

a workable plan to apply technologies to address specific challenges in their communities. Rather than simply requesting funds to build capacity or upgrade existing equipment, each application should describe a project that pinpoints specific problems, proposes creative solutions, and postulates measurable outcomes.

All funded projects must be interactive in that they foster the exchange and sharing of information among individuals and/or groups, as opposed to one-way or broadcast systems. Because these grants will serve as national models for other communities, NTIA expects each project to include provisions for a thorough, independent evaluation that will provide valid and reliable data as well as valuable lessons learned to be shared with others interested in the project.

In previous fiscal years, NTIA supported planning projects. The emphasis for Fiscal Year 2003 is on projects that deploy, use, and evaluate applications of new telecommunications technology. NTIA will, however, support projects that incorporate some planning activities as part of the proposed project.

Limitations on Project Scope

Each TOP project is expected to include a range of activities that support project development, implementation, and evaluation. However, TOP will not support projects whose primary purpose falls into the categories discussed below.

1. *Single-Organization Projects.* TOP will not support projects whose primary emphasis is on the internal communications needs of a single organization, even if the organization has a considerable number of offices or users in different cities or regions of the country.

2. *Infrastructure Development Projects.* Every TOP applicant is expected to create a project that describes and provides funding for specific applications of technologies to address important community challenges. Therefore, TOP will not support projects whose primary purpose is to create telecommunications or network infrastructure without significant dedication of resources to specific applications of that infrastructure.

3. *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 purpose.

4. *Training Projects.* While TOP considers training to be an essential aspect of most projects, TOP will not support projects whose primary purpose is to provide training in the use of software applications, Internet use, or other network technologies.

5. *Voice-based Systems.* Two-way, interactive voice networks are an important element of existing network systems. Voice as a means for conveying information and voice input tools play critical roles in ensuring people with disabilities have access to network technology. However, TOP will not support projects whose primary purpose is to either build or install voice-based communication networks such as call centers, two-way radio networks, enhanced-911 and 311 systems, or 800 MHZ radio systems.

6. *Curriculum Development Projects.* As indicated in the "Eligibility Criteria" section of this Notice, K-12 schools and non-profit entities that provide lifelong learning opportunities are eligible to apply for grants. However, TOP will not support projects whose primary purpose is the development of curricula for K-12 students.

In addition, NTIA places a priority on avoiding duplication of other federal initiatives. As indicated in the "Selection Procedures" section of this notice, the selection official will recommend awards based, in part, on avoidance of redundancy with initiatives of other federal agencies. Therefore, applicants should carefully review other federal initiatives, and, if necessary, describe how their project would not be eligible for support by other federal initiatives. For assistance in researching other federal initiatives, please see the discussion of Electronic Information in the "Other Information" section of this Notice.

Review Criteria

Reviewers will analyze and rate each application using the following criteria. The relative weights of each criterion are identified in parentheses.

1. Project Purpose (20%)

Each application must describe a clearly defined project that uses telecommunications and information technology for the provision of educational, cultural, health care, public information, public safety, or other social services.

In assessing the project purpose, reviewers will examine the degree to which the applicant clearly describes and convincingly links three major

elements: (1) The problem(s) to be addressed, (2) the proposed solution, and (3) the anticipated outcomes of the project.

Reviewers will assess the evidence and severity of the identified problem(s) and need(s). With respect to the proposed solution, reviewers will assess the degree to which the project will address the identified problem(s). With respect to anticipated project outcomes, reviewers will assess the degree to which the proposed results and outcomes of the project are both realistic and measurable. Reviewers will also assess the degree to which an applicant convincingly links the three major elements-problem(s), solution(s), and outcome(s).

2. Innovation (20%)

Reviewers will assess innovation by examining both the technology to be used and the application of the technology in a particular setting, to serve a particular population, or to solve a particular problem. TOP defines innovation broadly. For example, projects that involve imaginative partnerships, the introduction of new business processes designed to offer more effective services, untested strategies for overcoming access barriers, or new techniques that transform inter-organizational relationships can all be considered innovative. TOP encourages applicants to experiment with leading edge technologies. It is, however, the creativity behind the application of the technology to meet community needs that ultimately determines the level of innovation.

Using experience gained in their respective fields, reviewers will examine each project in a national context and evaluate how an application compares with, complements, and improves on what is known about using telecommunications and information technology for the provision of educational, cultural, health care, public information, public safety, or other social services.

3. Community Involvement (20%)

Each application will be rated on the level of community involvement in the development and implementation of the proposed project. Reviewers will:

(1) Analyze the applicant's partnerships to ensure that they include linkages among unaffiliated organizations (from the public, non-profit, or private sectors) as an ongoing and integral part of project planning and implementation. TOP considers partners to be organizations that supply cash, in-kind resources (including personnel,