

equipment, facilities, etc.), and/or are actively involved in the planning and implementation of the project;

(2) consider the degree of attention paid to the needs, skills, working conditions, and living environments of the targeted end users.¹ Reviewers will consider the extent to which applicants involve representatives from a broad range of potential users in both the design and implementation of the project and consider the varying degrees of abilities of all end users, including individuals with disabilities. Reviewers will also assess the degree to which the project addresses barriers which limit a community's or a group's access to network technologies. Finally, reviewers will assess the applicant's plans for training end users and upgrading their skills; and

(3) examine the steps the applicant has taken to include and sustain the involvement of a variety of community stakeholders. Reviewers will look for documented evidence of demand—from the community, end users, and potential beneficiaries—for the services proposed by the project.

4. Evaluation and Dissemination (15%)

Each application will be rated on its proposed plans for evaluating the project and sharing the knowledge learned. Reviewers will assess the extent to which the applicant's research or evaluation design: (1) Provides for continuous feedback for project planning, implementation, review, and revision; (2) addresses the problems, solutions, and anticipated outcomes described in the project purpose; (3) proposes a research design that yields valid and reliable findings; (4) captures lessons learned and sufficient descriptive data so that others may easily adapt and replicate the project; and (5) meets TOP's requirements for an independent evaluation as described in the "Reporting Requirements" section of this Notice.

In assessing evaluation, reviewers will examine:

(1) The research design and methodology;

(2) evaluation questions, data collection, and data analysis plans;

(3) the qualifications of any staff or external evaluators working on the evaluation; and

(4) the allocation of resources for implementing the evaluation and reporting project findings.

With respect to dissemination of the lessons learned, reviewers will assess:

(1) the extent to which the project would be easy to replicate or adapt,

based on considerations such as cost and complexity;

(2) the applicant's plans and budget resources dedicated to disseminate actively the best practices and lessons learned from the project's successes and failures; and

(3) the capability and experience of an applicant or their partner organizations to reach communities across the country and disseminate their findings.

5. Project Feasibility (15%)

In assessing the feasibility of each application, reviewers will focus on five issues: The technical approach, the qualifications of the project staff, the implementation schedule, plans for protecting privacy, and the applicant's plan for sustaining the project beyond the grant period.

(1) In assessing the technical approach, reviewers will examine the degree to which the proposed system offers advantages over established approaches to addressing the specified problems and would work and operate with other systems. In addition, reviewers will assess the technological alternatives that have been considered; designs for system maintenance and periodic upgrades; and plans for project expansion. Applicants are expected to make use of existing infrastructure and commercially available telecommunications services, unless extraordinary circumstances require the construction of new network facilities.

(2) In assessing the qualifications of the project team, reviewers will assess the applicant and its partners to determine if they have the resources, expertise, and experience necessary to undertake, evaluate, and complete the project and disseminate results within the proposed period.

(3) Reviewers will assess the degree to which the proposed project, from implementation through evaluation, will be completed in the proposed time frame.

(4) Reviewers will evaluate the applicant's plans to safeguard the privacy of the project's end users and others affected by the project.

(5) Finally, reviewers will examine the applicant's strategies to sustain the project after the completion of the grant.

6. Project Budget (10%)

Reviewers will analyze the budget in terms of clarity and cost-effectiveness. Reviewers will also assess the reasonableness of the proposed budget and whether the allocation of funds is sufficient to complete the tasks outlined in the project narrative.

Eligible Costs

Eligible Costs. Allowable costs incurred under approved projects shall be determined in accordance with applicable federal cost principles, *i.e.*, OMB Circulars A-21, A-87, A-122, or Appendix E of 45 CFR part 74. If included in the approved project budget, TOP will allow costs for personnel; fringe benefits; computer hardware, software, and other end-user equipment; telecommunication services and related equipment; consultants, evaluators, and other contractual items; travel; rental of office equipment, furniture, and space; and supplies.

All costs must be reasonable and directly related to the project.

Ineligible Costs

Costs associated with the construction or major renovation of buildings are not eligible. While costs for the construction of new network facilities are eligible, 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 for professional services are also ineligible. TOP defines professional services as activities delivered over a network that would otherwise be provided in a face-to-face setting such as teaching students, counseling clients, providing direct patient care, or interpreting services, etc. For example, if the project proposes to create a telemedicine network, the costs of setting up, maintaining, and evaluating the use of the network are eligible, but payment for the time or services of physicians or other health professionals providing care over the network is not an eligible cost.

Note that costs ineligible for TOP support may not be included as part of the applicant's matching fund contribution.

In addition, Pub. L. 108-7, the Consolidated Appropriations Resolution, FY 2003, places restrictions on eligible project costs for applicants that are recipients of Universal Service Fund discounts and applicants receiving assistance from the Department of Justice's Regional Information Sharing Systems Program as part of the project costs. The statute provided:

That, notwithstanding any other provision of law, no entity that receives telecommunications services at preferential rates under section 254(h) of the Act (47 U.S.C. 254(h)) or receives assistance under the regional information sharing systems grant program of the Department of Justice

¹ An "end user" is an individual who directly uses the network technology.