

the validity of the methodology and assumption used; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

Comments may be sent to F. Lamont Heppe, Jr., Director, Program Development and Regulatory Analysis, Rural Utilities Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Stop 1522, Room 4034 South Building, Washington, DC 20250-1522.

*Title:* Public Television Station Digital Transition Grant Program.

*Type of Request:* New collection.

*Estimate of Burden:* Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 21 hours per response.

*Respondents:* Not-for-profit institutions; State, Local or Tribal Government.

*Estimated Number of Respondents:* 50.

*Estimated Number of Responses per Respondent:* 1.12.

*Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents:* 1,168 hours.

Copies of this information collection can be obtained from Michele Brooks, Program Development and Regulatory Analysis, at (202) 690-1078.

All responses to this information collection and recordkeeping notice will be summarized and included in the request for OMB approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

### General Information

As part of the nation's evolution to digital television, the Federal Communications Commission has ordered all television broadcasters to initiate the broadcast of a digital television signal by May 1, 2003, and to cease analog television broadcasts on December 31, 2006. About half of the nation's 357 public television stations did not meet the deadline to initiate digital broadcasting, and have received extensions to as late as May 1, 2004, to do so.

The Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2003, authorized \$51,941,000 for the Distance Learning and Telemedicine program. The Committee Recommendations specify that of the funds provided for Distance Learning and Telemedicine, \$15,000,000 should be made available in grants for public

broadcasting systems to meet this goal. The Committee further recognizes that these stations will have considerable financial difficulty in meeting that deadline.

Public television stations rely largely on community financial support to operate. In many rural areas the cost of the transition to digital broadcasting may exceed community resources. Since rural communities depend on public television stations for services ranging from educational course content in their schools to local news, weather, and agricultural reports, any disruption of public television broadcasting would be detrimental.

Initiating a digital broadcast requires the installation of a new antenna, transmitter or translator, and new digital program management facilities consisting of processing and storage systems. Public television stations use a combination of transmitters and translators to serve the rural public. If the public television station is to perform program origination functions, as most do, digital cameras, editing and mastering systems are required. A new studio-to-tower site communications link may be required to transport the digital broadcast signal to each transmitter and translator. The capability to broadcast some programming in a high definition television format is inherent in the digital television standard, and this can require additional facilities at the studio. These are the new components of the digital transition.

In designing the national competition for the distribution of these grant funds, priority is given to public television stations serving the areas that would be most unable to fund the digital transition without a grant. The largest sources of funding for public television stations are public membership and business contributions. In rural areas, lower population density reduces the field of membership, and rural areas have fewer businesses per capita than urban and suburban areas. Therefore, rurality is a primary predictor of the need for grant funding for a public television station's digital transition. In addition, some rural areas have per capita income levels that are lower than the national average, and public television stations covering these areas in particular are likely to have difficulty funding the digital transition. As a result, the consideration of the per capita income of a public television station's coverage area is a secondary predictor of the need for grant funding. Finally, some public television stations may have, or may meet in their communities, critical needs, and a third

scoring factor for critical need will account for conditions that make these public television stations less likely to accomplish the digital transition without a grant.

### Definitions

As used in this notice:

*Consortium* means a combination or group of public television stations.

*Digital television, or DTV,* means a new television system which will replace the current analog system, which was designed by and is referred to as the National Television Standards Committee, or NTSC, system. The standard for digital television was adopted by the Federal Communications Commission on December 24, 1996, after being developed by the Advanced Television Standards Committee, or ATSC.

*Digital television coverage area* means the geographic area that will be covered by a public television station after its digital transition. This shall be defined using the Irregular Terrain Model (Longley-Rice model) developed by and available from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration at <http://elbert.its.bldrdoc.gov/itm.html>. For translators only, an applicant may define the digital television coverage area using an alternative means, which must be explained fully in the application and is subject to acceptance by the RUS.

*Digital transition* means a conversion from analog television broadcasting to digital television broadcasting. To perform the digital transition according to Federal Communications Commission rules, a broadcaster must initiate digital television broadcasting while continuing to operate analog television broadcasting, to enable viewers time to acquire digital television reception capability, and subsequently discontinue analog television broadcasting.

*Distance learning* means a digital public television broadcast from one area, whether rural or not, to a school, library, home, or other end-user site located in a rural area, for the purpose of providing educational and cultural programming.

*High definition television, or HDTV,* means an enhanced television service which is authorized by the Federal Communications Commission as part of the digital television standard.

*Public television station* means a television broadcast station, which (1)(A) under the rules and regulations of the Federal Communications Commission in effect on November 2, 1978, is eligible to be licensed as a