Writing Your RUS-DLT Grant:

Common writing mistakes

Where to spend your time (by section)

How to set yourself up for success

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What's it All About?

The DLT Grant provides funding for interactive "real time" distance learning or telehealth projects that provide rural residents with access to content and/or services, helping to bridge the digital divide.

Bridging the Digital Divide

The DLT Basics

USDA United States Department of Agriculture
Rural Development

- CFDA: 10.855
- Due Date: July 13th, 2020
- How Much: $25M from the Cares Act associated with Covid19.
- Matching Funds: 15% of the Federal Request *(about 13% of total project costs)*
- Award Size: Up to $1M in funds
- Priorities: Special Consideration Points Given For –
  - Opportunity Zones
  - Substance abuse (including opioid, not limited to opioid)
  - STEM Education
        *Submission – **Grants.gov only (no hard copies accepted)**

RUS-DLT Round Two – COVID19 Focus

- Program goal: to encourage and improve telemedicine and distance learning services in rural areas through the use of telecommunications, computer networks, and related advanced technologies to be used by students, teachers, medical professionals, and rural residents.

- Additionally, all projects are advised to discuss the ways that their DL or Telemed project impacts the Covid19 response, preparation or mitigation. This does NOT need to be healthcare specific (i.e. providing distance learning to students displaced from school due to the pandemic, providing remote training to HC workers regarding Covid19, etc.).

Eligible Expenditures
***The same rules apply toward matching funds**

Eligible Expenditures

- ✓ **Capital Expenditures –** interactive distance learning or telemedicine equipment, video infrastructure, ancillary core network devices necessitated by the project, internal wiring, *software*, *licensing*, digitally connected peripheral devices and associated services.
- ✓ *Up to 20%* of the budget can be spent on broadband related expenditures
- ✓ *Cloud Services*, if adequately defined and justified

Ineligible Expenditures

- ✓ **Recurring Expenses –** transmission costs, existing operational costs, *salaries,* benefits, contractual, supplies, etc.
- ✓ **No Indirect Costs! No Evaluation Costs!**
- ✓ **Unrelated technology purposes --** this is not a grant for tons of PCs/Tablets… the main purpose is for the interactive video. Peripherals that help deliver content or services via the video transmission are provisionally eligible

Licensing/software and services must be associated with an endpoint in the budget

Common Application Errors Mistakes

Focus on the details…

This grant values consistency and repetition down to the details. If there are discrepancies or incorrect information throughout the application, this can result in your grant being deemed ineligible and never reviewed

     - For example, when editing, if you make one change to your narrative, that can lead to MANY changes throughout your application. You need to be consistent; site names and site list order should be the same in ALL SECTIONS

     - All paperwork and documents (especially signature documents) should include title/signature block from someone with *fiscal authority*

     - Uploading final documents to your grant application: PDF each section (titled by the section name) and attached in the correct place in the online Form 424. As a recommendation, also include your budget worksheet in Excel form to make it easier on grant reviewers

     - Confirm SAM and Grants.gov accounts are active and up to date
         *new this year: Financial Certification required in SAM account
     - Follow the guidelines to the letter – never assume or apply logic!

Other Writing Tips and Suggestions

- Truly engage with your community(ies) to better understand and address needs throughout your narrative sections

- Be authentic...your project should represent YOU and the communities you serve, not be a cut/paste from someone else's project
  - This grant appreciates compelling and specific narratives that are unique and specific to the challenges you face in serving your community(ies). Tell your story and provide personal examples and anecdotes reflecting the impact this project will have.

Where to Spend Your Time

Maximize your Objective Score

Objective Scoring
Rurality – up to **40 pts**
Economic Need – up to **30 pts**
Special Consideration – up to **10 pts**

You can do this part before you even begin your narrative sections!

- ALL end-user sites in communities of 5,000 in population or fewer

- Minimum to get at least 10 points in this section (unlikely to receive the full 30 points)

- Just need to check ONE of the options for this section (Opportunity Zones, Substance abuse (including opioid, not limited to opioid) or STEM Education focus)

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Where to Spend Your Time

Needs and Benefits Section – ONLY scored narrative section!

Objective Scoring	Subjective Scoring	Required but not Scored	Required but not Scored
Rurality – up to **40 pts**	Needs & Benefits – up to **30 pts**	Executive Summary	Official Grant Budget & Match letter/worksheet
Economic Need – up to **30 pts**		Financial Info & Sustainability	Certs / Assurances
Special Consideration – up to **10 pts**		Statement of Experience	Proof of Legal Existence / Eligibility
		Technology System Plan	State Rural Development Letter

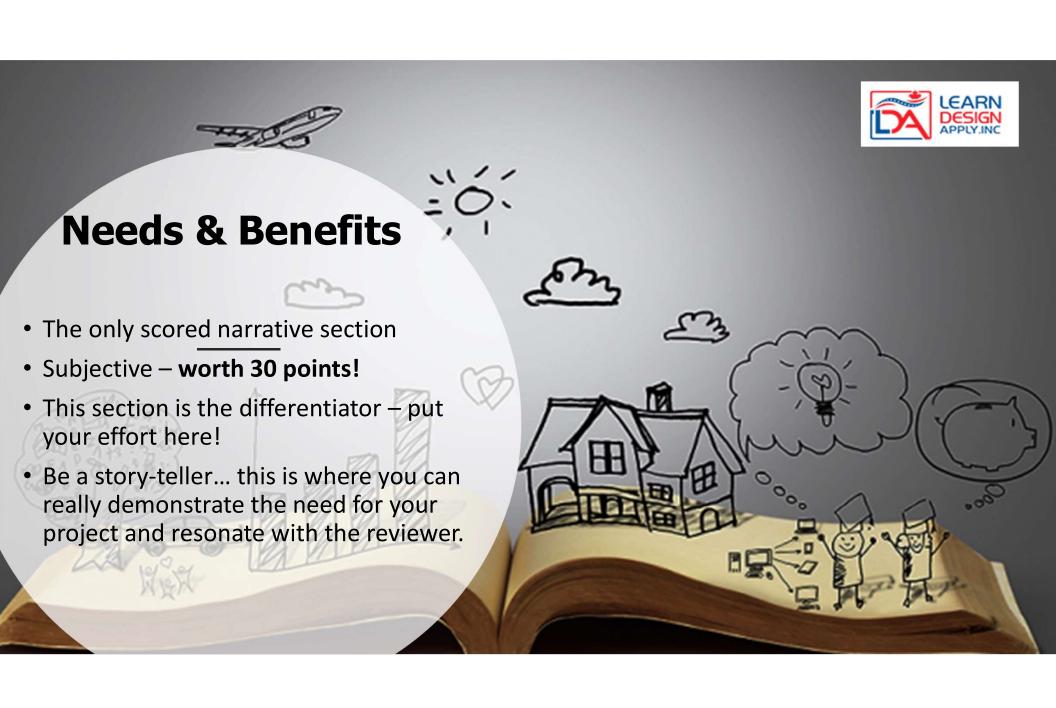LEARN DESIGN APPLY.INC

Needs and Benefits Section Continued…

It's rarely about the telehealth or distance learning technologies….

It's all about how those technologies *address a need*

- What are the problems you face?
- Quantify those problems
- Explain how the technologies and other line items in your budget address those problems
- Articulate general benefits
- Project specific outcomes

Needs & Benefits

- The only scored narrative section

- Subjective – **worth 30 points!**

- This section is the differentiator – put your effort here!

- Be a story-teller... this is where you can really demonstrate the need for your project and resonate with the reviewer.

Community Involvement and Needs Assessment

- Consider holding a planning meeting (or meetings). Provide a snapshot of the posted invitation (newspaper, web, etc) and include details… date, time, and who attended.

- Develop a planning committee. List their names and titles, and keep a record of the dates that you meet, who attended, and what was discussed. Include a wide variety of stake-holders.

- How did you identify the critical needs that will be addressed by your project?
  - Surveys
  - Climate assessment
  - Other data points

    (test scores, health or economic data)

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Assessment leads to
Needs Identifcation & Project Design

- When identifying your Needs, try to think broadly
- Start with your primary need and then consider other ways distance learning or telemedicine connections can help address problems in your target area. *Example:*
- Primary need: *to provide primary care in a school based health setting*
- Other possible needs / use cases:
    - Prevention / Wellness Programming
    - Special Education Services (PT, OT, Speech, Psychological Testing)
    - Expanding access to teachers, families, community members
    - Access to specialty care (ENT, Allergist, Mental Health Professionals, etc.)
    - Continuing Medical Education / Professional Development

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How does your Project Address those Needs?

- Describe your project. How do the technologies you are proposing help you address those needs?   Just a couple of lines is fine!

"This project places telemedicine endpoints, along with digitally connected medical scopes, in each of our schools. This will allow real time connections to healthcare experts for the delivery of primary care, addressing the critical lack of access to geographically accessible healthcare."

Now Elaborate...

- **Needs – list the individual needs you've just outlined in your Alignment Table**

- **For each Need, discuss the need in detail.**

- **Cite sources – how can you prove this need really IS a need?**

- **Make regional, state or national comparisons!**
  - **In what ways do you not compare favorably?**
  - **Reference test scores, health statistics, etc.**
  - **BAD is GOOD... really highlight your Need!**

- **Assume the reviewer is not an expert on your topic... keep your narrative simple and to the point**

Benefits

- From the Alignment Table, capture all of the Benefits you identified
- Discuss them individually
- How does your project allow you to achieve those benefits?
- Talk in general terms

Outcomes

- Where Benefits are broad, Outcomes are specific
- Capture the numbers of people served
- What are the specific number of courses or services provided for the first time?
- What % increase, decrease, improvement, etc. are you anticipating?

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Other N&B Elements

Project Support

- Letters showing a "360" of support – no templates!
- Donations of money or time!
- Board approval & support
- Facebook or Twitter comments

Alignment w/State Plan

- Discuss how your project (DL or TM) is in line with the direction your state is championing.
- Cite similar initiatives

Non-Duplication

- Discuss any past DLT projects that any project member may have be part of (last 3 yrs)
- Are any project members involved in another 2020 DLT?
- Address Non-Duplication

Final Check-Points for Success

Review the Checklist – check your application for completeness

A	Completed Standard Form 424 & Site worksheet
B	Executive Summary of the Project
C1	C-1 Rurality
C2	C-2 Economic Need
C3	C-3 Special Consideration
C4	C-4 Need for Services and Benefits
D	Matching Requirements
E	Scope of Work & /Budget
F	Financial Information and Sustainability
G	Statement of Experience
H	Telecommunications Systems Plan
I	Compliance with Other Federal Statutes and Regulations
J	Evidence Of Legal Existence and Authority to Contract with the Federal Government
K	Environmental Impact and Historic Preservation
L	Consultation with State Director

Compare this checklist to the guidelines and review ALL required elements for each section.

Ask for another pair of eyes to review your application – sometimes you can be too close to your own work!

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Learn Design Apply, Inc. (LDA) is a grants consulting and management company with 50+ years combined experience in grant management and writing, program development and relationship management with underserved communities, technology firms and healthcare providers in the USA.

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Questions?

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