

Public Service Commission of Wisconsin



Universal Service Fund Nonprofit Access Program

***Fiscal Year 2012 Grant Application
Guidelines and Forms***

**Application Deadline
February 15, 2012**

Introduction

The Wisconsin Universal Service Fund (USF) was created to promote and assist with the availability and affordability of telecommunications services within Wisconsin. Companies that provide telecommunications services in Wisconsin are required to contribute to the USF. The Public Service Commission (Commission) has established several programs, all of which are funded by the USF. One of the USF programs, the Nonprofit Access Program, was established to provide funding to nonprofit groups to facilitate affordable access to telecommunications services.

In the Nonprofit Access Program, any nonprofit group (defined as an IRS § 501(c)(3) organization) may apply for partial funding from the USF to cover costs of a program or project that assists in providing access to telecommunications services to low-income or disabled customers, or assists in deploying advanced telecommunication services. Total funding for this program is limited to \$500,000 for the current state fiscal year (July 1, 2011, to June 30, 2012). There is no specified dollar limit for any particular project, other than the requirement in the administrative rule that the USF will only pay up to 50 percent of total project costs.

Awards for this grant are expected to be made in April 2012. Funded proposals have until the end of June 2013 to use grant dollars. Extensions may be given upon request from the applicant. Applicants may apply for multiple year projects, but funding will only be authorized on a state fiscal year basis. Successful applicants for multi-year projects will need to reapply for funding for subsequent years. Wisconsin Administrative Code § PSC 160.125(2)(f), which covers this program, is located at the end of this packet.

Eligible Applicants

Any nonprofit group as defined as an IRS § 501(c)(3) organization may apply for funding under the Nonprofit Access Program.

Anticipated Funds Available

In accordance with Wisconsin Administrative Code § PSC 160.125(2)(f), a maximum of \$500,000 may be disbursed under the Nonprofit Access Program per state fiscal year.

Matching Funds Requirement

Applicants are required to provide at least **50% matching funds toward the total project cost (a dollar for dollar match)**. For example, if the total project budget is \$20,000, no more than \$10,000 can be funded from this grant program. Matching funds may be in the form of cash or in-kind contributions. Matching funds may not be items purchased with USF grant dollars from prior years, nor may the in-kind match items be used to meet the grant match requirement for more than one USF grant cycle. Federal, State, and private foundation funds, and any other funding sources, may be used to meet the matching requirement. In-kind contributions can be professional services that are donated or discounted by the donor. Matching funds, both cash and in-kind contributions, must relate to the proposed project and must be itemized on the *Budget Summary Form* found at the end of this application packet.

The application must identify the source and amount of matching funds. If the source of the match is not the applicant, documentation that matching funds are committed must be provided with the application or prior to release of any funding. If the source is the applicant, a statement of commitment of matching funds or documentation of in-kind funds must be provided with the application or prior to release of any funding.

Application Submission and Deadline

All applicants are required to submit a signed cover sheet, signed affidavit, budget summary form, and project narrative. The cover sheet, affidavit form and budget summary form are located at the end of this application packet. Electronic copies are also available from the PSC website (see end of application packet). Applications may be submitted to the Commission by any of the following methods and applicable deadlines:

U.S Postal Service	Commercial Carrier or Hand Delivery	FAX Submission	E-Mail Submission
Public Service Commission P.O. Box 7854 Madison, WI 53707-7854	Public Service Commission 610 N. Whitney Way Madison, WI 53705	Public Service Commission Attn: Chela O'Connor 608-266-3957	Chela.OConnor@wisconsin.gov Must include a scanned signed cover sheet and signed affidavit
Must be <u>received</u> in the PSC offices by Wednesday, February 15, 2012.	Must be <u>delivered</u> to the Commission's office by 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, February 15, 2012.	Must be <u>received</u> by Wednesday, February 15, 2012.	Must be <u>received</u> by Wednesday, February 15, 2012.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the Commission receives all documents in a readable format prior to the deadline. **No late applications will be considered. Please note that applications mailed will need to be received at the Commission by Wednesday, February 15, 2012.**

Application Procedure

A complete application includes the following items and should be assembled in the following order:

1. Universal Service Program Grant Application Form (cover sheet)

Use the form included at the end of this application packet or use the on-line fillable version, then print it and file it with other required documents.

- Leave State Application Number (above Section I) blank.
- Fill out Sections I and II.
- Signature of the certifying representative of the organization is required in Section II of the form.
- Leave Section III blank.

2. Affidavit of Eligibility

Use the form included at the end of this application packet (also available on-line). The form includes a statement certifying that the Universal Service Fund support will be used for the purpose granted. **The form must be signed by a certifying representative of the organization.**

3. Budget Summary

Use the form included at the end of this application packet or use a copy available in pdf and Word format on-line.

4. Project Narrative

The narrative should address the *Review Criteria* listed below.

The application forms are available on the PSC website:

<http://psc.wi.gov/utilityInfo/tele/usf/programs/npSummary.htm>

The application must be submitted by the deadline date (**February 15, 2012**). Do not use binders, plastic covers, folders, or cover sheets other than the one included in this application package. The filing should be single-sided. Once filed, all applications become the property of the Commission, are subject to open records laws of the state, and will not be returned to the applicant.

Review Criteria

In preparing the Project Narrative, the criteria should be addressed in the order in which they are listed below. Please use the headings provided below. Each criterion should be addressed separately and completely so the response stands alone and does not refer to outside sources. Failure to address any criterion will result in reduction of points by the reviewers. The page size should be a standard 8-1/2" x 11" with a legible font no smaller than 11 point, and a minimum of one-inch margins throughout. **The entire Project Narrative section should be no more than six (6) single-sided and single-spaced, numbered pages.**

1. Applicant Overview

- Briefly describe the applicant organization(s) including area(s) and clientele served.

2. Project Purpose¹

- Provide a summary paragraph of what the project will do.
- Define the specific need or problem that is currently not being met and describe how this need was identified and defined.
- Describe how the specific need may be met or problem solved through affordable access to telecommunications.

¹ Please note, 2011 Wisconsin Act 22 prohibits the funding of Advanced Telecommunications Services with this grant.

- Describe how the project will facilitate affordable access to telecommunications.
- Describe how the project meets at least one of the following purposes of the Universal Service Fund:
 - a. To assist customers located in areas of the state that have relatively high costs of telecommunication services in obtaining affordable access to a basic set of essential telecommunication services.
 - b. To assist low-income customers and disabled customers in obtaining affordable access to a basic set of essential telecommunication services.

3. Project Outcomes

- Identify realistic, measurable outcomes expected to result from the implementation of the project. Anticipated outcomes should relate to the need/problem statement.

4. Project Implementation

- Provide a timeline for the project.
- Describe the activities to be performed throughout the timeframe of the project, including priorities, sequence and necessary materials, equipment or contracts.
- Identify providers for each portion of the services or equipment needed for the project.
- Explain the approach to the problem, plan of work and why this approach was selected.
- State how the progress of the project will be monitored to ensure that it will be carried out within the specified time.
- Describe any partnerships, community support or other collaborations with individuals or organizations that will be involved in the project.
- Briefly describe any plans for the project that extend beyond one year.

5. Training and Development

- Describe any training or staff development required for the project.

6. Budget Detail

- Provide justification for the budget, in narrative form, for each category that is listed on the *Budget Summary* form.
- Describe how the project meets the described public need in a least cost manner. This can be accomplished by showing that requests for proposals have been issued or by obtaining several bids for equipment or services and reporting the results of the cost review process. If the project will be done by in-house staff, explain why that approach was chosen.
- Identify the providers of each portion of the telecommunications services or equipment and provide a specific description of the components of the project. The Commission has approved use of grant dollars to pay for telephone services and for internal wiring needs if they directly serve organization clientele.

- Administrative costs that are included should include those costs that are directly attributable to the project. If a percentage of the organization's overhead is used to determine administrative costs, the amount and what is included in that percentage must be described. Rent for general administrative purposes can not be included as a separate reimbursable project expense; however, it can be included as an in-kind cost for matching purposes.

7. Evaluation

- Explain how the project will be evaluated and by whom. Describe measurement tools, such as pre-testing and post-testing, surveys, inventories, and reports, which will be used to determine the extent to which the project meets each of its objectives.

Review and Selection Process

All grant applications will be subject to a screening and review process conducted by Commission staff, a review team, and the Commissioners. Reviewers will have expertise in technical or programmatic aspects of telecommunications or Universal Service issues. The process is outlined below:

1. Notice and Public Comment

Wis. Admin. Code § PSC 160.125(2)(f) requires the Commission to request public comment on the Nonprofit Access Program applications that have been submitted. The Commission will issue a notice requesting comments about two weeks after the application deadline. Comments are generally due about two weeks after the notice has been issued.

2. Initial Screening

Commission staff will conduct an initial screening of all applications. The applications will be screened for timeliness of filing, eligibility of applicant as a nonprofit group as defined by IRS § 501(c)(3), and the commitment of 50 percent matching contributions for the project. Any application that fails the initial screening may be eliminated from further review.

3. Application Review

A panel of technical or program professionals will review applications passing the initial screening. The reviewers will use a rating checklist that scores each application based on the criteria outlined in the *Review Criteria* section. Particular attention will be paid to the potential success of the project to assist low-income or disabled customers, or customers that have high costs in obtaining affordable access to essential telecommunication. Results of this analysis and review will be reported in a memorandum to the Commissioners.

4. Final Decision on Grant Awards

In making the final grant funding decisions, the Commission shall consider information including the following:

- The basis of the public need to be met.
- The extent to which other Universal Service Fund programs or projects already meet the need described above.
- The overall cost of the proposed project or program relative to the public need being met.

The Commission may consider other factors in its decision-making such as the analysis provided by staff, analysis of the review panel, public comments filed on the applications, geographic distribution of the proposed grants, diversity of needs being met by the proposed grants, number of previous USF grants awarded to the applicant, cost of the project relative to the number of individuals receiving benefits, and availability of funds. The Commission may rate proposals with low overhead (administrative) costs higher than projects with high overhead costs. The Commission makes its decision in Open Meetings of the Commission.

All grant applicants will be notified, in writing, of intended award decisions approximately two months after the application deadline.

Reporting and Payment Process

Grant projects are expected to start within two months of award notification. Applicants should notify the Commission if this expectation cannot be met. A *Summary Financial Statement* will be enclosed with the letter notifying applicants that they have received a grant award. This statement must be used to request reimbursement for funds expended under the grant award. This report is also to be used by the applicant to report the match requirement. Reimbursements are made to the grantees after the project costs are incurred. Reimbursement requests can be made monthly, quarterly, or after the project is completed.

Grant awardees will be required to submit a final evaluation report describing how well the project facilitated access to telecommunications services. Failure to submit the final evaluation report will be considered breach of the grant contract. Progress reports may also be required to be filed. Details regarding these filings will be included in the letter notifying applicants of the grant award.

The Commission retains the right to revoke a grant if the funded applicant and project do not comply with Commission guidelines or fail to implement the project in accordance with the application as submitted and approved. In addition, the Commission reserves the right to take any other action allowed by law in the event an approved project is implemented in a manner inconsistent with the Nonprofit Access Program.

Withdrawal of Application

Applicants may withdraw their proposal at any time by providing a written request to the Commission.

False, Misleading, or Omitted Statements

False or misleading statements or omissions that render the information provided on an application to be false or misleading are grounds for rejection of an application, for denial, or for termination of funding. The Applicant may also be required to reimburse the Universal Service Fund. In addition, the Commission reserves the right to take any other action allowed by law.

No Obligation for Future Funding

If an application is selected for funding, the Commission has no obligation to provide any additional future funding. Funding is limited to the amount awarded by the Commission when it makes its decision on grant awards. A subsequent award of funding for a project is entirely at the discretion of the Commission. Multi-year projects can apply for only one year of funding and must reapply for funding for subsequent years.

Technical Assistance

Staff will provide limited technical assistance to all prospective applicants, as staff resources allow, until the time that a proposal has been submitted to the Commission. Staff can only provide answers to specific questions and make general comments in regard to the grant application guidelines and forms. Staff will not provide specific programmatic suggestions for a particular applicant nor review a draft copy of a forthcoming project application.

In compliance with state regulations regarding conflict of interest and open records, Commissioners will not provide any specific advice or assistance to applicants. All applicants will be referred to Commission staff.

For Further Information, Contact:

Chela O'Connor, USF Manager
Public Service Commission
610 N. Whitney Way
P.O. Box 7854
Madison WI 53707-7854
PHONE: 608-266-8950
FAX: 608-266-3957
TTY: 1-800-251-8345 (from inside WI)
TTY: 608-267-1479 (from outside WI)

E-MAIL: Chela.OConnor@wisconsin.gov

WEB PAGE: <http://psc.wi.gov/utilityInfo/tele/usf/programs/npSummary.htm>