project meets the program's priorities as described in the section entitled "Program Funding Priorities";
4. The geographic distribution of the proposed grant awards;
5. The variety of technologies and strategies employed by the proposed grant awards;
6. The extent to which the proposed grant awards represent a reasonable distribution of funds across application areas;
7. The promotion of access to and use of the information infrastructure by rural communities and other underserved groups;
8. Avoidance of redundancy and conflicts with the initiatives of other federal agencies; and
9. The availability of funds.

(3) Upon approval by the OTIA Associate Administrator, the Director's recommendations will then be presented to the Selecting Official, the NTIA Administrator. The NTIA Administrator selects the applications to be negotiated for possible grant award taking into consideration the Director's recommendations and the degree to which the slate of applications, taken as a whole, satisfies the selection factors described above and the program's stated purposes as set forth in the section entitled "Program Purposes."

(4) After applications have been selected in this manner, negotiations will take place between TIIAP staff and the applicant. These negotiations are intended to resolve any differences that exist between the applicant's original

request and what TIIAP proposes to fund and, if necessary, to clarify items in the application. Not all applicants who are contacted for negotiation will necessarily receive a TIIAP award. Final selections made by the Administrator will be based upon the recommendations by the Director and the OTIA Associate Administrator and the degree to which the slate of applications, taken as a whole, satisfies the program's stated purposes as set forth in the section entitled "Program Purposes," upon the conclusion of negotiations.

### Eligible Costs

*Eligible Costs.* Allowable costs incurred under approved projects shall be determined in accordance with applicable federal cost principles, i.e., OMB Circular A-21, A-87, A-122, or Appendix E of 45 CFR part 74. If included in the approved project budget, TIIAP will allow costs for personnel, fringe benefits, computer hardware and software, other end-user equipment, telecommunication services and related equipment, consultants and other contractual services, travel, rental of office equipment, furniture and space, supplies, etc. that are reasonable and directly related to the project. Costs associated with the construction or major renovation of buildings are not eligible. While costs for the construction of new network facilities are eligible costs, applicants are expected to make use of existing infrastructure and commercially available telecommunications services. Only under extraordinary circumstances will the construction of new network facilities be approved. Costs of the professional services, such as instruction, counseling, or medical care, provided via a network supported through this program are not eligible.

Note that costs that are ineligible for TIIAP support may not be included as part of the applicant's matching fund contribution. NTIA also requires that all TIIAP awardees eligible for the discounts under section 254(h) of the Communications Act of 1934 (the Act) apply for all available discounts prior to purchasing telecommunications services with grant funds. In addition, the discounts received through the Universal Service Fund may not be used as matching contributions.

*Indirect Costs.* The total dollar amount of the indirect costs proposed in an application under this program must not exceed the indirect cost rate negotiated and approved by a cognizant federal agency or 100 percent of the total proposed direct costs dollar

<sup>11</sup> See discussion of "Eligible Costs" and "Matching Funds Requirements" in this notice.

<sup>12</sup> The Office of Telecommunication and Information Applications is the division of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration that supervises NTIA's grant awards programs.

amount in the application, whichever is less.

#### **Award Period**

Successful applicants will have between 12 and 36 months to complete their projects. While the completion time will vary depending on the complexity of the project, NTIA has found that most applicants require at least two years to complete and fully evaluate their projects. Accordingly, NTIA encourages applicants to propose projects lasting between two to three years.

#### **Waiver Authority**

It is the general intent of NTIA not to waive any of the provisions set forth in this notice. However, under extraordinary circumstances and when it is in the best interest of the federal government, NTIA, upon its own initiative or when requested, may waive the provisions in this notice. Waivers may only be granted for requirements that are discretionary and not mandated by statute. Any request for a waiver must set forth the extraordinary circumstances for the request and be included in the application or sent to the address provided in the **ADDRESSES** section above. NTIA will not consider a request to waive the application deadline for an application until the application has been received.

#### **Other Information**

##### *Electronic Information*

Information about NTIA and TIIAP, including this document and the Guidelines for Preparing Applications—Fiscal Year 1998, can be retrieved electronically via the Internet using the World Wide Web. Use <http://www.ntia.doc.gov> to reach the NTIA home page and follow directions to locating information about TIIAP. TIIAP can also be reached via electronic mail at [tiiap@ntia.doc.gov](mailto:tiiap@ntia.doc.gov).

##### *Application Forms*

Standard Forms 424 (OMB Approval Number 0348-0044), Application for Federal Assistance; 424A (OMB Approval Number 0348-0043), Budget Information—Non-Construction Programs; and 424B (OMB Approval Number 0348-0040), Assurances—Non-Construction Programs, (Rev 4-92), and other Department of Commerce forms shall be used in applying for financial assistance. These forms are included in the Guidelines for Preparing Applications—Fiscal Year 1998, which can be obtained by contacting NTIA by telephone, fax, or electronic mail, as described in the **ADDRESSES** section above. TIIAP requests one original and

five copies of the application. Applicants for whom the submission of five copies presents financial hardship may submit one original and two copies of the application. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person is required to respond to nor shall a person be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act unless that collection of information displays a currently valid OMB control number. In addition, all applicants are required to submit a copy of their application to their state Single Point of Contact (SPOC) offices, if they have one. For information on contacting state SPOC offices, refer to the Guidelines for Preparing Applications—Fiscal Year 1998.

Because of the high level of public interest in projects supported by TIIAP, the program anticipates receiving requests for copies of successful applications. Applicants are hereby notified that the applications they submit are subject to the Freedom of Information Act. To assist NTIA in making disclosure determinations, applicants may identify sensitive information and label it "confidential."

##### *Type of Funding Instrument*

The funding instrument for awards under this program shall be a grant.

##### *Federal Policies and Procedures*

Recipients and subrecipients are subject to all applicable federal laws and federal and Department of Commerce policies, regulations, and procedures applicable to federal financial assistance awards.

##### *Pre-Award Activities*

If an applicant incurs any project costs prior to the project start date negotiated at the time the award is made, it does so solely at its own risk of not being reimbursed by the government. Applicants are hereby notified that, notwithstanding any oral or written assurance that they may have received, there is no obligation on the part of the Department of Commerce to cover pre-award costs.

##### *No Obligation for Future Funding*

If an application is selected for funding, the Department of Commerce has no obligation to provide any additional future funding in connection with that award. Renewal of an award to increase funding or extend the period of performance is at the total discretion of the Department of Commerce.

##### *Past Performance*

Unsatisfactory performance of an applicant under prior federal financial assistance awards may result in that applicant's proposal not being considered for funding.

##### *Delinquent Federal Debts*

No award of federal funds shall be made to an applicant who has an outstanding delinquent federal debt until:

1. The delinquent account is paid in full;
2. A negotiated repayment schedule is established and at least one payment is received; or
3. Other arrangements satisfactory to the Department of Commerce are made.

##### *Purchase of American-Made Products*

Applicants are hereby notified that any equipment or products authorized to be purchased with funding provided under this program must be American-made to the maximum extent feasible.

##### *Name Check Review*

All non-profit applicants are subject to a name check review process. Name checks are intended to reveal if any key individuals associated with the applicant have been convicted of or are presently facing criminal charges such as fraud, theft, perjury, or other matters that significantly reflect on the applicant's management, honesty, or financial integrity.

##### *Primary Applicant Certifications*

All primary applicants must submit a completed Form CD-511, "Certifications Regarding Debarment, Suspension and Other Responsibility Matters; Drug-Free Workplace Requirements and Lobbying," and the following explanations are hereby provided:

1. Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension—Prospective participants (as defined at 15 CFR part 26, section 105) are subject to 15 CFR part 26, "Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension" and the related section of the certification form prescribed above applies;
2. Drug-Free Workplace—Grantees (as defined at 15 CFR part 26, section 605) are subject to 15 CFR part 26, subpart F, "Government wide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Grants)" and the related section of the certification form prescribed above applies;
3. Anti-Lobbying—Persons (as defined at 15 CFR part 28, section 105) are subject to the lobbying provisions of 31 U.S.C. 1352, "Limitation on use of appropriated funds to influence certain federal contracting and financial

transactions," and the lobbying section of the certification form prescribed above applies to applications/bids for grants, cooperative agreements, and contracts for more than \$100,000, and loans and loan guarantees for more than \$150,000, or the single family maximum mortgage limit for affected programs, whichever is greater; and

4. Anti-Lobbying Disclosure—Any applicant that has paid or will pay for lobbying in connection with a covered federal action, such as the awarding of any federal contract, the making of any federal grant, the making of any federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, or the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement using any funds must submit an SF-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying

Activities" (OMB Control Number 0348-0046), as required under 15 CFR part 28, Appendix B.

#### *Lower Tier Certifications*

Recipients shall require applicants/bidders for subgrants, contracts, subcontracts, or other lower tier covered transactions at any tier under the award to submit, if applicable, a completed Form CD-512, "Certifications Regarding Debarment, Suspension, Ineligibility and Voluntary Exclusion—Lower Tier Covered Transactions and Lobbying" and disclosure form SF-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities." Form CD-512 is intended for the use of recipients and should not be transmitted to DOC. SF-LLL submitted by any tier recipient or subrecipient should be submitted to DOC in accordance with

the instructions contained in the award document.

#### *False Statements*

A false statement on an application is grounds for denial or termination of funds and grounds for possible punishment by a fine or imprisonment as provided in 18 U.S.C. 1001.

#### *Intergovernmental Review*

Applications under this program are subject to Executive Order 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs." It has been determined that this notice is a "not significant" rule under Executive Order 12866.

**Larry Irving,**

*Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information.*

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