USDA Rural Development
Rural Utility Services

Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program Application Guide FY 2023

Together, America Prospers

Disclaimer:

This FY2023 Distance Learning and Telemedicine Application Guide was reviewed and determined to not comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (link available here: www.section508.gov), nor do the contents of the guide meet federal plain language requirements (link available here: www.plainlanguage.gov).

The noncompliant version is being provided as a temporary resource while the final version is being fully remediated for compliance. If you need assistance and are unable to access the resources in this guide, please contact the General Field Representative for the area where the pending project is located (link available here: https://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/telecom-gfr/all).

USDA Rural Development's Rural Utilities Service staff has been asked to provide a fully compliant version by January 2, 2023.

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DISTANCE LEARNING & TELEMEDICINE PROGRAM
GRANT APPLICATION GUIDE
FISCAL YEAR 2023

RURAL UTILITIES SERVICE
RURAL DEVELOPMENT
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communications of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-1127 (TDD).

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Introduction and General Information

Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program

General Information

Distance learning means a real-time, interactive, telecommunications link to an end-user through the use of eligible equipment to provide educational programs, instruction, or information originating in one area, whether rural or not, to students and teachers who are located in rural areas.

Telemedicine means a real-time, interactive, telecommunications link to an end-user through the use of eligible equipment which electronically links medical professionals at separate sites in order to exchange health care information in audio, video, graphic, or other format for the purpose of providing improved health care services, primarily to residents of rural areas.

To review additional definitions related to this program, review the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Regulation, 7 CFR 1743, at https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-XVII/part-1734.

The Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Grant Program is specifically designed to assist rural communities in acquiring distance learning and telemedical technologies so that local teachers and medical service providers who serve rural residents can link to other teachers, medical professionals, and experts located at distances too far to access otherwise. Since 1994, the DLT Grant Program has helped to establish hundreds of distance learning and telemedicine systems improving quality of life for thousands of residents in rural communities across the United States.

BEFORE GETTING STARTED

All applicants must read:

7 CFR 1734, Subpart A and B

Notice of Solicitation of Applications (NOSA) published on the DLT Program Website and in Grants.gov on **December 1, 2022**.

DLT Program Website: https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants

The regulation **MUST** be used in conjunction with this Application Guide. Should any differences result in the interpretation of this Application Guide and the regulation, the regulation takes precedence.

For additional information concerning this grant program, please use the Contact Us form located at https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/contact-us and select "Distance Learning & Telemedicine" as the subject.

When and Where to Submit Application:
GRANT applications must be submitted through Grants.gov by 11:59 pm ET on

January 30, 2023

Applications must be submitted **ELECTRONICALLY** via www.grants.gov. Applications will not be accepted on paper or electronic mail.

Applicants may request technical assistance or other application guidance from the Agency if such requests are made prior to official submission of the application and at least 15 days prior to the due date listed in NOSA. Technical assistance is not meant to be an analysis or assessment of the quality of the materials submitted, a substitute for agency review of completed applications, nor a determination of eligibility, if such determination requires in-depth analysis. The Agency will not solicit or consider scoring or eligibility information that is submitted after the application deadline. The Agency reserves the right to contact applicants to seek clarification on materials contained in the submitted application.

The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) strongly encourages applicants to obtain all necessary sign-ups, credentials, and authorizations well in advance of the deadline, including the required System for Award Management (SAM.gov) registration and Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications. Grants.gov requires one-time credentialing and online authentication procedures. These procedures may take several business days to complete. Additionally, several requirements on Grants.gov and SAM.gov call for an annual update; applicants should ensure that their credentials and authorizations are up to date.

The Grants.gov website, like all web facilities, has finite capacity. If several federal grant programs have the same application deadline date, users may experience periods of site overloading. Please plan accordingly.

Please follow the instructions on Grants.gov. If applicants experience a technical problem retrieving or submitting an electronic application, they should contact the Grants.gov customer support resources. RUS staff do not control the technical aspects of Grants.gov and will not be able to help if an applicant experiences a problem. However, RUS is available to answer questions about the Program and the contents of an application.

Grants.gov applications must be submitted by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on the closing date.

Additional Registration Requirements for all Applicants

Unique Entity Identifier – In April 2022, the federal government replaced the DUNS number with the Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) as the authoritative identifier for organizations that apply for federal contracts or financial assistance. Applicants must provide a UEI when applying for DLT funding. Obtain your organization's UEI when you create or update your SAM.gov entry. You can obtain your UEI at SAM.gov even if you have no updates to your SAM.gov record. If your organization is currently registered in SAM.gov with either an active or inactive registration, you have already been assigned a UEI. Your UEI is viewable on your entity's registration record in SAM.gov. **Note that the UEI must belong to the Applicant, not an affiliate, subsidiary, or parent company.**

SAM and Grants.gov Registration – Applicants must register in the System for Award Management (SAM) prior to registering in Grants.gov. Applicants must also make the certifications and representations required of entities that are applying for or have received funding under any federal financial assistance project or program (aka the "Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications") to be eligible for a DLT grant. Please refer to SAM's Quick Start Guide for Grant Registrations for more details: pages 33 and 34 of the guide discuss how to make the Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications. **A SAM registration that lacks the Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications will cause an application to be deemed ineligible.**

Registration in SAM is free of charge at https://www.sam.gov. Please keep in mind that it can take up to 15 business days to register as a new potential grantee with SAM, then an additional 24 hours for Grants.gov to recognize the SAM information. Applicants should plan accordingly and begin the process well in advance of the application deadline.

Throughout the RUS application review and the active Federal grant funding period, the SAM registration with Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications must be active with current data at all times. To maintain an active SAM registration, the applicant must review and update the information in SAM annually from the date of initial registration or from the date of the last update. The applicant must ensure that the information in the database is current, accurate, and complete.

If an applicant has a current SAM registration but did not make the Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications at the time of initial registration or renewal, the applicant should log into SAM and add the required representations and certifications before submitting a grant application. Note that it can take an additional 10 business days for SAM to recognize the update to the registration. **Please check the applicant's SAM registration for accuracy prior to submitting an application.**

Changes for Fiscal Year 2023

1. The scoring criteria for Special Consideration points has been updated.
2. The DUNS number has been replaced with the UEI as the authoritative identifier for organizations that apply for federal contracts or financial assistance.
3. Cyber security software directly related to the funded project is an eligible grant purpose.

Eligibility Requirements

Applicant Eligibility

To be eligible for a grant, an organization must:

1. Be legally organized as an incorporated organization, an Indian tribe or tribal organization, as defined in 25 U.S.C. 450b(b) and (c), a state or local unit of government, a consortium, or other legal entity, including a private corporation organized on a for-profit or not-for-profit basis. Each applicant must provide evidence of its legal capacity to contract with the Rural Utilities Service to obtain the grant and comply with all applicable requirements, in accordance with 7 CFR part 1734.4(a).

   Consortium: A consortium is a combination or group of entities formed to undertake the purposes for which the distance learning and telemedicine financial assistance is being requested.

   - If the applicant is an existing established consortium with the legal ability to contract with the Federal Government, that organization can apply in the name of the formal consortium.
   - If the applicant is an informal consortium which by itself lacks the legal capacity to contract with the Federal Government, either one entity must serve as the host organization which will apply on behalf of the consortium and be designated as the project owner with all awardee responsibilities, or each individual entity must contract with RUS in its own behalf.

2. Either operate a rural community facility or deliver distance learning or telemedicine services to entities that operate a rural community facility or to residents of rural areas at rates calculated to ensure that the benefit of the financial assistance is passed through to such entities or to residents of rural areas.

Grant applications that are written by vendors who are mentioned in the application as vendors to be used on the project to be funded by the DLT award are ineligible as a violation of the competition rules in 2 CFR 200.319. Such vendors are also prohibited from bidding on the project because of conflict of interest. Additionally, applicants must fully understand the procurement requirements of 2 CFR part 200 Subpart D and the DLT regulations when compiling an application for submission and must avoid the use of predetermined equipment as a violation of the bidding requirements unless they have adequately demonstrated in the application that no other equipment is available for the intended purpose.

Equipment vendors, manufacturers, system integrators, and other businesses whose purpose in the proposal is to sell equipment or technological services to support applicants cannot themselves be applicants or affiliates of the applicant. If the grant writer for the application is paid by a vendor, manufacturer, system integrator, or other business, the vendor, manufacturer, system integrator or other business becomes an affiliate of the applicant and cannot participate in the project.

Corporations that have been convicted of a federal felony within the past 24 months **are not eligible.** Any corporation that has been assessed to have any unpaid federal tax liability, for which all judicial and administrative remedies have been exhausted or have lapsed and is not being paid in a timely manner pursuant to an agreement with the authority responsible for collecting the tax liability, is not eligible for financial assistance.

Applicants are required to provide evidence of their ability to contract with RUS to obtain the grant and comply with all applicable requirements, in accordance with 7 CFR 1734.4(a). It is incumbent on applicants to determine the appropriate entity to apply for the grant. Entities created by educational or medical institutions for the purpose of applying for and managing grants, such as university or hospital foundations, should not be applicants unless they can own and manage grant-funded equipment as required by the Grant Agreement and applicable regulations, including 2 CFR Part 200. Accordingly, **RUS will not transfer awards to another entity because the applicant later determined that it cannot close the award, execute the standard Grant Agreement, which is publicly available, or hold the grant assets in its name.**

Note: Electric or telecommunications borrowers financed through the Rural Utilities Service are eligible for grants.

Eligible Grant Purposes

There are five categories of eligible purposes (7 CFR 1734.21, (a) - (e)):

1. **Acquiring and installing, by lease or purchase, eligible equipment**. If leased, the cost of the lease during the three-year life of the grant is eligible.

   The following are examples of eligible equipment. This list is not exhaustive. Neither does it convey blanket eligibility. For example, a computer is not automatically eligible. It must be used for an eligible purpose. The purpose of the DLT Grant program is to deliver education or medical care to end users at remote sites via telecommunications, not simply to furnish educational or medical technology.

   - Computer hardware and software
   - Interactive audio and video equipment
   - Computer networking components
   - Telecommunications terminal equipment
   - Data terminal equipment
   - Inside wiring
   - Cyber security software directly related to the funded project

   In general, equipment not electronically interconnected to the grant and match funded equipment is not eligible. The application must demonstrate that the **PREDOMINANT PURPOSE** (50% or more of use) of **EVERY LINE-ITEM** in the grant and match budget meets the DLT Grant definition of distance learning or telemedicine. **NOTE: All equipment purchased for this Project must be new or non-depreciated.**

2. **Purchases of extended warranties, site licenses, and maintenance contracts**, for a period not to exceed 3 years from installation date, provided that such purchases are in support of eligible equipment included in the project and made concurrently.

3. **Acquiring or developing instructional programming that is a capital asset**, including the purchase or lease of instructional programming already on the market. Renewals of instructional programming are not eligible nor is classroom equipment (such as laboratory equipment). Also, expenses such as those for tuition, fees for coursework on a per course basis, or fees for cultural events or virtual field trips are not capital assets and therefore, are not eligible. Additionally, salaries, benefits, and overhead of medical, educational, or any personnel employed by the applicant shall not be included. The funded development and acquisition of instructional programming must be done through an independent third party and may not be performed using the applicant's employees.

4. **Providing technical assistance and instruction for using eligible equipment**, including any related software, developing instructional programming for equipment use, and providing engineering or environmental studies relating to the establishment or expansion of the phase of the project to be financed with the grant. The costs for this category cannot exceed 10% of the grant amount requested.

5. **Purchasing and installing broadband facilities.** This purpose is limited to a maximum of 20% of the requested grant amount. All broadband facilities must be **owned** by the applicant and must be **used for** providing distance learning or telemedicine services.

Ineligible Grant Purposes

The following purposes are considered ineligible grant purposes (see 7 CFR 1734.23):

- To pay for medical or educational equipment not having telemedicine or distance learning as its essential function, including telephone systems
- To pay for Electronic Medical Records (EMR) systems
- To pay salaries, wages, or employee benefits to medical or educational personnel
- To pay for the salaries or administrative expenses of the applicant or the project
- To purchase equipment that will be owned by the local exchange carrier or another telecommunications service provider unless that service provider is the applicant
- To duplicate facilities providing distance learning or telemedicine services in place or to reimburse the applicant or others for costs incurred prior to RUS' receipt of the completed application
- To pay costs of preparing the application package for financial assistance under this program
- For projects whose sole objective is to provide links between teachers and students or between medical professionals who are located at the same facility or campus environment
- For site development and the destruction or alteration of buildings
- For the purchase of land, buildings, or building construction
- For projects located in areas covered by the Coastal Barrier Resources Act (16 U.S.C. 3501 et seq.)
- For any purpose that the Administrator has not specifically approved
- Except for leases provided for in §1734.21, to pay **the cost of recurring or operating expenses for the project, including but not limited to broadband connection fees**
- For any other purposes not specifically contained in §1734.21.

Additionally, except as otherwise provided in §1734.12, grants shall not be used to finance a project, in part, when the success of the project is dependent upon the receipt of additional financial assistance under this subpart **or is dependent upon the receipt of other financial assistance that is not assured.**

Additional Eligibility Criteria

1. **Minimum Rurality Score:** To be eligible to receive a grant, an application must receive a minimum of **20 points** as an average score for all end-user and hub/end-user sites included in the project. See instructions under Section D-1 for calculating the Rurality Score.

2. **Matching Contribution:** The grant applicant's matching contribution must total at least 15 percent of the grant amount requested and be used for eligible grant purposes. See instructions under **Section E** for more information on the Matching Contribution.

3. **Tribal Government Resolution of Consent:** A certification from the appropriate tribal official is required if a project is being proposed by a non-Tribal applicant over or on Tribal Lands. The appropriate certification is a Tribal Government Resolution of Consent. The appropriate tribal official is the Tribal Council of the Tribal Government with jurisdiction over the Tribal Lands at issue. **Any non-Tribal applicant that fails to provide a certification to administer a project on Tribal Lands will not be considered for funding.** For a sample Tribal Government Resolution of Consent, visit **Appendix A** of this guide.

Other Considerations:

Rural Areas: The intent of the DLT Program is to benefit rural areas (populations of 20,000 or less and not contiguous and adjacent to urban areas > 50,000). While some projects could include end-users in more urbanized areas, the Agency will evaluate projects based on their benefit to rural areas. Additionally, rural areas excludes certain populations pursuant to 7 U.S.C. 1991(a)(13)(H) and (I).

Online Educational or Medical Services: Because this program is intended to fund end-user equipment at specifically identified sites, applications that propose to provide only web-based services which are universally available are ineligible. This type of project does not have a defined service area and the beneficiaries can be located anywhere, including urban areas.

Grant Limits

The minimum Grant amount which can be requested is **$50,000**. The maximum Grant amount which can be requested is **$1,000,000.**

Grant Review Process

1. **Grant Receipt:** Completed applications must be submitted through https://www.grants.gov by the specified submission date to be considered for funding.

2. **Incomplete Applications:** Incomplete applications will not be eligible for funding under this grant opportunity.

3. **Scoring:** All complete applications will be scored in accordance with the criteria set forth in the Notice of Solicitation of Applications (NOSA), this guide, on the program website, and on the Grants.gov website.

4. **Ineligible Applications:** Applicants with applications that are deemed ineligible will be notified in writing regarding application deficiencies.

5. **Appeals:** Only RUS Telecommunications and Electric Borrowers may appeal the decision to reject their applications. Any appeal must be made, in writing, within 10 days after the applicant is notified of the determination to deny the application.

6. **Selection Process:** Applications will be selected for approval based on scores assigned, availability of funds, and the provisions of § 1734.27. To increase the range of applicants that will be successful in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, only ONE application per applicant is eligible for approval. If an applicant submits an application for the same project more than once, the Agency will base its evaluation on the last copy of the application submitted. If an applicant submits more than one application for distinct projects, the application with the higher score will be considered for funding.

Regardless of the number of points an application receives, the Administrator may take any of the following actions:

a) Limit the number of applications selected for projects located in any one State during a fiscal year
b) Limit the number of selected applications for a particular type of project
c) Select an application receiving fewer points than another if there are insufficient funds during a particular funding period to select the higher scoring application.

7. **Legal Documents:** All grantees will be required to execute a standard DLT Grant Agreement. A standard form of this agreement can be found on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants

Completing the Grant Application

This section addresses all the information that must be submitted for an application to be deemed complete and to be considered for funding. Please ensure all necessary information is included in the appropriate section. All forms and certifications are included on the DLT website, shown in Appendix A of this Guide, or are available through Grants.gov or SAM.gov.

A. Standard Form 424
B. Description of Project Sites
C. Executive Summary of the Project
D. Scoring Criteria Documentation (Rurality, Economic Need, Needs and Benefits, and Special Consideration)
E. Matching Requirements
F. Scope of Work
G. Financial Information and Sustainability
H. Statement of Experience
I. Telecommunications System Plan
J. Compliance with other Federal Statutes
K. Evidence of Legal Existence and Authority to Contract with the Federal Government
L. Environmental Impact and Historic Preservation
M. Consultation with USDA State Director
N. Supplemental Information

A. Standard Form 424

The SF-424, also referred to as the Application for Federal Assistance Form, is provided by Grants.gov as a required form. It is crucial that you use the **EXACT NAME of the LEGAL ENTITY** applying for the grant on the SF-424. All **other application components must be uploaded with the SF-424 in Grants.gov.** See **Section K** for more details.

B. Description of Project Sites

Pursuant to the DLT regulation, 7 CFR 1734.25 (b)(7) and (9), applicants are required to include in the application a description of the participating hubs, end-users, and hub/end user sites, the number of rural residents that will be served by the project at each end-user and hub/end user site, and a listing of the location of each end-user and hub/end user site (city, town, village, borough, or rural areas), as well as the State. A Sample Description of Project Sites is available on the DLT website to guide applicants through what information should be provided as part of a complete application. Be sure to list all locations to receive grant-funded equipment or function as a critical part of the proposed project. Please use the following definitions when distinguishing a site as a hub, end-user, or hub/end-user site. These designations should be used consistently throughout the application.

Hub Sites: A hub site is a facility that is part of a network or telecommunications system that provides educational or medical services to end-user or hub/end-user sites. A pure hub receives no end-user benefits. The site is usually a connection management point or is exclusively an educational or medical source of distance learning or telemedicine.

End-User Site: An end-user site is a facility that is part of a network or telecommunications system that is utilized by end-users. For a site to be included as an end-user site for scoring purposes, the applicant must demonstrate equipment purchased will be installed or placed at the site and the site will only receive benefits or services from other networked sites.

Hub/End-User Site: A hub/end-user site performs both functions: a hub which also accommodates end-users.

Non-Fixed End-User Sites: If equipment funded by the grant will be used in rural residents' homes or in mobile facilities, the project will be deemed a non-fixed end-user site application, since the end-user sites will change constantly. The location of the hub site that serves the non-fixed end-user sites will serve as a proxy for the addresses of the end-users. If the project includes both non-fixed and fixed end-user sites, it will be described as a ***Hybrid*** application. Note: the addresses of individual homes of prospective students or patients for non-fixed project **should not** be provided on the Description of Project Sites. These addresses will not be used for scoring purposes, and such personally identifiable information should not be included in the application.

Congressional district information to be included in the Description of Project Sites can be found on the DLT map located on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants. Further guidance on navigating the US Census website and DLT map is available in **Appendix B**.

C. Executive Summary of the Project

The Executive Summary gives reviewers their first overall view of the project area, the problems residents face, and how the proposed project will address those problems. This is the applicant's opportunity to discuss the core aspects of the project. It should contain a concise description of the project, including:

1. A description of why the project is needed.
2. An explanation of how the applicant will address the need(s) cited, why the applicant requires the financial assistance, the types of education or medical services to be offered by the projects, and the benefits to rural residents.
3. A description of the applicant, documenting eligibility.
4. An explanation of the total project cost including a breakdown of the grant required and the source of matching contribution and other financial assistance for the remainder of the project.
5. A statement specifying whether the project is either a **distance learning or telemedicine facility** as defined in § 1734.3. If the project provides both distance learning and telemedicine services, the applicant must identify the *predominant use* of the system.
6. A statement specifying whether the project is proposing to reduce the morbidity and mortality that is associated with substance use disorder in rural communities.
7. A statement specifying whether the project is requesting special consideration points for projects that support Tribal Lands, Farmworker Communities, or Distressed Energy Communities, Native American Language(s), or Mental Health Services. If no special consideration is being requested, applicant should state "No special consideration requested."
8. A general overview of the telecommunications system to be developed, including the types of equipment, technologies, and facilities used.
9. A description of the participating hub, end/user, and hub/end-user sites and the **number of rural residents that will be served by the project at each end-user and hub/end-user site**.
10. Discussion of the relationship of the applicant with participating hub, end-user, and hub/end-user sites and if the application is being filed as an **informal consortium.** If the application is for an informal consortium with all entities requesting to sign the grant agreement (so that they can own certain grant-funded equipment and be jointly and severally liable for the entire grant project), a single **fiscal agent** must be identified as the applicant and **all** entities must provide certifications and documentation under **Section J** and **Section K**, respectively, including SAM registrations with Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications.
11. A certification by the applicant that facilities to be constructed with the grant do not duplicate adequate established telemedicine or distance learning services.
12. A listing of the location of each end-user site and hub/end-user site (city, town, village, borough, or rural areas), as well as the State.

At the end of the Executive Summary, please provide a section titled **"Publicly Releasable Project Description"** that contains the following information:

1. Title of the Project
2. Description of the proposed end-user and hub/end-user site(s)
3. A brief description of project
4. Total estimated population affected by proposed project and how you arrived at this number

The description does not need to be lengthy but should be informative.

Example 1: Distance Learning

This Rural Development investment will be used to equip [**number**] hub sites and [**number**] end-user sites throughout [**county name(s)**] in [**geographical direction**] [**State**] with [**equipment type**]. Instructors at [**entity name**] in [**county and state**] will deliver [**type of instructional content (example: Scientific, Technical, Engineering and Mathematics)**] courses to [**number**] locations benefitting [**number**] students.

Example 2: Telemedicine

This Rural Development investment will be used to equip [**number**] hub sites and [**number**] end-user sites throughout [**county name(s)**] in [**geographical direction**] [**State**] with [**equipment type**]. Medical professionals at [**entity name**] in [**county and state**] will deliver [**type of medical care (example: mental health care including substance and opioid use disorder treatment)**] to [**number**] locations benefitting [**number**] individuals.

Publicly releasable descriptions of past awards can be found on the DLT website.

D. Scoring Criteria Documentation

The DLT Grant Program is a competitive program. Applications are scored in **objective** and **subjective** categories. The table below lists each DLT category, and the maximum points available.

Objective Criteria

D-1	Rurality: (up to 40 points)	This category is based on Census population data.
D-2	Economic Need**:** (up to 30 points)	This category is based on poverty data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) Program.
D-3	Special Consideration: (up to 10 points)	RUS will offer special consideration to applications that have at least one end-user site in the following areas: Tribal Lands, Farmworker Communities, or Distressed Energy Communities. Projects that support Native American Language(s) or support Mental Health Services are also eligible for Special Consideration points (10 points maximum).

Subjective Criteria

D-4	Need for Services and Project Benefits (Needs & Benefits): (up to 30 points)	These criteria evaluate the specific needs for the technology in the proposed service territory, how the proposed project will address those needs and benefit the residents of the area affected, and the community involvement in the planning and implementation of the project. The applicant must explain how the project proposes to address these needs and why the project cannot be completed without a grant.

D-1 Rurality – Up to 40 Points

The Rurality score is based on the population size of each community where an end-user site is located and the proximity of urban areas to the site. For non-fixed end-user site projects and projects which contain non-fixed components, the Rurality score will be based on the population and the proximity of urban areas to the Hub site. Applicants should use Census population data from the Census Website (**Appendix B)** that cites the **2010 Decennial Census** as its source for population statistics. The determination of the proximity of urban areas should be made using the DLT Map (**Appendix B**), which is also based on the **2010 Decennial Census.**

To guide applicants in calculating the Rurality score, the Agency is providing a sample Rurality Calculation Worksheet. The **FY2023 DLT Sample Worksheet** is included on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

Include the population statistics and rurality calculations for all sites, including those designated as (pure) hubs. Use the following definitions for assistance in designating the type of site:

> ***Hub Sites:*** A hub site is a facility that is part of a network or telecommunications system that provides educational or medical services to end-user sites. A pure hub receives no end-user benefits. The site is usually a connection management point or is exclusively an educational or medical source of distance learning or telemedicine. Hub sites located in non-rural areas are not eligible for grant assistance unless they are necessary to provide DLT services to rural residents at end user sites.
>
> ***End-User Site:*** An end-user site is a facility that is part of a network or telecommunications system that is utilized by end-users. For a site to be included as an end-user site for scoring purposes, the applicant must demonstrate equipment purchased will be installed or placed at the site.
>
> ***Hub/End-User Site:*** A hub/end-user site performs both functions: a hub which also accommodates end-users.

The following classifications define the various population levels determining the Rurality score.

> EXCEPTIONALLY RURAL AREA – **5,000 and under: *40 Points***. Any area of the USA not included within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough having a population in excess of 5,000 inhabitants and not part of an urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town having a population in excess of 50,000 inhabitants.
>
> RURAL AREA – **5,001-10,000: *30 Points***. Any area of the USA included within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough having a population over 5,000 and not in excess of 10,000 inhabitants and not part of an

urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town having a population in excess of 50,000 inhabitants.

MID-RURAL AREA – **10,001-20,000: *20 Points***. Any area of the USA included within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough having a population over 10,000 and not in excess of 20,000 inhabitants and not part of an urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town having a population in excess of 50,000 inhabitants.

URBAN AREA - **Over 20,000: *0 Points***. Any area of the USA included within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough having a population in excess of 20,000 inhabitants or part of an urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town having a population in excess of 50,000 inhabitants.

Applicants may use the ***Sample Rurality Calculation Work*sheet** to enter: 1) the name given to the site; 2) the town, city, or Census Designated Place where the site is located; 3) the population (2010 Census) of the town, city or Census Designated Place; 4) whether or not the site is in an urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town with population > 50,000; 5) the name and population of the adjacent urban city or town (if any); and 6) the *Rurality* score (as derived from the Scoring Table).

Although pure hubs are not included in the calculation, **except** in the case of non-fixed end-user applications and hybrid applications, their information should be included. The Agency will need this data to recalculate the score if there appear to be end-user beneficiaries at the site. Place the sites in the same order and use the same naming convention as used on the *Description of Project Sites.* The numbering and naming convention of sites should be consistent throughout the application.

If any end-user sites are not within the boundaries of a town or a *place* that can be identified by the **2010 Census**, there is a possibility that the community is so rural that it is not associated with any Census-recognized community. If this is the case, the location would be considered by the RUS DLT Program as 'Census Rural' and be reported as an "Exceptionally Rural Area" (unless it is contiguous and adjacent to a city or town with population > 50,000).

To determine if a site lies in any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough having a population in excess of 20,000 inhabitants or an urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town having a population in excess of 50,000 inhabitants, applicants should check the site address, using the DLT mapping tool on the DLT website under "To Apply" at https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

Combining Individual Scores for an Overall *Rurality* Score

After all the sites and corresponding populations have been entered on a *Rurality Calculation Worksheet*, calculate the estimated score by taking the average of the scores for sites designated as end-users or hub/end-users. Do not include pure hubs in the calculation. ***Exception*:** Non-fixed end-user applications only use hub sites in the calculation and Hybrid Projects use hub sites for the non-fixed portion of the service area.

Minimum Rurality Score: To be eligible to receive a grant, an application must receive a minimum of 20 points as an average score for all end-user and hub/end-user sites included in the project.

Rounding: Scores should be shown with their decimals rounded to 2 decimal places (i.e., 20.321 rounds to 20.32).

D-2 Economic Need – Up to 30 Points

The Economic Need score will be used to evaluate the relative financial need of the applicant, community, and project, and is based on the county poverty percentage of the end-user sites proposed in the application. The percentages must be determined by utilizing the U.S. Census Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) Program. Applicants can use the spreadsheet with current SAIPE county-level data, which has been posted to the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants, to look up SAIPE data (released December 2021). End-user sites located in geographic areas for which no SAIPE data exist will be determined to have an average SAIPE poverty percentage of 30 percent. Such geographic areas may include territories of the United States or other locations eligible for funding through the DLT Grant Program.

All applicants are required to provide the applicable SAIPE poverty percentage based on the counties where the hub, end-user, and hub/end-user sites (as defined in §1734.3) are located.

To guide applicants in determining the Economic Need score of their project, the Agency is providing a sample Economic Need Calculation Worksheet. The **FY2023 DLT Sample Worksheet** is included on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

The *Economic Need* score is based on SAIPE data for the **county** where the end-user and hub/end-user sites are located. ***Exception*:** Non-fixed end-user applications only use hub sites in the calculation and Hybrid Projects use hub sites for the non-fixed portion of the service area. The SAIPE data used is from the column "poverty percentage, all ages**.**"

Determining the Economic Need Score:

The project Economic Need Score percentage will be determined by the average of the scores for all end-user and hub/end-user sites. The sites will receive points as follows:

County poverty percentage ≥ 30 percent - **30 points**
County poverty percentage ≥ 20 percent but < 30 percent - **20 points**
County poverty percentage ≥ 10 percent but < 20 percent - **10 points**
County poverty percentage < 10 percent - **0 points**

Combining Individual Scores for an Overall *Economic Need* Score

After all the sites and corresponding populations have been obtained, calculate the estimated score by taking the average of the scores for sites designated as end-users and hub/end-users. Do not include pure hubs in the calculation. ***Exception*:** Non-fixed end-user applications only use hub sites in the calculation and Hybrid Projects use hub sites for the non-fixed portion of the service area.

Rounding: Scores should be shown with their decimals rounded to 2 decimal places (i.e., 12.487 rounds to 12.49).

D-3 Special Consideration – up to 10 Points

Special consideration points will be awarded for projects with at least one end-user in the areas listed below. Applicants may only receive special consideration points in one area (10 points max). Review the NOSA published on **December 1, 2022** for additional details on Special Consideration points.

To guide applicants in determining the Special Consideration score of their project, the Agency is providing a sample Special Consideration Worksheet. The **FY2023 DLT Sample Worksheet** is included on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

- **Projects that serve Tribal Lands, Farmworker Communities, or Distressed Energy Communities (10 points):** Projects that enable and improve distance learning and telemedicine services on Tribal Lands are eligible for 10 points. **Non-tribal applicants must submit a Tribal Government Resolution of Consent if services are being proposed on Tribal Lands.** If the applicant proposes to partner with more than one Tribe, a Tribal Resolution from each Tribe is required. **If a Tribal Resolution(s) is not provided, the application will be ineligible.** See the **Additional Eligibility Criteria** section of this guide for more guidance on the Tribal Government Resolution of Consent.

Projects that enable and improve distance learning and telemedicine services to Farmworker Communities in rural areas are eligible for 10 points. The key to the success of the food and agriculture industries is the millions of workers that power it. Farmworkers include agricultural workers, field crop workers, nursery workers, livestock workers, graders, and sorters. Applicants seeking these points should describe the type of farm work that is prevalent in the community they intend to serve and how many farmworkers will be served by the project.

Projects that enable and improve distance learning and telemedicine services to Distressed Energy Communities in rural areas are eligible for 10 points.

Tribal Lands, Farmworker Communities, and Distressed Energy Communities are identified in GIS layers included in the DLT mapping tool located on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

- **Projects that support Native American Language(s) (10 points):** Language helps people engage meaningfully with one another, share knowledge, worldviews, cultural expressions, beliefs, traditions, and hope for the future – from generation to generation. Yet, many indigenous languages across the world are in danger of falling into disuse. It is the policy of the United States to preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native languages.

  Projects that use distance learning to protect, revitalize, and promote the use of Native languages are eligible for 10 points. For this criterion, USDA will look to the Native American Languages Preservation Act of 2006 which defines Native American Language as the historical, traditional languages spoken by Native Americans, including the languages spoken by Native Hawaiian and Native American Pacific Islander peoples.

  To receive these points, an applicant must indicate the Native American Language(s) that will be supported by the project, list the qualifications of the instructor(s) to teach that language, and include the number of students that will be served by the project.

- **Projects that Support Mental Health Services (10 points):** Rural communities have fewer mental health facilities and less access to mental health services and professionals. The lack of this vital infrastructure puts low-income residents, veterans, and young people in rural communities at risk, with the suicide rate growing at a faster pace among rural youth.

  Projects that enable and improve telemedicine services to support mental health services in rural communities are eligible for 10 points. To receive the points, the executive summary and the needs and benefits section of the application must demonstrate that supporting mental health services is a primary purpose of the application.

D-4 Need for Service and Project Benefits – Up to 30 Points

The Need for Service and Project Benefits (Needs & Benefits) criteria measure the extent to which the proposed project meets the need for distance learning or telemedicine services in rural areas. The criteria also evaluate benefits derived from the services proposed by the project, as well as local community involvement in planning, implementing, and providing financial assistance to the project.

Need for Services

To receive these points, applicants must clearly state the economic, geographic, educational, or health care challenges facing the project's respective communities and provide any documentation that demonstrates the challenges. Applicants must use verifiable data and statistics to substantiate and quantify these challenges. Additionally, the application should address why the applicant cannot afford the project without a grant.

Applicants should include documentation of support for the project from professionals in the educational or health care fields. The professional opinion(s) should be as specific as possible regarding the situation and the proposed project. Applicants must also substantiate the underserved educational or health care nature of the project's proposed service area, as well as demonstrate demand by rural residents and other beneficiaries for the educational or medical services that the project would provide. Applicants must show that the project is designed to meet local community needs.

Please note, any economic data used in this section should not be duplicative of the data used for the **D-2 Economic Need** scoring criterion. Applicants should only submit economic data in this section if the economic data for the county used in **D-2 Economic Need** does not truly capture the economic condition of the end-user site locations.

Benefits Derived from Services

In addition to documenting the need for services, applicants should describe how the project would assist the community in solving these challenges. **Applicants must document the specific benefits of the project and quantify them in terms of expected outcomes**. Applicants must tie the benefits of the project DIRECTLY to the stated needs the project is intended to address and provide measurable targets or goals such as estimates of the number of people that will benefit from the project.

Local community involvement in planning, implementing, and financial assistance of the project.

Applicants should address the participation by local residents and organizations in planning and developing the project and include evidence of this participation in the application. Examples of

evidence of community involvement include community meetings, public forums, and surveys. Willingness of local end-users or community-based organizations to contribute to the costs of completing, operating, or maintaining the project is a strong indication of community support. Documentation of support includes, but is not limited to, letters of financial and non-financial commitment towards the project from local organizations.

Examples

For a distance learning project that serves secondary schools, provide the **number of schools and students** that will benefit. Document all other benefits provided by the project with quantifiable goals, such as:

- four-year foreign language availability up from 300 to 1,200 students
- AP chemistry offered for first time to entire district
- expanded educational facility use, such as evening vocational training
- a reduction in the rate of high school dropouts from 17% to 12%

For a telemedicine project that serves a group of hospitals, provide the **number of health care facilities and the number of patients** expected to benefit. The applicant should also **document** all other benefits provided by the project, such as:

- time and monetary savings to the community from telemedicine diagnoses
- 4 doctors retained in the community or medical staff trained
- lives saved due to prompt medical diagnoses

Document any ancillary benefits or multiple uses that would create added value in the rural communities that the project will serve. Examples include training, information resources, library assets, adult education, lifetime learning, and job creation. If applicable, address particular community problems such as out-migration and the extent to which the project would reduce or prevent population loss.

E. Matching Requirements

The grant applicant's minimum matching contribution must equal 15% of the grant amount requested. Matching contributions generally must be in the form of cash. However, in-kind contributions solely for the purposes listed in §1734.21 may be substituted for cash and appropriately identified in the in-kind section of the line-item budget.

- To guide applicants in calculating the match, the Agency is providing a sample Match Calculation Worksheet. The **FY2023 DLT Sample Worksheet** is included on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

Additionally, documentation submitted in support of the application should reflect all financial support for the project as required by §1734.22. The applicant must provide evidence, from authorized representatives of the sources, of a commitment that the funds are available and will be used for the project. Each match entry on the Matching Requirement Documentation must be supported by a signed letter from the entity proposing the match, unless the match is being provided by the applicant.

Special Matching Provisions for American Samoa, Guam, the Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands. Under Federal law, applications from these areas are exempt from matching requirements up to $200,000. The maximum DLT Grant in FY 2023 is $1,000,000 and the required minimum match is 15%, or $150,000. This means that for the FY 2023 DLT Grant Program, these areas are not required to provide a minimum match.

Eligible purposes for in-kind matching funds are identical to eligible purposes for a DLT grant.

For a line item identified as in-kind to be eligible for match funding, the application must demonstrate:

1. The match is used for eligible purposes;

2. none of the use is to benefit sites not shown in the scoring; and

3. the predominant purpose (over 50% of use) of that line item is for purposes which meet the DLT grant definition of distance learning or telemedicine.

If any part of an in-kind line item is for ineligible purposes, the line item cannot be budgeted for match. To be eligible, items proposed as match must be integral to the project in exactly the same way as items the applicant proposes to obtain with the grant. The technology purchased with DLT grant monies or credited as in-kind match items are intended to build distance learning or telemedicine systems that would not otherwise be financially possible if not for the grant.

Federal funds are not eligible as matching funds, unless specifically authorized otherwise by Federal statute. The application must include documentation of the statutory exception with the application, for the federal matching funds to be considered. NOTE:
E-rate funds are federal funds and cannot be applied as matching funds to a DLT project.

Special Matching Provisions for projects located in eligible counties under Counties in Appalachia. If counties in the proposed project are any of the counties eligible under this provision, Appalachian Regional Commission ("ARC") funds may be used as a matching contribution. Please see www.arc.gov for a list of eligible counties. Applying ARC funds as a match requires coordination with ARC State Program Managers and States in the Region. See the ARC Members, Partners, and Staff link also at www.arc.gov for ARC State Program Managers contact information. DLT applicants considering an ARC match are strongly encouraged to contact their ARC State Program Managers early in the process to explore the feasibility of an ARC grant.

Use of non-Federal Grants as Matching Funds: To document the match, include a copy of the announcement letter from the grantor. The letter from the grantor must be explicit about the purpose of the grant and not have limitations or exclusions, and the funds must be available at the time of application submission.

Types of Matching Funds

Cash

Most applicants propose to provide a cash match for the project. When this occurs, reimbursements for approved purposes are made on a pro-rata basis with the applicant being reimbursed for the approved grant percentage of the presented invoiced cost.

In-Kind Match

In-kind items must be non-depreciated or new assets, not installed, with established monetary values. An in-kind match must be integral to and necessary for the DLT project, not simply a technology purchase made in the same timeframe. Unlike cash, in-kind matches are tied directly to the eligibility of the proposed in-kind item**. If an item is not eligible or not integral to and necessary for the project, the item will be removed from the grant and match budget and the proposed match will not be credited.** This could make the application ineligible.

Costs incurred by the applicant, or others on behalf of the applicant, for facilities or equipment installed, or other services rendered prior to submission of a completed application, shall not be considered as an eligible in-kind matching contribution. In-kind match from vendors, in the form of equipment, discounts, extended warranties, maintenance agreements or licenses are not eligible.

Funding Commitments

The applicant must provide, in form and substance satisfactory to RUS, funding agreements that have been obtained to ensure completion of the project. These agreements, which must be placed in this section of the Application, shall be sufficient to ensure:

1. Payment of all proposed expenditures for the project;
2. all required matching contributions as required by 1734.22; and
3. any additional funding provided in accordance with §1734.25(g).

Match Documentation Specifics

The match documentation must be placed under **Section E** of the application. Each proposed match entry on a Match Calculation Worksheet must be supported by a signed letter from the entity proposing the match except when the match is provided by the applicant.

1. **The documentation must be signed by a person capable of obligating the donor organization.** Include the printed name and title of the person signing the letter. The letter must clearly indicate the name of the donor organization and state that the funds are committed to the proposed DLT project as described in the Budget and elsewhere in the application. If the name and title do not appear on the donor organization's letterhead, attach evidence of the signer's authority to obligate the funds.

2. **If the match is cash, state the dollar amount**. Letters without a **stated cash amount** cannot be credited as a cash match.

3. **If the proposed match is in-kind**, state the actual dollar amount and give a complete description of the donation identified by the line-item number in the budget and the expected date of purchase. Letters that do not identify the line-items in the budget cannot be credited as an in-kind match. Demonstrate how the established monetary value of the item was determined. Applicants that do not submit adequate documentation for in-kind match as specified will have their in-kind match disallowed. Proposed matches must be consistent on the SF-424, the Line-Item Budget, and the Matching Calculation documentation. Note, equipment operational prior to submission of an application cannot be an in-kind contribution.

4. **Discounts and Donations:** In review of previously submitted applications, it was determined that vendor donated matches did not have value without a required, subsequent purchase of vendor equipment or licenses using grant funds. For example, in many grant applications, software licenses were donated in satisfaction of the matching requirement. However, such licenses only worked with, and thus only had value with, the same vendor's equipment. Additionally, by side agreement, grant applicants were required to purchase the vendor's equipment once the grant was made with grant funds.

The Agency determined that such a practice violated federal procurement standards found at 2 CFR part 200.317-326, given that the grant applicant could not put the purchase out for bid, either because no other equipment would work with the "donated" licenses, or because they were contractually obligated to buy the equipment before the grant was made. Consequently, the Agency has determined that vendor matches requiring subsequent purchases, either by necessity or contract, are not permitted.

F. Scope of Work

Applicants must provide a narrative (with charts, if needed) explaining the Scope of Work. The application should provide a clear and convincing presentation of how the goals of the project will be achieved. The scope of work completes the picture for the reviewer. It discusses how the organization proposes to proceed with the project. **An application that does not include a scope of work and line-item budget cannot be evaluated and will be deemed ineligible.**

The scope of work must include, at a minimum, the following:

1. The **specific activities** to be performed under the project;

2. **who** will carry out the activities;

3. the **timeframes** for accomplishing the project objectives and activities; and

4. a **budget** for all capital expenditures reflecting the line-item costs **separated by site** for approved purposes for both the grant funds and the matching funds for the project. Separately, the budget must specify if there are any line-item costs that are nonapproved purposes for grants as contained in §1734.23, and how they will be funded.

Additional Guidance for the Budget

The Budget is a required document for RUS to evaluate an application. To guide applicants in completing the budget for their project, the Agency is providing a sample Budget Worksheet. The **FY2023 DLT Sample Worksheet** is included on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

a) The Budget should show each cost as a **line-item, separated by site**. The items listed and described in the Telecommunications System Plan (**Section I**) should track line-by-line with the entries in the Budget. **The site references in the Budget must match those used in the Description of Project Sites** (**Section B**) so that it is clear which locations will be receiving equipment through the grant project.
b) Do not combine items into lump sums that cannot be evaluated individually by the Agency. The individual parts must be evaluated for cost comparison and program

eligibility. **If an aggregated line item includes a component that is ineligible, the entire item will be deemed ineligible.**

c) Provide detail such as the brand and model number used to prepare the budget; for example, "VideoKing TX-90, $5,600," as opposed to "One Video System, $75,000," Installation," $50,000," or "Wiring, $100,000." (Note that RUS approval of a project budget for application purposes does not constitute specific approval to purchase a particular brand of equipment if a grant is made. The procurement of equipment by a grantee must be performed in compliance with the grant agreement and applicable regulations, including 2 CFR Part 200).
d) If a user fee or license fee is required to use grant or match purchased equipment, it must be presented as such in the application.
e) Extended warrantees, site licenses and maintenance contracts should be broken out as separate line items for each hub and/or end user site, as applicable.
f) The final Budget total should be rounded to the nearest whole dollar amount.

G. Financial Information and Sustainability

The applicant must provide a narrative description demonstrating the feasibility of the project, including having sufficient resources and expertise to undertake and complete the project and how the project will be sustained following completion. The application must show that funding is available for the three-year period that it takes to put together the project (required for eligibility) and to ensure the project's continuance as a viable community resource.

Applicants must provide a narrative description that addresses the project's feasibility. The narrative should include a description of the project's leadership, its technical expertise, and how leadership and technical expertise is distributed throughout all the sites or the service territory. Describe how the flow of funds and institutional financial support (local government, businesses, school system, university, or foundation) will sustain the project and maintain continuity of service.

The narrative should include all assumptions and the following information:

- A description of the project's expenses in the project Budget;
- evidence of cost-sharing arrangements among hub and end-user sites, if applicable; and
- identification of any other items that may affect feasibility and/or sustainability of the project.

H. Statement of Experience

Provide a written narrative (no longer than three single-spaced pages) describing the organization's demonstrated capability and experience in operating an educational or health care endeavor and any project similar to the proposed project. Experience with a similar project is desirable but not required. If the organization does not have experience with projects like the proposed project, the application should explain how the applicant will overcome this lack of experience.

I. Telecommunications System Plan

The components of Telecommunications System Plan (TSP) are detailed in the regulations at 7 CFR 1734.25(h). Some specific elements of the plan are highlighted below.

1. System Plan Narrative

Provide a narrative describing the overall DLT network and use of the proposed equipment in the network. Detail each item in the Scope of Work Budget by line number - what it is, how it will be used in the network, and how it qualifies as a DLT use. Provide justification of the equipment based on discussions with technical experts. Discuss any possible duplication of other DLT efforts and how this project avoids such duplication. Discuss the applicant's involvement in any previous USDA DLT grants or current USDA DLT grant application.

- Some items requested for DLT funding will have more general uses than other equipment, which may have 100% distance learning or telemedical purposes. For each item, specify the percentage of use that can be attributed to purposes that meet the DLT grant definition of distance learning or telemedicine, explain how those percentages were determined, and address the capabilities of the proposed equipment/software. The percentage of use is only to be used for analysis as part of line-item explanations. Do not break out items in the actual Budget by percentage of use. Please note, the predominant purpose (50% or more of use) of every line-item in the grant and match budget meets the DLT Grant definition of distance learning or telemedicine. See the **Eligible Grant Purposes** section of this guide for more details.
- Document discussions with various technical sources, such as consultants, engineers, product vendors or internal technical experts.
- Address whether or not any part of the project will duplicate any adequate, established telemedicine or distance learning services already in operation. In particular, discuss how match and grant funding for this project, if approved, would complement previous efforts. Describe the status of previous projects and, specifically, the extent to which the funds have been drawn for eligible grant purposes. **To complete the Non-duplication of Services Certificate, select the appropriate box on item J-4 of the DLT Application Checklist. This form is provided in Appendix A.**

- Identify any previous grants that the applicant has received from this program in the past and how those projects would affect the project proposed in the current application. This applies not only to prior grants received by the current applicant, but to grant funding that may have gone to any of the end-user sites in the current proposal via a grant received by another entity.
- Discuss whether or not any of the sites in the current project are included as participants in another application for a Fiscal Year 2023 DLT Grant.
- In the absence of any explanation, overlaps in projects are assumed to be duplication, and the application could consequently be deemed ineligible.

2. **System Plan Map/Diagram**

Attach a map or a drawing, which is a spatial representation of the service area encompassing the project, displaying an overlay of the proposed distance learning or telemedicine system, including hub sites, end-user sites, and hub/end-user sites. This map can be displayed as a series of maps containing an overview, followed by close-up maps of individual sites.

Each site, hub, end-user, and hub/end-user sites must be represented on the submitted map(s). This representation need not be to scale, but it must be representational of the project, not generic. Generic network diagrams, usually depicting some kind of campus architecture, are by themselves insufficient. However, applicants can provide network diagrams (without geographic references) if they can also provide geographic maps that reference the diagrams. Nevertheless, an application that does not contain a map that shows each site could be difficult to evaluate, thereby losing competitive value when compared to applications that present visual clarity of their project.

Failure to provide a well-written and thorough Telecommunications System Plan may result in the application being rejected.

J. Compliance with other Federal Statutes

Appendix A contains certification forms to demonstrate compliance with certain Federal statutes and regulations. There are four required certifications numbered J-1 through J-4. The applicant attests to these certifications by executing and including the FY2023 DLT Checklist under this section. Certification J-1 requires additional selection or discussion as stated in the certification.

Many certifications which used to be required as separate forms are now addressed by the Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications in SAM. Applicants are required to make these certifications and representations as part of their SAM registration to be eligible for a grant. See the **Additional Registration Requirements for all Applicants** section of this guide for more details.

The FY2023 DLT Application Checklist can be found on the DLT website under "To Apply" at https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

Important Note: If the applicant is applying as a consortium that does not have the legal authority to contract with the Government (see the **Eligibility Requirements** section of this guide), each entity within the consortium must provide a set of these certifications. However, if the consortium has a designated host entity, which will be the sole signer of the grant documents, only the host entity is required to submit certifications.

J-1 Certificate Regarding Flood Hazard Area Precautions
J-2 Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970
J-3 Certificate Regarding Architectural Barriers
J-4 Non-Duplication of Services Certificate

Additional Guidance on Completing Schedules J-1 through J-4 in the Application Checklist

1. The FY2023 DLT Application Checklist can be found on the DLT website under "To Apply" at https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants. Look for **Section J, "Compliance with Other Federal Statutes and Regulations"** on the checklist as shown in **Figure 1** below.

2. Select the appropriate checkbox next to each schedule (J-1 through J-4).

Figure 1: Section J, Compliance with Other Federal Statutes and Regulations

J	Compliance with Other Federal Statutes and Regulations		
	1. Certificate Regarding Flood Hazard Area Precautions **(check appropriate box below)** ☐ The Project is **not** located in a 100-yr Flood Plain. No flood insurance is required. ☐ The Project is located in a 100-yr Flood Plain. **See attached statement** regarding who is or will be providing the flood insurance.	☐	J-1
	2. Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 Certification	☐	J-2
	3. Certificate Regarding Architectural Barriers	☐	J-3
	4. Non-Duplication of Services Certificate	☐	J-4

3. After completing the full checklist, an authorized representative from the applying entity should print their name and title, then sign and date the bottom of the checklist as shown in **Figure 2** below.

Figure 2: Sign and Date the Application Checklist

By signing this certification, you are agreeing to the language in schedules J-1, J-2, J-3, and J-4, as shown in the application guide. If a box checked in Section J-1 above requires an attachment, the attachment is provided with this application. If you have any questions about your application, please contact RUS prior to submitting this application and certification.

_____

Print Name and Title below the line (sign on the line). Date

K. Evidence of Legal Existence and Authority to Contract with the Federal Government

Eligibility Criteria

The applicant must provide evidence with respect to legal existence and authority to contract with the United States Government (See 7 CFR 1734.4 and the **Eligibility Requirements** section of this guide). Additionally, it is incumbent on applicants to determine the appropriate entity to apply for the grant. Entities created by educational or medical institutions for the purpose of applying for and managing grants, such as university or hospital foundations, should not be applicants unless they can own and manage grant-funded equipment as required by the Grant Agreement and applicable regulations, including 2 CFR Part 200. Accordingly, RUS will not transfer awards to another entity because the applicant has later determined that it cannot close the award, execute the standard Grant Agreement, which is publicly available, or hold the grant assets in its name. This will follow through to the implementation of the project, and all invoices submitted with requests for reimbursements must be in the name of the Awardee.

1. **Legal Existence**: The applicant must provide acceptable evidence of legal existence. Corporations or LLCs must provide evidence of good standing in accordance with the laws of the state or other body under which they are organized (typically found on each State's Secretary of State website). For entities that exist under law, rather than through incorporation or other action (such as school districts, hospital districts, or state universities), a copy of the state statute, regulation, or other appropriate documentation must be provided to confirm the legal name of the entity. **Note: A SAM registration <u>is not sufficient</u> evidence of legal existence,** nor is an IRS or state statement of tax status. **Applications that do not demonstrate the applicant's legal existence as an entity that is eligible to apply for a grant may be deemed ineligible.**

2. **SAM registration**: The applicant must provide a printout of the organization's SAM registration which (a) demonstrates that the Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications have been made as part of the registration, and (b) shows the registration was active **before** the application was submitted. The SAM registration must remain active with current information while RUS is considering an application and while a Federal Grant Award is active. To maintain the registration in SAM, the applicant must review and update its information annually. The applicant must ensure that the information in SAM is current, accurate, and complete.

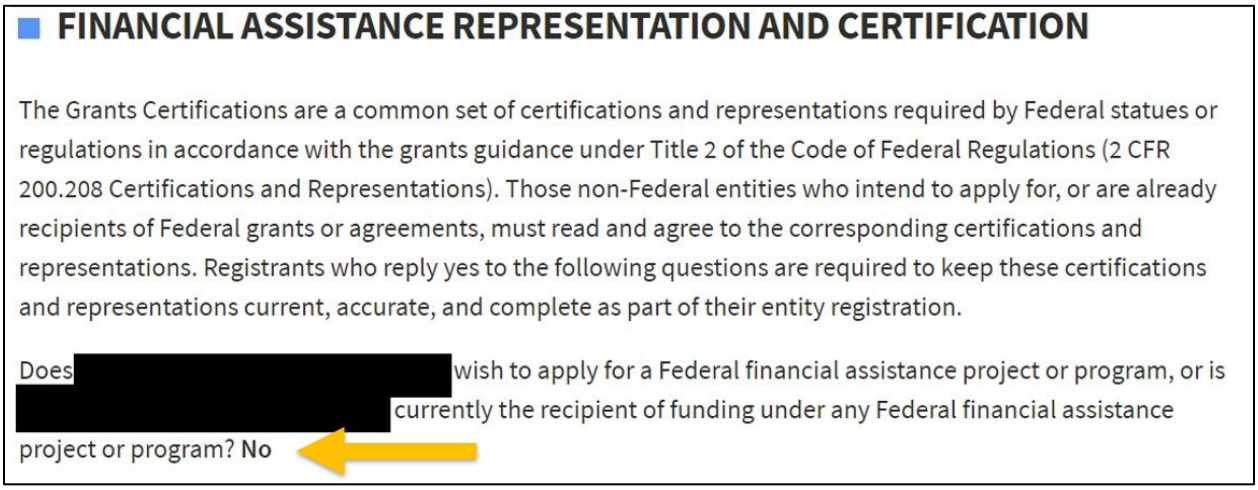
The Entity Name, UEI, and SAM registration must be for the applicant. They cannot be for a parent, subsidiary, or other affiliated entity.

It is important that the <u>EXACT NAME of the LEGAL ENTITY</u> applying for the grant be listed in block 8 of the SF 424, Application for Federal Assistance, and that the entity be legally eligible to receive the award and take ownership of items acquired under the grant.

Additional Guidance for Completing the Financial Assistance Representations and Certifications in SAM.gov

- Applicants will be asked "Does [Entity Name] wish to apply for a Federal financial assistance project or program, or is [Entity Name] currently the recipient of funding under any Federal financial assistance project or program?"
    - The system **default** answer to this question is "No".
    - Applicants **must make the certifications and representations required** of entities which are applying for or have received funding under any Federal financial assistance project or program to be eligible for the DLT program. **To do this, applicants must change the answer to "Yes".**

Figure 33: Financial Assistance Representation and Certification



Additional Guidance for Consortia:

As defined in 7 CFR 1734.3, a consortium means a combination or group of entities undertaking the purposes for which the distance learning and telemedicine financial assistance is provided. At least one of the entities in a consortium must meet the requirements of § 1734.4.

a) If the applicant is an existing established consortium with the legal ability to contract with the Federal Government, the consortium itself must provide documentation as listed in **Section K** above.

b) If the applicant is an informal consortium that by itself lacks the legal capacity to contract with the Federal Government, the applicant must have a legally organized fiscal agent which is part of the consortium and which submits the application on behalf of the consortium. There are two possibilities with respect to legal information for the informal consortium.

1. The fiscal agent can serve as the host organization, i.e., assume sole responsibility for the grant, be the sole entity executing the documents, and be solely responsible for ownership and control of all assets acquired with the grant funds, regardless of where they are installed. In this scenario, the documentation as listed in **Section K** is only required from the fiscal agent.

2. The fiscal agent can elect not to assume sole responsibility for the grant; instead, each organization within the consortium will be party to the grant agreement, will be responsible for the performance of the entire grant project, and will be able to own and control assets acquired with the grant funds. In this scenario, each entity in the consortium must submit documentation as listed in **Section K** above.

An application from an informal consortium must clearly state whether the grant documents will be signed by <u>one</u> entity or by <u>all</u> entities. Since the applicant entity will be termed the "fiscal agent" in either case, using that term is not sufficient to clarify how many signatories the grant documents will have. Unless the applicant has explicitly requested multiple signers, the application will be evaluated as if only one signer is intended, and the grant agreement will be prepared accordingly.

L. Environmental Impact and Historic Preservation

The applicant must provide details of the project's impact on the environment and historic properties. Grants made under this part are subject to 7 CFR Part 1970, which contains policies and procedures for implementing a variety of Federal statutes, regulations, and executive orders generally pertaining to the protection of the quality of the human environment. The application shall contain a separate section entitled "Environmental Impact of the Project."

For projects requesting funding of broadband facilities, an Environmental Questionnaire (EQ) must be completed to provide information on environmental compliance. Applicants must complete and submit an Environmental Questionnaire (see **Appendix A**) in accordance with 7 CFR Part 1970, for any external facilities that will be constructed with Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program funds. These external facilities include, but are not limited to, huts, new poles, buried cable, switches, or any broadband related equipment that will remain outside of the facility. By their very nature, these specific facilities could have impacts that will need to be evaluated for the need of a further environmental review. Therefore, it is essential that the EQs be thoroughly completed before submission.

A copy of 7 CFR Part 1970 can be retrieved from: https://www.ecfr.gov. As this type of grant only allows 20% of the grant to be used for broadband equipment, these requirements should, relatively rarely, be required for most DLT grants. However, these requirements will be followed when required.

Applications not proposing broadband facilities must provide an Environment Impact Survey consisting of a brief project description with a statement of why the project will not impact the environment.

M. Consultation with USDA State Director

The applicant must provide evidence that the organization has consulted with the USDA State Director for Rural Development about the availability of other sources of funding at the State or local level. Include this evidence as part of the application.

When requesting evidence of consultation with the USDA State Director, an applicant should provide an executive summary of the project as well as the proposed grant and match amounts to enable the State Director to make an informed determination. Failure to provide this information may delay receipt of the State Director's response.

Note: Applicants should contact the USDA State Director as early as possible in the application process. A listing of the State Rural Development Offices can be found at: https://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/state-offices.

N. Supplemental Information

The applicant can use this section to provide any additional information it considers relevant to the project and likely to be helpful in determining the extent to which the project will further the purposes of the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program.

Appendix A: Forms

Application for Federal Assistance SF-424 3838
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Application for Federal Assistance SF-424

All applicants requesting funding under the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program must complete the Standard Form 424, Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424), on Grants.gov. Additional instructions for specific line items are also included below. The form and any attachments referenced in this Guide can be found on the DLT website at https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

Additional Instructions for the SF-424

Block 1: Applicants should select "Application" for their submission. If an applicant makes changes to a submitted application, please select "Change/Corrected Application" for the resubmission. For duplicative applications submitted through Grants.gov, the Agency will base its evaluation on the last copy of the application submitted.

Block 8: There are multiple entries in this block. The contact information provided in this box will be used by RUS for all contact and correspondence. Full, accurate contact information must be provided for someone with the authority to answer any questions that RUS staff may have about the application.

All applicants for grants must supply a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). See instructions in the **Additional Registration Requirements for all Applicants** section of this guide for details about obtaining a UEI.

Block 10: The Name of the Federal Agency is Rural Utilities Service.

Block 11: The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number is 10.855.

Block 12: Funding Opportunity Number is RUS-23-01-DLT. The Title is "Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program".

Block 14: Please use the Description of Project Sites to provide this information

Block 15: Brief descriptive title of project. **Upload all application sections using the "Add Attachments" button under Block 15.**

Block 16: Please use the Description of Project Sites to provide this information

Block 19: Program is covered by E.O. 12372. Go to https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SPOC-4-13-20.pdf for state office contact information. Applicants must select option (a) or (b) determined by state participation. Use the above link to determine if the state in which applicant is located participates in SPOC.

Block 20: An explanation of the delinquency must be provided if "yes" is checked.
Block 21: Please be sure to check "I agree". The application must be submitted by an authorized representative of the organization that will own and operate the project if the grant is awarded.

Sample Description of Project Sites

Instructions for Using the Sample Description of Project Sites Worksheet

1. To guide applicants in completing the Description of Project Sites, the Agency is providing a sample Description of Project Sites Worksheet. The **FY2023 DLT Sample Worksheet** is included on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants. Please insert additional rows as needed to accommodate all Sites.

2. **Site Number** – Number each site consecutively regardless of its designation. This number should be used consistently to identify each site in the Description of Project Sites, Rurality Calculation, Economic Need Calculation, Special Consideration Calculation, and the Line-Item Budget. Please do not use letters to subdivide numbers (e.g., 4a and 4b); instead use as many numbers as necessary to capture all sites.

3. **Site Name** – Input the official name of the site. Use this name consistently in the Description of Project Sites, Rurality Calculation, Economic Need Calculation, Special Consideration Calculation, and the Line-Item Budget.

4. **Site Designation** – Designate each site as hub, end-user, or hub/ end-user according to the guidance in **Section B** of this guide.

5. **Street Address, Town, County, State, 5 Digit ZIP** – Input the Street Address, Town or Place Name, County, State, and 5 Digit ZIP code for each Site location.

6. **Congressional District** – Input the Congressional District in which the site is located. This information can be found on the DLT map which is included on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

Sample Rurality Calculation

Instructions for Using the Sample Rurality Calculation Worksheet

1. To guide applicants in completing the rurality calculation for their project, the Agency is providing a sample Rurality Calculation Worksheet. The **FY2023 DLT Sample Worksheet** is included on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants. Please insert additional rows as needed to accommodate all Sites.

2. **Site Number** – Number each site consecutively regardless of its designation. This number should be used consistently to identify each site in the Description of Project Sites, Rurality Calculation, Economic Need Calculation, Special Consideration Calculation, and Budget.

3. **Site Name** – Input the official name of the site. Use this name consistently in the Description of Project Sites, Rurality Calculation, Economic Need Calculation, Special Consideration Calculation, and Line-Item Budget.

4. **Site Designation** – Designate each Site as hub, end-user, or hub/ end-User according to the guidance in **Section B** of this guide.

5. **Town or Place Name** – Input the Town or Place Name, in which the site is located.

6. **Census Population** – Input the population from the 2010 Census, guidance provided in **Appendix B**. If town or place is not located in the Census, there is a possibility that the community is so rural that it is not associated with any Census- recognized community. If this is the case, the location would be considered by the DLT Program as 'Census Rural.'

7. **Is the Site in a Town contiguous and adjacent to a City or Town > 50,000?** - Choose Yes or No from the dropdown list to indicate if there is an adjacent urban community, based on the DLT Map, guidance provided in **Appendix B**.

8. **Name of Adjacent Urban City or Town (if you answer "Yes" in previous column)** - If there is an adjacent city or town with a population > 50,000, enter the name of that city or town.

9. **Rurality Score for each Site** – Input the Rurality Score for each site according to the following table:

   EXCEPTIONALLY RURAL AREA – **5,000 and under: *40 Points***. Any area of the USA not included within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough having a population in excess of 5,000 inhabitants and not part of an

urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town having a population in excess of 50,000 inhabitants.

RURAL AREA – **5,001-10,000: *30 Points***. Any area of the USA included within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough having a population over 5,000 and not in excess of 10,000 inhabitants and not part of an urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town having a population in excess of 50,000 inhabitants.

MID-RURAL AREA – **10,001-20,000: *20 Points***. Any area of the USA included within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough having a population over 10,000 and not in excess of 20,000 inhabitants and not part of an urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town having a population in excess of 50,000 inhabitants.

URBAN AREA - **Over 20,000: *0 Points***. Any area of the USA included within the boundaries of any incorporated or unincorporated city, village, or borough having a population in excess of 20,000 inhabitants or part of an urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town having a population in excess of 50,000 inhabitants.

10. **Rurality Score for the Application** – Calculate the score for the application by taking the average of the scores for sites designated as end-users or hub/end-users. Do not include pure hubs in the calculation, except for hubs serving non-fixed end user sites. Enter the average in the space provided, rounding to two decimal places.

Sample Economic Need Calculation

Instructions for Using the Sample Economic Need Calculation Worksheet

1. To guide applicants in completing the Economic Need Calculation for their project, the Agency is providing a sample Economic Need Calculation Worksheet. The **FY2023 DLT Sample Worksheet** is included on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants. Please insert additional rows as needed to accommodate all Sites.

2. **Site Number** – Number each site consecutively regardless of its designation. This number should be used consistently to identify each site in the Description of Project Sites, Rurality Calculation, Economic Need Calculation, Special Consideration Calculation, and Budget.

3. **Site Name** – Input the official name of the site. Use this name consistently in the Description of Project Sites, Rurality Calculation, Economic Need Calculation, Special Consideration Calculation, and Line-Item Budget.

4. **Site Designation** – Designate each Site as hub, end-user, or hub/end-user according to the guidance in **Section B** of this guide.

5. **County** – Input the County in which the site is located.

6. **SAIPE Percent Poverty, All Ages** –Input the percent of county residents that are impoverished as identified in the dataset released December 2021, which has data for 2020. The data can be found in the spreadsheet available on the DLT website at https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/telecommunications-programs/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants. If the site is located within a geographic area for which no SAIPE data exists (e.g., insular territories), enter 30%.

7. **Economic Need Score for each Site** – Input the Economic Need Score for each site according to the following table:

   County poverty percentage $\geq$ 30 percent - **30 points**
   County poverty percentage $\geq$ 20 percent but < 30 percent - **20 points**
   County poverty percentage $\geq$ 10 percent but < 20 percent - **10 points**
   County poverty percentage < 10 percent - **0 points**

8. **Economic Need Score for the Application** – Calculate the score for the application by taking the average of the scores for sites designated as end-users or hub/end-users. Do not include pure hubs in the calculation, **except** for hubs serving non-fixed end user sites. Enter the average in the space provided, rounding to two decimal places.

Sample Special Consideration

1. To guide applicants in determining the Special Consideration score of their project, the Agency is providing a sample Special Consideration Worksheet. The **FY2023 DLT Sample Worksheet** is included on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

2. Document any special consideration request as described in **Section D** of this guide. No special consideration points will be awarded if the claim is not properly supported.

3. Insert the **Site Number,** consistent with the Description of Project Sites, Rurality Calculation, Economic Need Calculation, and Line-Item Budget, where an end-user site will be serving Tribal Lands, Farmworker Communities, and/or Distressed Energy Communities

4. Insert the **Site Name,** consistent with the Description of Project Sites, Rurality Calculation, Economic Need Calculation, and Line-Item Budget, where an end-user site will be serving Tribal Lands, Farmworker Communities, and/or Distressed Energy Communities

Sample Match Calculation

Instructions for Using the Sample Match Calculation Worksheet

1. To guide applicants in determining the match calculation, the Agency is providing a sample Match Calculation Worksheet. The **FY2023 DLT Sample Worksheet** is included on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

2. List each matching contribution and the dollar value on a separate line.

3. Input the total value of the matching contributions in Line 1 at the bottom of the sheet.

4. Input the total grant request in Line 2 at the bottom of the sheet.

5. Calculate the percent match and input in Line 3.

6. Match must be a minimum of 15%

7. Matching funds must be documented as described in **Section E**. Place letters of financial commitment and other match documentation along with this form into **Section E** of the application package. Each external donor's match must be supported by a matching letter. Matches not properly documented will not be credited. Depending on the consequent reduction of the match, this could make the project ineligible (i.e., if resultant match is < 15%)

Sample Line-Item Budget

Instructions for Using the Sample Line-Item Budget Worksheet

1. To guide applicants in completing the line-item budget, the Agency is providing a sample Line-Item Budget Worksheet. The **FY2023 DLT Sample Worksheet** is included on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grant.

2. All budget items to be funded by the Grant or the Cash Match should be included in the grant and cash match section of the Budget; this should be the majority of the Budget. The in-kind section of the Budget should only include in-kind items. Remember that only non-depreciated or new assets can be contributed as in-kind items; no services can be included in this section.

3. **Site Number & Name**: Insert Site Number and Name, consistent with the Description of Project Sites, Rurality Calculation, Economic Need Calculation, and Special Consideration Calculation, where equipment will be installed.

4. **Description**: Provide a detailed description, such as brand and model number, for the equipment to be purchased. Do not aggregate disparate items (e.g., "telemedicine equipment for the clinic"), but do not itemize to an absurd degree (e.g., individual screws and brackets).

5. **Unit Cost**: Provide the cost for purchasing one unit of the equipment.

6. **Number of Units**: Provide the number of units to be purchased for the site.

7. **Extended Cost**: Provide the total cost for this line item (i.e., unit cost * number of units).

8. Place Totals of each section in the Totals boxes. **Round total request to the nearest whole dollar amount.**

9. Line A is the total cost of the project.

10. Line B is the total amount of Cash Match contributed to the project and supported by the Match Calculation Worksheet and documentation.

11. Line C is the total amount of In-Kind Match contributed to the project and supported by the Match Calculation Worksheet and documentation.

12. Line D is Line A minus Lines B and C. This should reconcile with the Grant Request on the Form SF-424 Block 18 Line a. Federal.

13. Grant to Match check is the match provided on Lines B and C divided by the grant request on Line D (* 100%). This should equal a minimum of 15%.

SAMPLE

RESOLUTION of CONSENT AND SUPPORT for the [APPLICANT NAME] DISTANCE LEARNING AND TELEMEDICINE PROJECT on [NAME OF TRIBE] TRIBAL LAND in the STATE OF [STATE NAME]

WHEREAS, a significant number of homes and businesses are currently without access to distance learning and/or telemedicine services in areas that are home to members of the [NAME OF TRIBE], and this lack of access has put our Tribe, and specifically our school children, at a significant disadvantage; **and**

WHEREAS, distance learning and/or telemedicine services provided through this project would greatly improve and expand the opportunities available to all members of the Tribe for educational advancement, career enhancement, access to health care options, increased safety options, and a better quality of life;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Tribal Government of the [NAME OF TRIBE] of [STATE NAME] supports and encourages [APPLICANT NAME] to provide distance learning and/or telemedicine services on [NAME OF TRIBE] Tribal Land in [STATE NAME] and to serve the areas which are today without service, and we support any grants for which they may apply to achieve this purpose.

APPROVED and **ADOPTED** this the (#)st day of (MONTH), 2022.

Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program: Broadband Facility

Overview

The USDA Rural Utilities Service (RUS) is required to assess the impacts of proposed federal actions, such as the provision of financial assistance through the DLT Grant Program, to the human environment in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and other federal, state, and local environmental laws. Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program applicants proposing to construct Broadband Facilities must complete an Environmental Questionnaire (EQ) and submit it with their applications. The EQ provides information to RUS so that it can either complete the environmental review process or determine the appropriate level of additional impact analyses needed, in accordance with RUS Environmental Policies and Procedures, 7 CFR 1970, which can be found at https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-XVIII/subchapter-H/part-1970. RUS will notify applicants if additional information or analyses are necessary beyond what was submitted in the EQ.

No construction activities may begin until final environmental approval from RUS is granted. In accordance with 7 CFR § 1970.12, awardees are prohibited from taking actions that may have an adverse environmental impact or limit the choice of practicable alternatives that may be considered until RUS has concluded the environmental review process. If the proposed project involves construction activities or property acquisition, the applicant is generally prohibited from acquiring, rehabilitating, converting, leasing, repairing, or constructing property or facilities, or committing or expending Agency or non-Agency funds until after RUS has concluded its environmental review requirements.

An applicant may submit to RUS a copy of any environmental review document that has been prepared in connection with obtaining permits, approvals, or other financing for the proposed project from state, local or other federal agencies. Such material, to the extent determined to be relevant, may be used to fulfill RUS environmental review requirements. Applicants should not reference items provided in other parts of the application package in the EQ; all materials relevant to the EQ must be integrated herein to facilitate timely review.

NOTE: If construction of broadband facilities is part of the proposed project, it is essential that the Environmental Questionnaires are completed so that it can be evaluated to determine if any additional consultation with applicable agencies is required. Keep in mind that only 20 percent of the DLT grant amount may be used for the construction of broadband facilities. Though this will rarely happen, if construction of these types of facilities are required, engage with RUS early so that questions and concerns can be addressed. This will allow for relevant agencies to be engaged early and made aware of any significant issues that may need to be addressed.

Requested Information

1. **Project Description and Location:** Describe all project-related construction activities, including, but not limited to, the construction or renovation of any buildings, the construction and installation of cable (buried or aerial), or the installation of telecommunications transmission facilities, including construction of new towers or collocations. Complete descriptions, locations and mapping must be provided for each site affected by project-related construction activities (recommend U.S. Geological Survey 7.5-minute quadrangle maps at a map scale of 1:24,000; larger scale maps may be provided for site-specific proposals). USGS maps may be obtained and purchased at the following website: https://www.usgs.gov/products/maps. All project elements, if known at the time of the application, must be clearly depicted on any map provided. If appropriate, photographs or aerial photographs of site-specific proposals may be provided.

2. **Land Use:** Describe the amount of property to be cleared, excavated, fenced, or otherwise disturbed by the proposed project, and the current land use and zoning for each project site affected by construction. Document whether the proposed project is located on public land owned or managed by the federal government. For information related to federal lands see the following website (https://gbp-blm-egis.hub.arcgis.com/). This website provides cadastral survey and land management information and data from the National Integrated Land System, specifically the distribution of the Public Land Survey System (PLSS), other survey-based data, and federal land boundaries. Detailed guidance related to evaluating impacts related to land use can be found in Subpart L of Rural Development's Environmental Policies and Procedures (http://www.rd.usda.gov/files/1970l.pdf)

3. **Wetlands:** Describe and indicate whether wetlands are present on or near the project site(s) affected by proposed construction (maps of wetlands may be obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wetland Inventory website (https://fws.gov/wetlands/), or from soil maps obtained from the USDA, Natural Resource Conservation Service's website (http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/), focusing on areas of hydric soil(s)). If wetlands are identified within the project area, please document where the project components will be located in relation to the identified wetland areas.

Detailed guidance related to evaluating impacts to wetlands can be found in Subpart G of Rural Development's Environmental Policies and Procedures (https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/1970g.pdf).

4. **Threatened and Endangered Species:** Describe and indicate whether any proposed project site(s) will directly or indirectly affect any threatened, endangered or candidate species, or is/are within or near critical habitats. Applicants must provide species lists and appropriate species accounts (i.e., requisite habitat) for each county affected by construction obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's website (https://ecos.fws.gov/ipac/). Information about potential critical habitat areas should also be included and can be found on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's website noted above. Detailed guidance related to evaluating impacts to threatened and endangered species can be found in Subpart N of Rural Development's Environmental Policies and Procedures (https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/1970n.pdf).

5. **Floodplains:** Describe and indicate whether or not any facility(ies) or site(s) are located within a 100-year or 500-year floodplain. If any project-related construction activities are within a floodplain, a copy of a Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) that depicts construction activities must be included. Information related to floodplains and National Flood Insurance Maps may be obtained from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) website (https://msc.fema.gov/portal). Detailed guidance related to evaluating impacts to and from floodplains can be found in Subpart F of Rural Development's Environmental Policies and Procedures (https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/1970f.pdf).

6. **Coastal Areas**: Determine whether or not the project is within the boundaries of a coastal zone management area (CZMA). For boundary related and contact information related to CZMA, see National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office for Coastal Management's website (https://coast.noaa.gov/). Detailed guidance related to evaluating impacts to coastal areas can be found in Subpart O of Rural Development's Environmental Policies and Procedures (https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/1970o.pdf).

7. **Brownfields:** Determine whether the project is located within a brownfield site. Per 42 U.S.C. 9601, the term "brownfield site" means real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. Maps and locations of sites, facilities and properties that have been contaminated by hazardous materials and are being, or have been, cleaned up under EPA's Superfund, RCRA or brownfields cleanup programs can be found at the EPA's Cleanups in My Community website (https://www.epa.gov/cleanups/cleanups-my-community). Detailed guidance related to evaluating impacts from locating projects at brownfield sites can be found in Subpart J of Rural Development's Environmental Policies and Procedures (https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/1970j.pdf).

Section 106 Review: Applicants are delegated the authority to initiate consultation with State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) and engage with interested tribes related to their projects. Prior to initiating any communications, please contact RUS at https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/contact-us and select "Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program" as the subject. In some cases, statewide programmatic agreements may apply, please contact RUS for more information. Detailed guidance and template letters related to evaluating impacts to historic and cultural resources can be found at Subpart H of Rural Development's Environmental Policies and Procedures (https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/1970h.pdf).

Applications Not Subject to FCC Section 106 Reviews

Applicants who propose to use Federal Communications Commission (FCC) spectrum for their telecommunications towers and collocations note that the FCC has regulatory requirements for licensing radio spectrum to be carried by these facilities, and an established review process for ensuring compliance with Section 106 of NHPA. If the proposed tower or collocation will use FCC licensed spectrum, regardless of the height of the telecommunications tower, applicants must complete FCC's Section 106 review process – see: https://www.fcc.gov/wireless/bureau-divisions/competition-infrastructure-policy-division/tower-and-antenna-siting#Sec106. If an application proposes a tower or collocation that will carry FCC spectrum, RUS has agreed that FCC will conduct Section 106 review for those facilities.

Applications Not Subject to FCC Section 106 Reviews or Statewide Programmatic Agreements

RUS will conduct Section 106 review for any new tower or collocation which will not carry FCC regulated spectrum and any other construction component of an application not subject to FCC review. Please follow the guidance in Subpart H of Rural Development's Environmental Policies and Procedures to include all applicable information in the EQ (https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/1970h.pdf).

Additional Assistance/Contact Information

In addition to the resource specific references provided above, general NEPA related information and guidance can be found on the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) website (https://www.whitehouse.gov/ceq/) or on the environmental section of the RUS website at https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies..

For information related to Section 106 of NHPA, see the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation website - https://www.achp.gov/digital-library-section-106-landing/citizens-guide-section-106-review

Compliance Forms

Federal Statute/Regulation	Evidence of Compliance	Attachment
42 U.S.C. 4001 through 4128; 7 CFR 1734.25(i)(3)	Certification regarding Flood Hazard Area Precautions Language is included on the following page; applicant certifies to the language by including the signed Application Checklist. Applicant must indicate whether or not any buildings which are part of the project fall within a 100-year flood plain and, if so, must attach a statement explaining who is or will be providing flood insurance. The checklist template includes a worksheet with a text box for the statement.	J-1
42 U.S.C. 4601-4655; 49 CFR 24 and 7 CFR 21	Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 Certification Language is included on the following pages; applicant certifies to the language by including the signed Application Checklist.	J-2
42 U.S.C. 4151 *et seq*.; Appendix A to 41 CFR subpart 101-19.6	Certification regarding Architectural Barriers Language is included on the following pages; applicant certifies to the language by including the signed Application Checklist.	J-3
7 CFR 1734.25(b)(8)	Non-Duplication of Services Certificate Language is included on the following pages; applicant certifies to the language by including the signed Application Checklist.	J-4

Schedule J-1

Certificate Regarding Flood Hazard Area Precautions

If the project is located in an area subject to flooding, flood insurance must be provided to the extent available and required under the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968, as amended by the Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4001 through 4128). If applicable, the insurance must cover, in addition to the buildings, any machinery, equipment, fixtures, and furnishings contained in the buildings. Rural Utilities Service will comply with Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management (3 CFR, 1977 Comp., p. 117), and 7 CFR 1970, of this chapter in considering the application for the project.

Please provide an explanation below to the following questions:

Is the project not located in a 100-year flood plain; and therefore, no Flood Insurance is required?

Or

Is the project is located in a 100-year flood plain? If yes, who is or will be providing the required insurance.

Fill in the explanation:

The Applicant hereby certifies, that, as a prospective recipient under the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program, it is in compliance, or will be in compliance during construction or installation of equipment and upon completion of the project, with the above referenced law.

Schedule J-2

Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition

Policies Act of 1970 Certification

The Applicant assures that it will comply with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (Uniform Act) as amended, 42 U.S.C. 4601-4655, and with implementing Federal regulations in 49 CFR 24 and 7 CFR 21.

Specifically, the Applicant assures that:

Whenever Federal financial assistance is used to pay for any part of the cost of a program or project which will result in the displacement of any person;

(a) Fair and reasonable relocation payments and assistance shall be provided to or for displaced persons in accordance with sections 202, 203, and 204 of the Uniform Act,

(b) Relocation assistance programs offering the services described in section 205 of the Uniform Act shall be provided to displaced persons, and

(c) Within a reasonable period of time prior to displacement, comparable replacement dwellings will be available to displaced persons in accordance with section 205(c)(3) of the Uniform Act.

Schedule J-3

Certificate Regarding Architectural Barriers

All facilities financed with RUS grants that are open to the public, or in which physically handicapped persons may be employed or reside, must be designed, constructed, or altered to be readily accessible to and usable by handicapped persons. Standards for these facilities must comply with the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4151 *et seq*.), and with the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS), (Appendix A to 41 CFR subpart 101-19.6).

As a prospective primary participant recipient of financial assistance from RUS, this organization commits to carry out RUS' established policy to comply with the requirements of the above referenced law to the effect that all facilities must be readily accessible to and usable by handicapped persons.

The Applicant hereby certifies, that, as a prospective recipient under the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant, it is in compliance, or will be in compliance upon completion of the project, with the above referenced law.

Schedule J-4

Non-Duplication of Services Certificate

As a prospective primary participant recipient of assistance from RUS, this organization commits to carry out RUS' established policy to comply with the requirements that no facilities using financial assistance will duplicate adequate established telemedicine services or distance learning services.

The Applicant hereby certifies that as a prospective recipient under the said Distance Learning and Telemedicine Loan and Grant Program, that it will not use RUS grant funds to duplicate any adequate established services as referenced above.

Appendix B: Determining Rurality using the Census Website and DLT Map

There are two pieces of information needed to determine the rurality of any site: 1) the population of the town where the site is located and 2) the proximity of urban communities to the site. Although both pieces of information are based on 2010 Census data, the first comes directly from the Census website, while the second will be determined using the DLT Map from the RUS DLT website. Detailed instructions for each data source appear below.

1) Finding the Population of a Town Using the Census website

1. Navigate to the main page, https://data.census.gov/.
2. Select **Advanced Search** from the initial screen. This option appears immediately under the large search box.
3. In the left navigation column labeled **Find a Filter**, click on **Geography**.
4. From the list of **Most Commonly Used Geographies** click on **Place**.
5. From the list provided, scroll down, and click on the name of the state or other territory within which the desired town is located.
6. In the list of places, check the box next to every town name for which the population is needed, and then click the **Search** button in the lower right portion of the screen.
7. Search for the table labeled P1| RACE, and then click on the + sign to show the available data products. Choose the option for **2010: DEC Summary File 1**. After a short delay, the 2010 P1 population data should display for all chosen towns.

Example:

The following example outlines a search for Anderson, Huntsville, and Rainsville, Alabama. **Figure 4** provides a screenshot of step 6, just before the Search.

Figure 4 4: Step 6

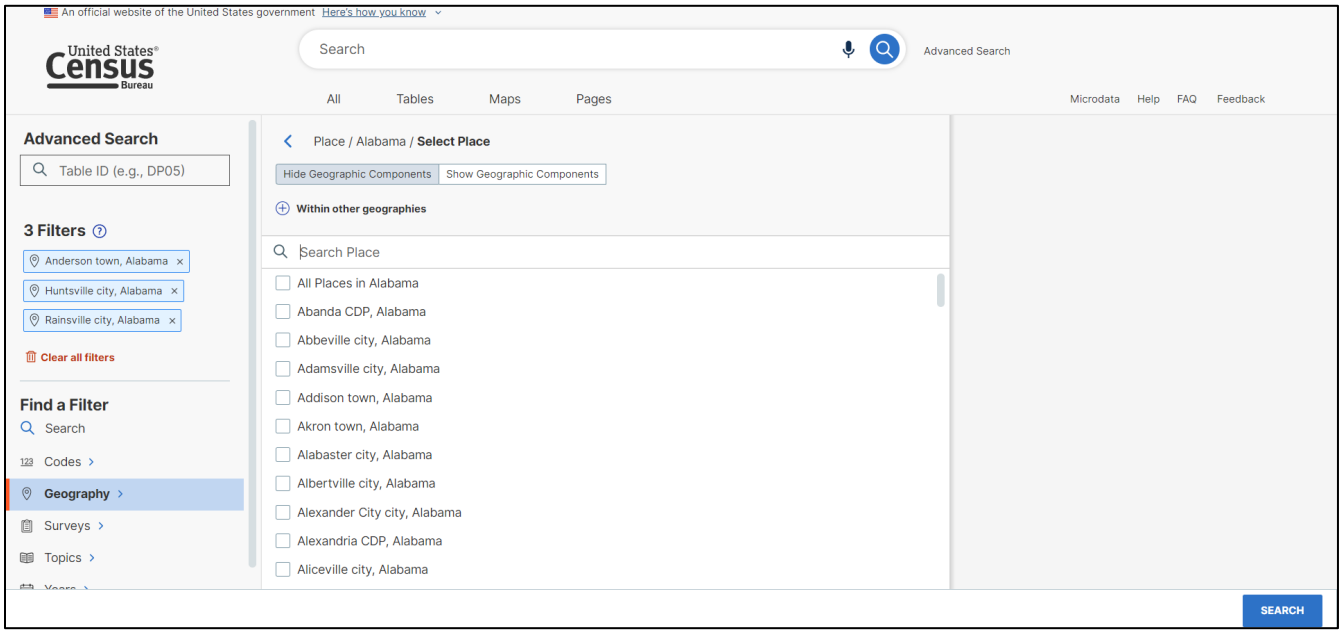
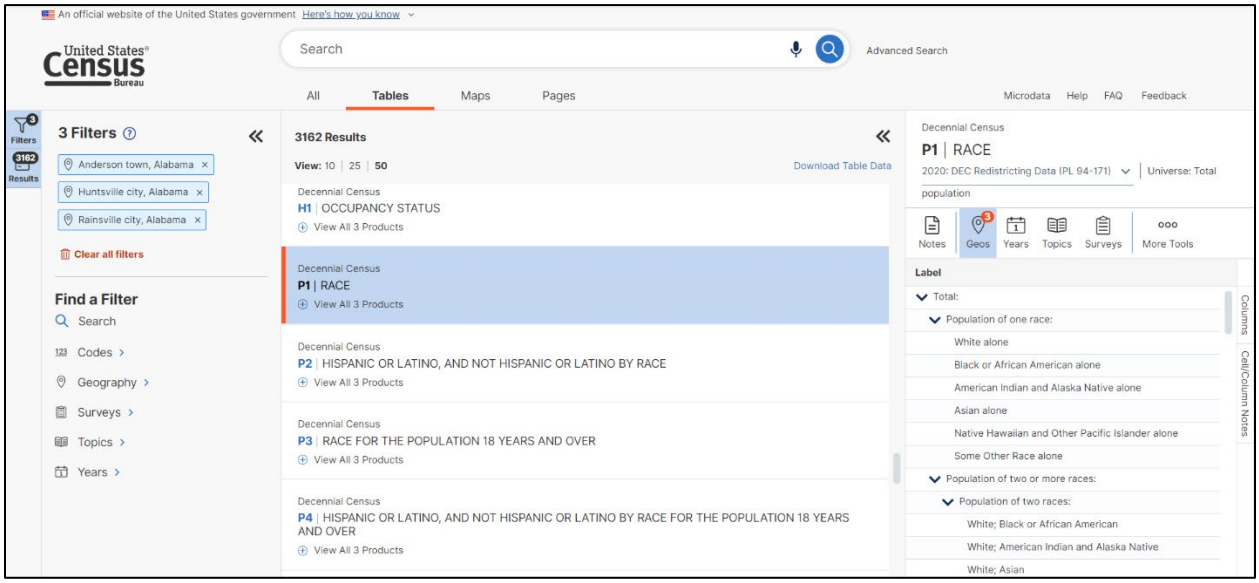


Figure 5 provides a screenshot of the page that displays immediately after the search. The data needed is found in the P1 table, which is labeled P1 | RACE. **Note: enter "P1" in the search bar at the top of the page to find this table.** Since three Products are available, click on the + sign to see the choices.

Figure 5 5: Step 7



After clicking on the + sign, the three available choices include two from the 2010 Decennial Census and one from the 2020 Decennial Census. Since the **2010** Census data is needed, that option should be chosen. Choosing the Summary File will limit the data to the required values.

Figure 6 6: P1 Table with Three Options

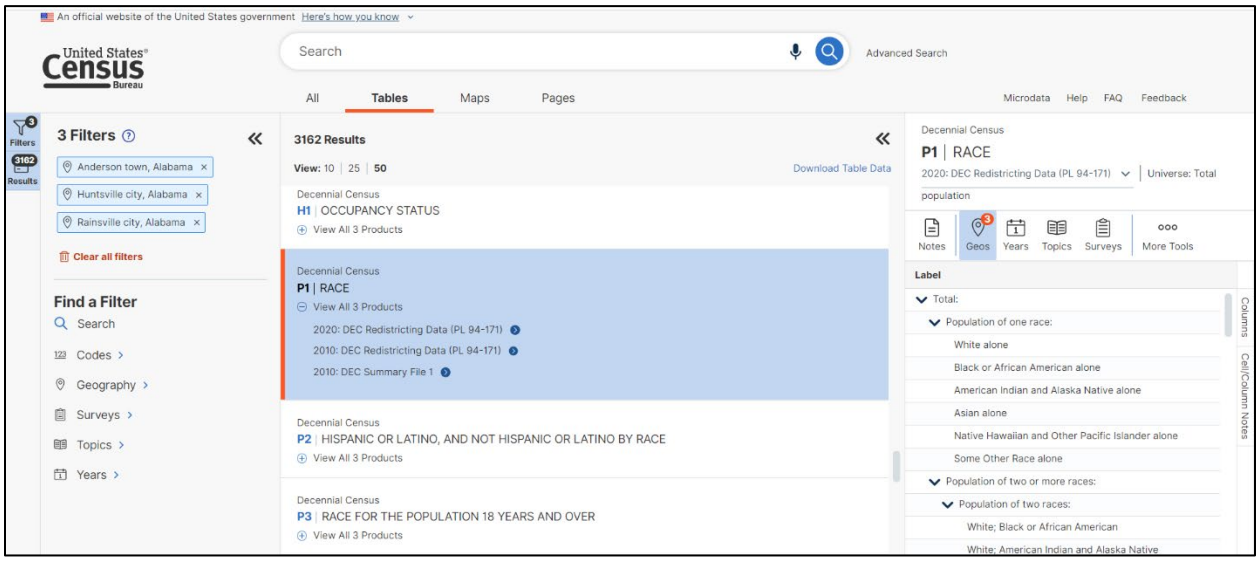
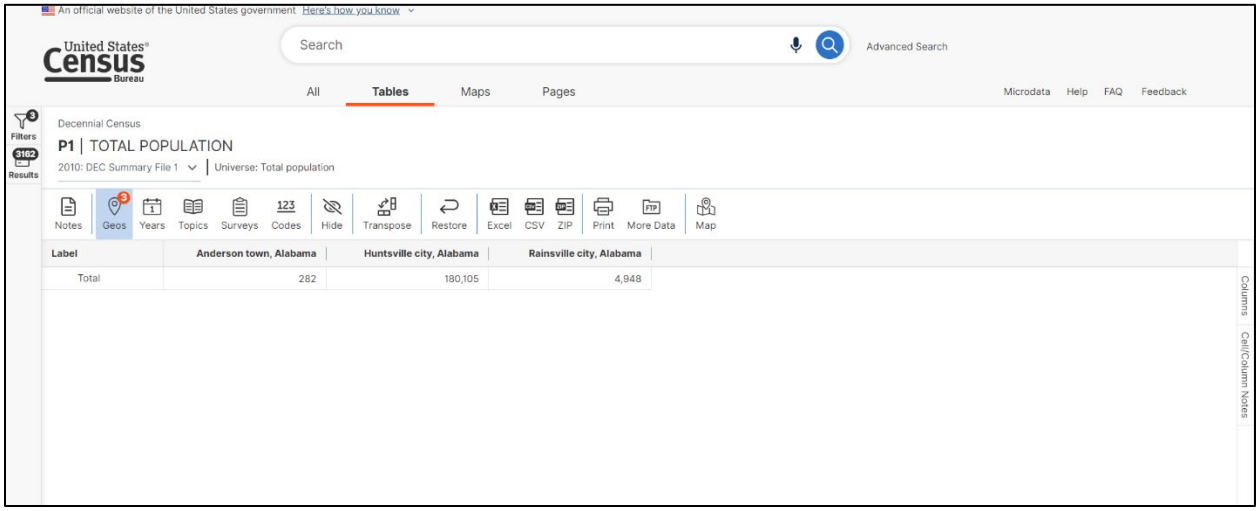


Figure 7 provides a screenshot of the page that appears upon selecting the 2010 Decennial Summary File. For the examples selected, the population for Anderson is 282, Huntsville is 180,105, and Rainsville is 4,948. Based on a Rurality Calculation Worksheet, these locations would receive preliminary rurality scores of 40, 0, and 40, pending the check for an adjacent urban area.

Figure 77: 2010 Decennial Summary File

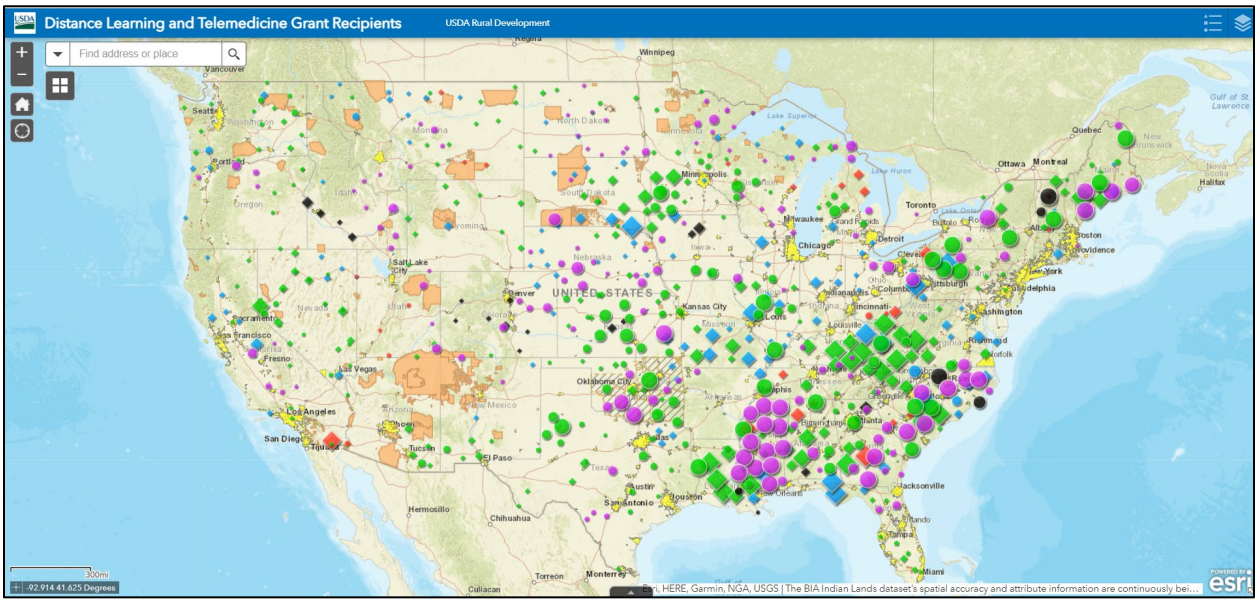


If any end-user site is not within the boundaries of a town or a *place* found in the 2010 Census data, mark that site as "Census Rural" and assign 40 points to it if there is no adjacent urban area. If a site is identified as Census Rural, please include a .pdf map showing the site location with the application. The map may be created from any mapping software as long as the site location can be determined in comparison to other cities, towns, roads, and other features. The locations of the sites must be verified to confirm their associated population and rurality scores.

2) **Finding the proximity of urban areas using the DLT Map**

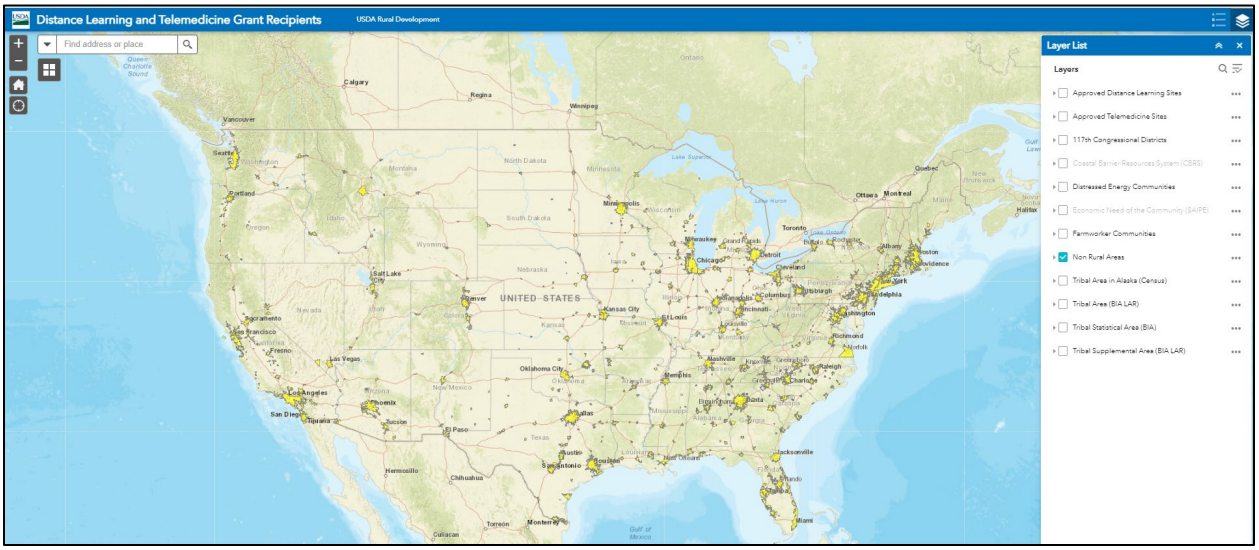
1. Navigate to the DLT Map located on the DLT website under the "To Apply" tab at: http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants.

Figure 88: DLT Map



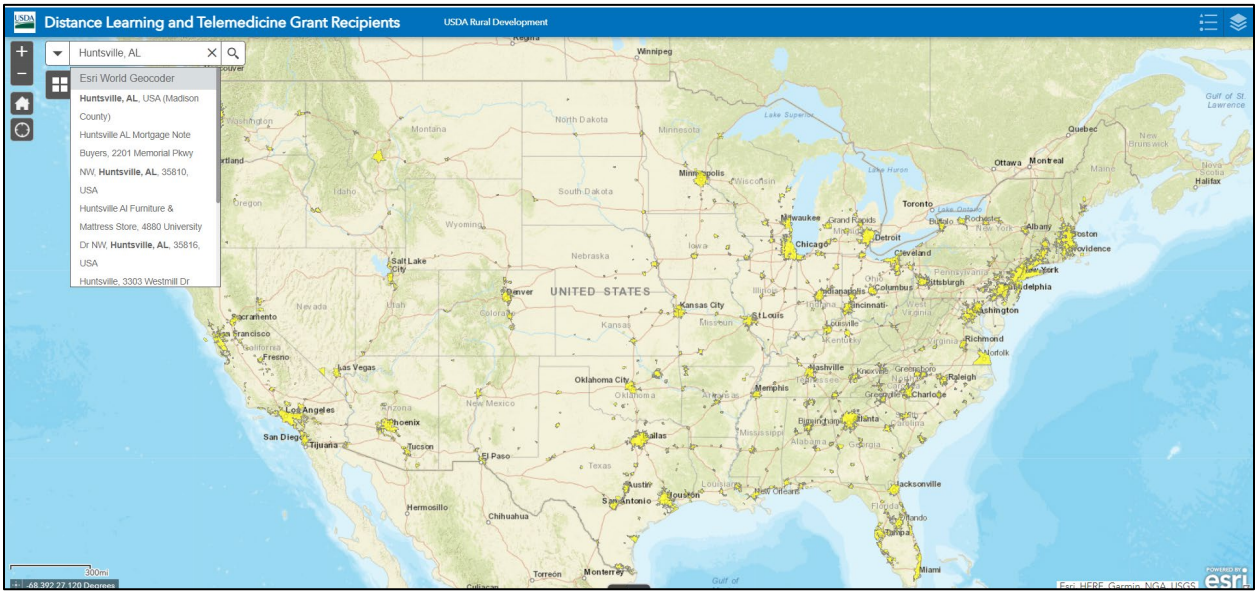
2. To reduce clutter on the map, select the list of Layers in the upper right-hand corner, and uncheck every layer except the **Non-Rural Areas** layer. The Non-Rural Areas on the map are shaded for ease of identification. Currently the shading is yellow, although the color may change in future updates. Look at cities on the map to identify the color.

Figure 99: Non-Rural Areas Layer



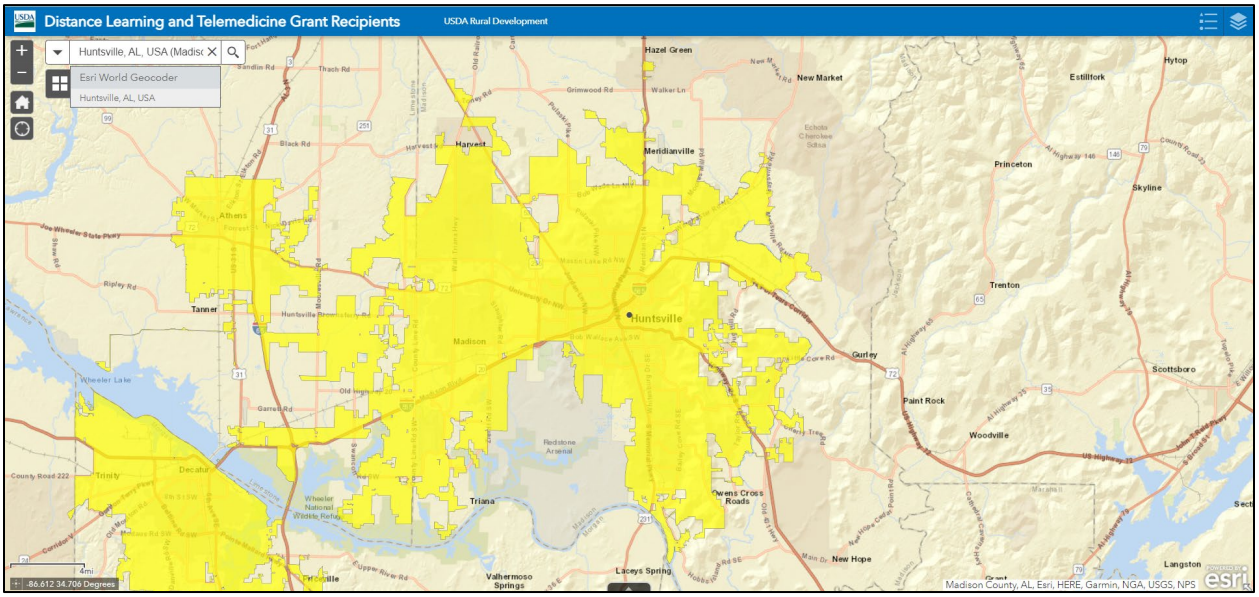
3. Using the white search bar in the upper left-hand corner, enter the address of the site and search.

Figure 1010: Search Function



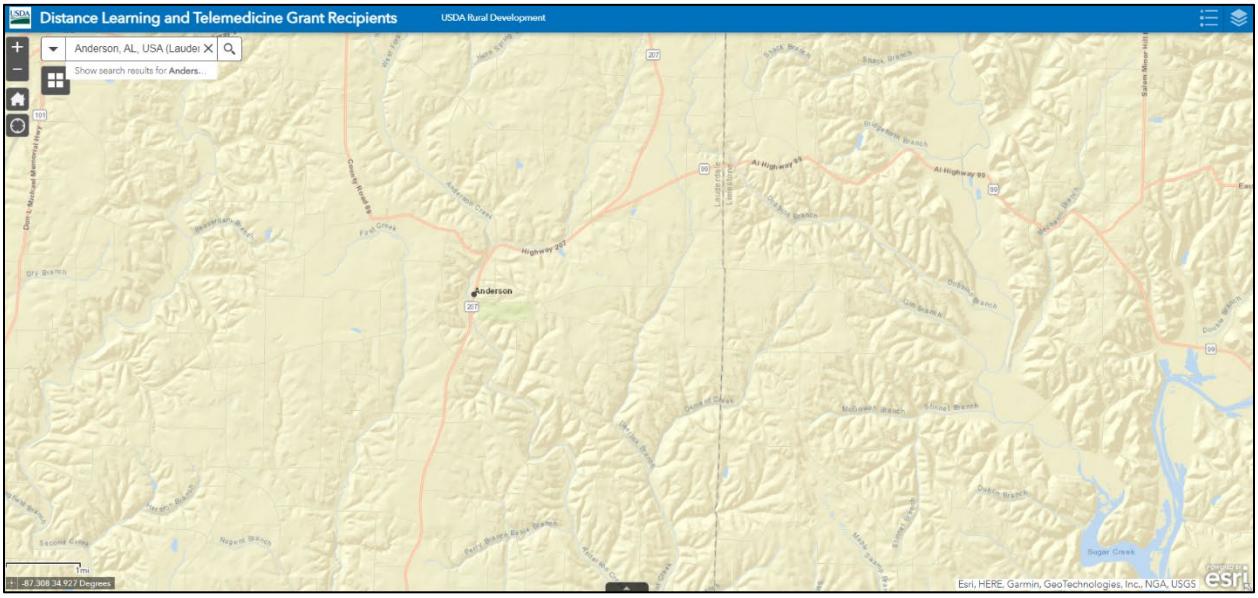
4. The map will zoom and recenter on the address entered. If the address is in a shaded Non-Rural Area (as shown by the yellow areas in the image below), it either lies in a town with population > 20,000 or is adjacent to and contiguous with an urban area around a city or town with population > 50,000.

Figure 1111: Searched Location in a Non-Rural Area



5. If the site **is not** in a Non-Rural Area (as shown in the image below), the town population confirmed using the Census data in step 1 above is the determinant of the rurality score for the site. Enter the appropriate information on a Rurality Calculation Worksheet. **Exception: If the town population associated with the site address from step 1 is > 20,000, but the site lies outside of the Non-Rural Area, the site will be considered Mid-Rural and receive a score of 20 points. Add an appropriate footnote to the Rurality Calculation Worksheet.**

Figure 1212: Searched Location Not in a Non-Rural Area



6. If the site **is** in a Non-Rural Area, zoom out to identify which adjacent city or town with population > 50,000 is the reason for the shading. Check the 2010 population of the adjacent city or town in question as directed in step 1 above; then enter that population and the name of the urban city or town where indicated on the Rurality Calculation Worksheet. The rurality score for the site will be 0 due to the proximity of the urban city or town.

Example:

The following example shows DLT Map images for two different school sites in Frederick County, Maryland. The two schools are Wolfsville Elementary School and Woodsboro Elementary School. Wolfsville Elementary is located in Myersville, Maryland, which has a 2010 Census population of 1,626. Woodsboro Elementary School is located in Woodsboro, Maryland, which has a 2010 Census population of 1,141. Based solely on that data, both school sites would be Extremely Rural and receive 40 points.

Figure 13 shows the DLT Map as it initially loads, while **Figure 14** shows the map with all layers other than Non-Rural Areas unchecked. Note the yellow shading around major cities.

Figure 1313: All Layers

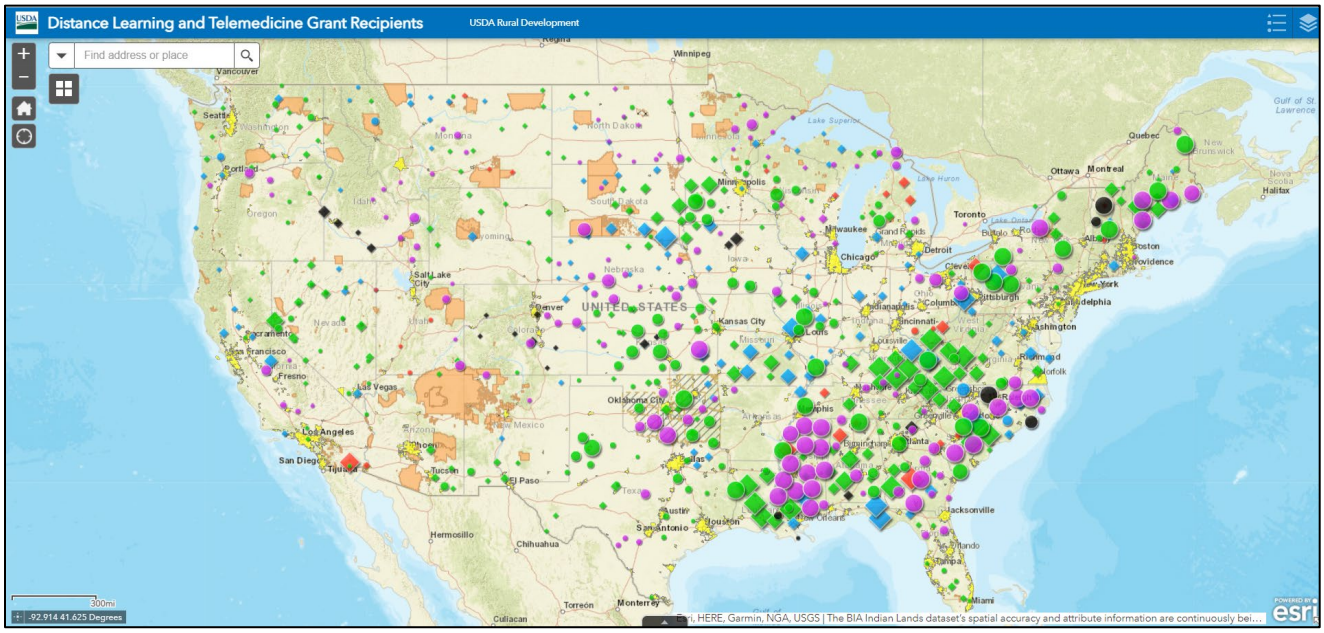


Figure 1414: Non-Rural Areas Layer

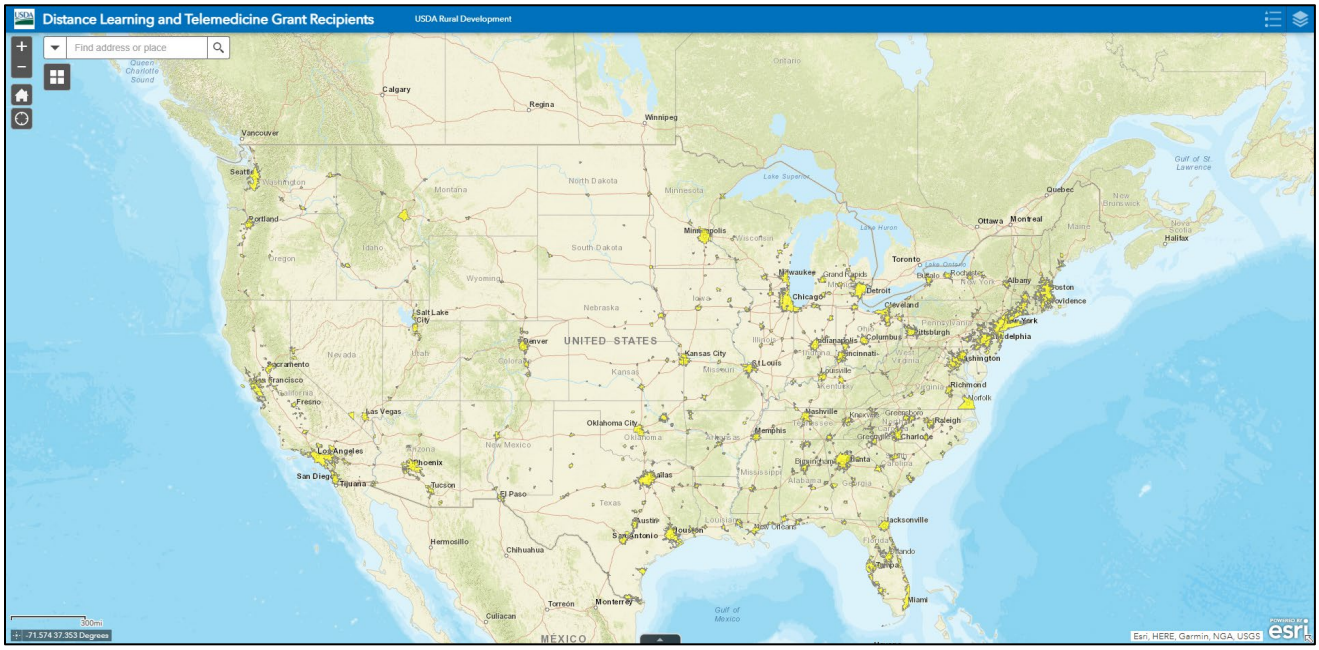


Figure 15 provides a screenshot of the page after the search for the Wolfsville Elementary School address, which is identified by the black dot. The zoom is very high, but the shading is clearly not yellow. The shot below is zoomed out to confirm the lack of shading. This site is Extremely Rural and would receive 40 points.

Figure 1515: Map Zoomed to Search Location – Wolfsville Elementary School

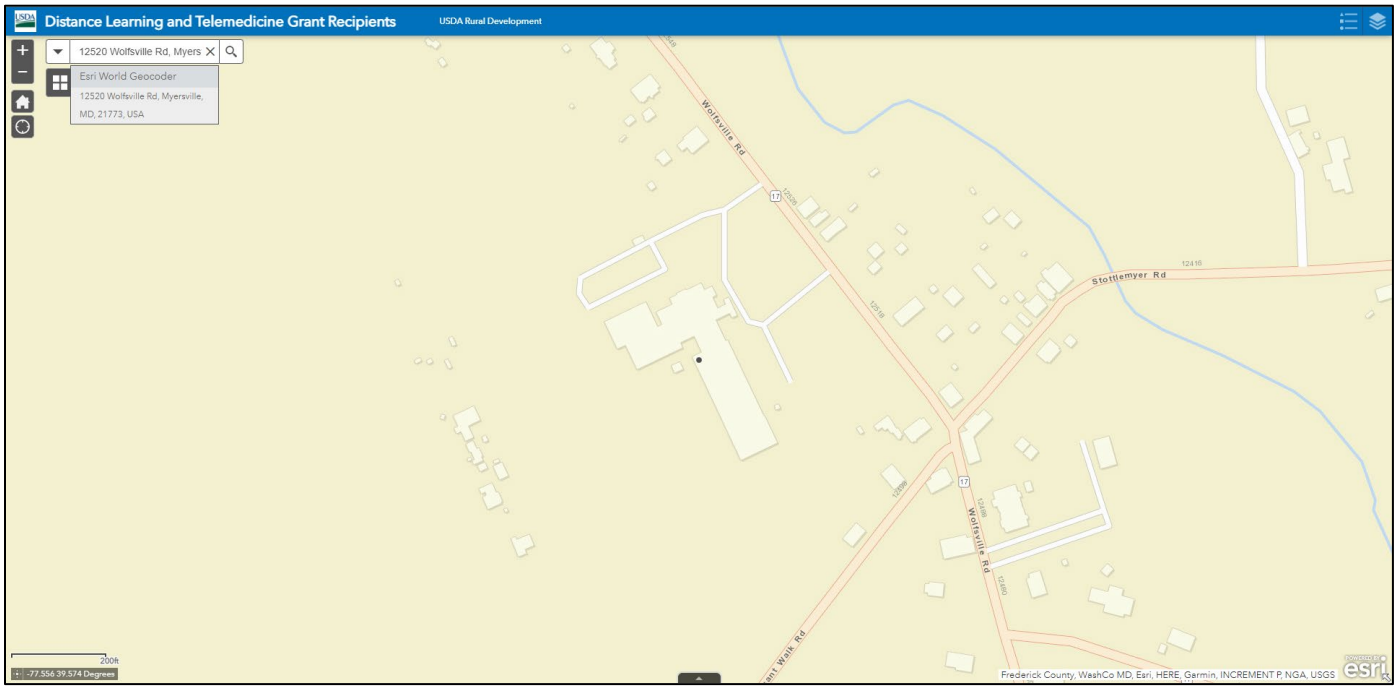
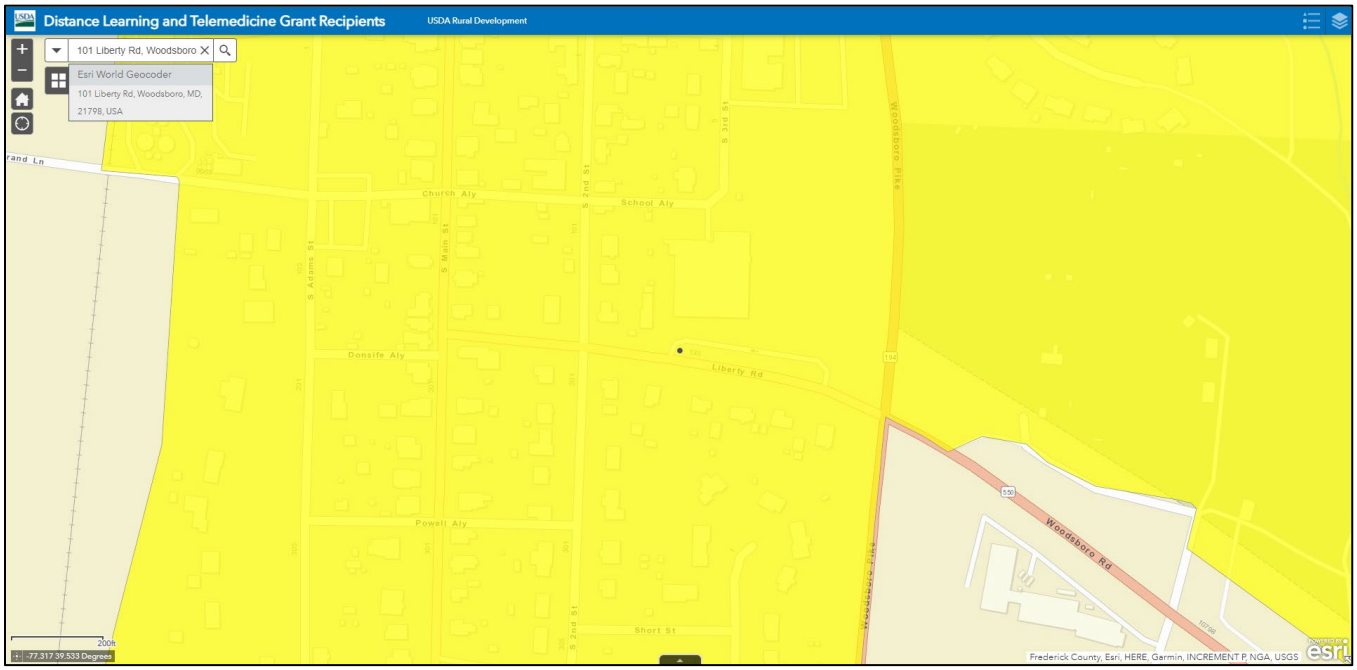


Figure 16 is the screen after the search for the address of Woodsboro Elementary School, which can be seen in the upper left. The bright yellow shading is clear and clicking on the dot reinforces that it is Non-Rural.

Figure 1616: Map Zoomed to Search Location – Woodsboro Elementary School



Zooming out identifies the center of this shading as the city of Frederick, Maryland, which has a 2010 Census population of 65,239. This site is Urban and would receive 0 points.

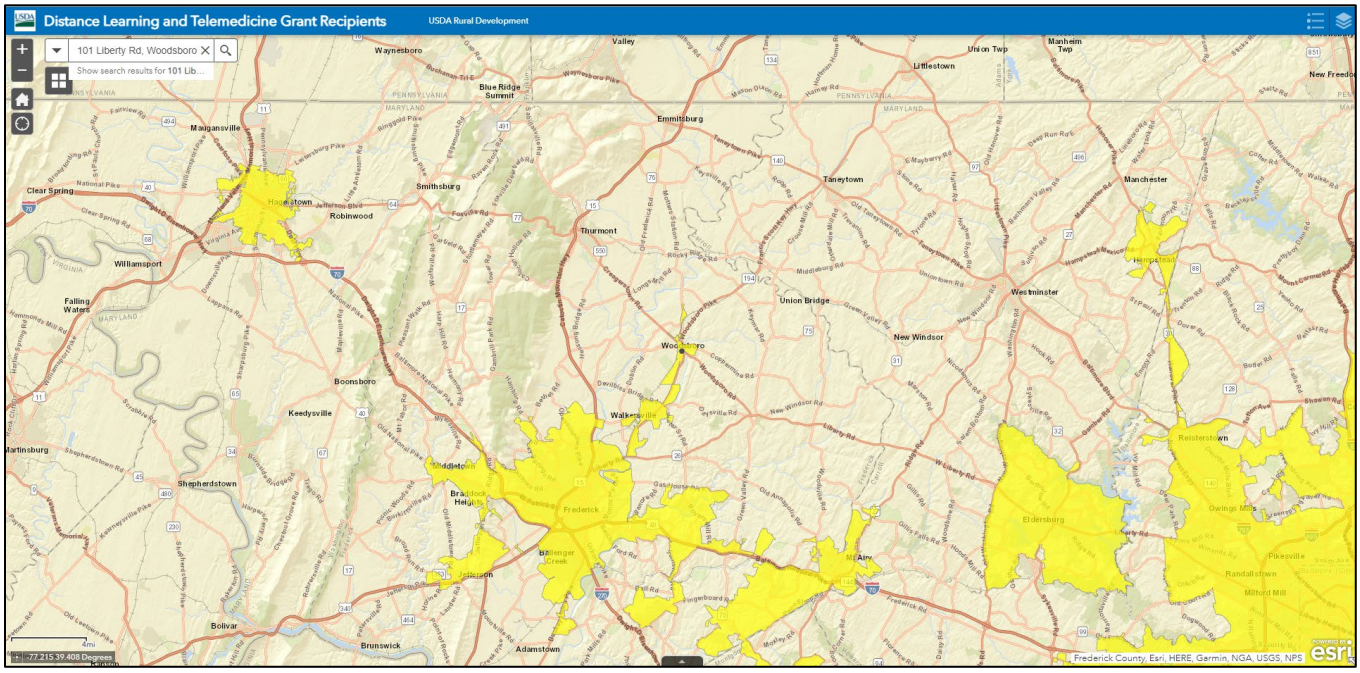



Figure 1717: Map Zoomed Out – Woodsboro Elementary School