

Public Service Commission of Wisconsin



**Universal Service Fund
Lifeline Outreach Grant Program**

**2023 Grant Application Instructions
Docket 5-LL-2023**

**Application Deadline
March 1, 2023
1:30 P.M**

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (Commission) is soliciting applications for the Lifeline Outreach Grant Program

The purpose of the Lifeline Outreach Grant Program is to assist low-income customers to obtain affordable access to essential telecommunications through the Lifeline program which provides a discount on customer essential telecommunication service.

The Lifeline Outreach program is organized around two program goals: Outreach and Education (Goal 1), and Research and Resource (Goal 2).

- **Goal 1:** The purpose of the Outreach and Education goal is to increase awareness of and subscribership to the Lifeline program, including understanding and assisting prospective subscribers with the eligibility process administered via the National Verifier (NV) eligibility tool, and selecting an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC).
- **Goal 2:** The purpose of the Research and Resource goal is to conduct research to identify barriers to access Lifeline by low-income customers, and tools or strategies for reaching out to those communities.

At the Commission's discretion, awards may be made for at least one project focusing on the Milwaukee metropolitan area, and at least one program with a statewide focus, if feasible. These awards may be made under either or both program goal areas.

Applicants seeking funding under both program goals must submit a separate application for funding under each goal area. Single applications addressing both goals areas may not be considered for funding.

Background

The Wisconsin Universal Service Fund (USF) was created to promote and assist with the availability and affordability of telecommunications services in Wisconsin. Companies providing telecommunications services in Wisconsin are required to contribute to the USF. The Commission administers several programs funded by the USF, including the Lifeline program and the Lifeline Outreach Grant program.

Lifeline

The Wisconsin Lifeline program is complementary to the federal Lifeline program and applies federal rules for eligibility, enrollment (one subscriber per household), and eligible telecommunications services. Wisconsin's Lifeline program provides a discount, in addition to the federal discount, on essential telecommunications service for eligible low-income individuals through a network of Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETCs) across the state.

The discount aims to reduce a customer's phone bills to \$15, or provide a maximum discount of \$9.25 per customer, whichever is least cost. To participate in Lifeline, all customers must receive an eligibility determination from the National Verifier (NV) using the secure, online web portal, or a paper application. Applicants may fill out the application on their own, or work with a family member, social worker, advocate, ETC, or others to do so. Eligibility determinations are good for 90 days and are used by ETCs to enroll customers in the program.

Lifeline Outreach Grant Program

Wisconsin's Lifeline program has a current utilization rate of 18 percent of potentially eligible subscribers. The Lifeline Outreach Grant Program provides an opportunity to increase access to and affordability of telecommunications.

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants for this grant program under both goal areas are:

- Non-profit organizations
- Community-based agencies,
- Political subdivisions, including Tribal governments

Additionally, under the Research and Resource goal area, for-profit businesses, and universities and other institutions of higher learning are eligible applicants.

ETCs are not eligible for funding under this program.

Anticipated Funds Available

Pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code § PSC 160.063, a total of \$250,000 is available for the Lifeline Outreach Grant Program. The Commission will award up to a total of six grants.

Matching Funds

Match funding is not required for this program. However, the Commission may consider proposed matching funds in evaluating projects and its award determinations.

If an applicant proposes to provide matching funds, 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 must be provided with the application or prior to release of any funding.

Communication regarding the application

The posting of these application instructions to the Commission's [Electronic Records Filing \(ERF\) System](#) in docket 5-LL-2023 will serve as official notice of the opening of a new grant round. The official means by which the Commission will provide information related to the application is in the docket 5-LL-2023. Interested parties must proactively subscribe to the docket on ERF to ensure they receive timely information related to the process. Parties may subscribe at [ERF-EZ Subscriptions](#), or go to [Subscribing Instructions](#) for more information.

Application Submission and Deadline

All applicants are required to submit an application using the Commission's online grant application system. The [PSC Grants System](#) will automatically upload the application to the appropriate ERF account when the application is submitted. The PSC Grants System will not permit late applications. Applicants are encouraged to start early and leave plenty of time to work with the grant application.

Applications are due and must be submitted on the PSC Grants System no later than 1:30 p.m. CT, Wednesday, March 1, 2023. Please note the earlier time.

The PSC Grants System will not accept any applications submitted after the deadline.

Application Procedure

The instructions for completing a Lifeline Outreach Grant Program application are in two parts. Both parts are available on the PSC website. The first part of the instructions is the PSC [Grants System User's Guide](#) for Grant Applicants and Recipients. The User's Guide provides a detailed overview of the [PSC Grants System](#). The User's Guide provides step by step instructions to create a system account, navigate the on-line grant application, validate the application, and

submit the complete application. The PSC Grant account will also provide the on-line form and filing process that grant recipients will use to request reimbursement. The User's Guide is the primary resource an applicant should consult to enter and use the on-line grant system.

The second part of the instructions is this current document. This document, Grant Application Instructions, provides specific guidance on completing an application for an FY 2023 Lifeline Outreach Grant Program grant. These instructions discuss the questions in the narrative section of the application. An applicant should use this supplement to understand what information is requested for each page and each question in the grant application.

Step 1: The user will navigate to the login page for the [PSC Grants System](#). For the first instance of logging in, an applicant will need to create a system account. (Information at [User's Guide page 2](#)). An applicant must remember their Username and Password. For all subsequent instances, an applicant will use this Username and Password.

Step 2: On the page titled Available Grants, the applicant will find the line for the 2023 Lifeline Outreach Grant and click on 'Apply.' (Information at [User's Guide page 4](#)).

Step 3: The program will now display the application which is arranged in a series of tabs along the top of the form. Each tab must be completed (instructions below detail tabs in order from left to right). The applicant must select the Details tab and fill in the required information. (Information at [User's Guide page 4](#)). Application data must be validated before moving to the next page/tab. Applicants must save their work using the save icon at the bottom of the page before leaving a page, as any unsaved entries will be lost if not saved.

Step 4: The applicant selects and completes the information required in the Contacts tab. (Information at [User's Guide pages 5-6](#)). Each applicant must supply at least one Primary Contact. Additional contacts can be added by selecting Add New Contact. A grant recipient can use this page to add additional names or change the Primary Contact for the grant if the recipient has turnover or other change in staff assignment while the grant project is underway.

Step 5: The applicant selects the Contributions tab and fills in the required information. Contributions mean match in the system. Match or contributions are optional. The validation step applies to this tab as well. Entries here must agree with the data entered on the Details page before they can be saved.

Step 6: The applicant selects the Budget tab and completes the required information. (Information at [User's Guide pages 7-8](#)). At this point there is another validation step where entries must align with the data on the Details and Contributions tabs. The Budget page requires that the applicant enter the total cost of all requested budget categories that will be purchased on a single line of the budget. The form requires a split between the portion of each line item

between what will be funded by a potential grant and the portion covered by in-kind contributions. Applicants must enter zero if no costs are associated with a budget field.

Step 7: The applicant selects the Communities tab and completes the required information. (Information at [User's Guide pages 8-9](#)).

Step 8: The applicant selects the Narrative tab and fills in the required information. (Information at [User's Guide pages 9-10](#)). The Narrative consists of twelve questions. All twelve questions are important. It is possible to write in the phrase 'n/a' and move on to the next question, but that means the applicant is passing on a question that either determines the applicant's eligibility to apply for a grant or contributes to the overall merit of the application. The applicant should answer every question and save their work before advancing to the next page of the Narrative.

Narrative

The Project Narrative, should address the following criteria in the order listed below. Use the headings provided.

Once submitted in the Grants System, all applications become the property of the Commission, and are subject to Wisconsin's open records laws. Applications will be available for the public to review on the Commission's website by searching under docket 5-LL-2023 in the ERF system. Saved, but not submitted applications cannot be viewed by the public.

Applicant Overview

1. Identify the project goal as either 1) Education and Outreach or 2) Research and Resources. Briefly describe the applicant organization(s) including its organizational capacity, history, mission, current geographic area(s) of focus, and the target population(s) served.
2. Describe the applicant's experience with telecommunications and broadband as it relates to the program goal areas.

Project Proposal

3. Provide a description of the proposed project, and why this project is a good fit for the applicant organization.
4. Provide the name and description of any project partners and the role of each partner?
5. Provide a description of the proposed activities and an explanation of how those activities may increase participation of eligible households in the Lifeline Program. Please note,

activities focused primarily on the development and distribution of literature or mailings, do not meet the spirit of the program.

Outreach and Education—examples of eligible activities:

- a) direct outreach to clients, including community and virtual events, one-on-one follow-up to community events, school events designed to reach low-income families, career fairs, events for people who are non-native English speakers, events for people who are homeless or recently formerly homeless, or rehabilitation programs for people leaving incarceration; and
- b) outreach, training, or outreach network building to organizations and professionals across the state currently providing services to low-income populations (e.g., conference presentations, online webinars, the creation of multilingual outreach and training materials).
- c) providing a ‘navigator’ type service to assist customers to determine what telecommunications services best meet their needs, and how to make the best use of that service.

Research and Resource—examples of eligible activities:

- a) the use of existing datasets to identify barriers to accessing Lifeline, and proposing solutions;
- b) the development of a survey tool for professionals and/or direct consumers to identify barriers and potential solutions;
- c) the development on an online application that may be used by professionals working with people who are low-income, or consumers, to identify opportunities for telecommunications and broadband discounts; and
- d) the development of a digital toolkit with ready-to-use program materials.

Project Outcomes and Evaluation

6. Identify qualitative and quantitative outcomes that are realistic and measurable, and that are expected to result from the implementation of the proposed project.
7. Explain how the project activities and outcomes identified will be evaluated by the applicant. Describe measurement tools (e.g., pre-testing and post-testing), surveys, inventories, or reports, which will be used to determine the extent to which the project meets each of its outcomes.
8. If the proposed project conducts activities largely similar to activities already conducted by the agency, or activities funded by a different USF program (e.g., TEPP Outreach, or the Non-Profit Access Grant Program), provide a description of how activities funded under this program will be measured separately in order to evaluate the effectiveness of

this award separately from current, substantively similar activities not funded under this grant.

Project Implementation

9. Provide a project timeline that describes key benchmarks to be performed throughout the performance period anticipated to be July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024, including priorities, sequence and necessary materials, equipment or contracts.
10. State how the progress of the project will be monitored to ensure that it will be carried out within the specified time.
11. Describe any partnerships, community support or other collaborations with individuals or organizations that will be involved in the project.

Budget Detail

12. Provide a narrative justification for the budget, using each budget category for which an expense is anticipated.

Administrative costs should only include costs directly attributable to the project. Eligible expenses for both goal areas include, but may not be limited to; staff time, telecommunication and internet service, video conferencing, and agency indirect costs up to 15 percent.

Review and Selection Process

Initial Screening

Commission staff will conduct an initial screening of all applications. The applications will be screened for: addressing the Narrative questions, completeness, formatting and length, eligibility of applicant.

Applications not meeting the initial screening requirements may not be considered for funding.

3. Application Review

A panel of technical or program professionals will review applications passing the initial screening. Reviewers will use a rating checklist that determines the relative merit of each application based on the *grant application* described above. The review panel provides review and expertise. Results of this analysis and review will be reported in a memorandum to the Commissioners and posted on ERF. Commissioners are not bound by the below merit criteria or

resulting recommendations from the panel, which are intended for advisory purposes only. The Commissioners utilize their experience, technical competence, and specialized knowledge. The Commissioners, as the finder of fact and decision makers, are charged with evaluating all available information and applying any relevant statutory criteria to reach well-reasoned decisions.

4. Final Decision on Grant Awards

After the screening and review process is complete, the Commission will make funding decisions in an Open Meetings of the Commission. The Commission will notify all grant applicants of its decision by adopting and serving on all applicants an Order awarding grants. The Order will be posted on ERF in docket 5-LL-2023.

In its decision making, the Commission may consider any of the following: (a) the application, budget and supporting documents (b) analysis of the review panel, (c) geographic distribution of the proposed grants, (d) areas of focus including a statewide focus, and a focus on the Milwaukee metropolitan area, (e) the number and performance of other USF grants awarded to the applicant, (f) the cost of the project relative to the anticipated benefits, and (g) other criteria within the Commission's statutory authority to administer the Universal Service Fund and Lifeline Outreach Grant Program under Wis. Stat. § 196.218 and Wis. Admin. Code § 160.063.

At the Commission's discretion, either or both program goal areas, awards may be made for at least one project focusing on the Milwaukee metropolitan area, and at least one program with a statewide focus, if feasible.

Grant Agreement, Reporting and Payment Process

The performance period for these grants will be from July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024. An executed Grant Agreement will be required of all Grant Recipients. Grantees will submit payment requests via the online PSC Grants System. Interim and Final Reports will be submitted in the manner indicated by 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. In addition, the Commission reserves the right to take any other action allowed by law.

**For Further Information or to request reasonable accommodations,
Contact:**

Laura Fay, Universal Service and Digital Equity Manager
Phone: (608) 267-0913
Email: Laura2.Fay@wisconsin.gov
Web: [PSC Lifeline Outreach Grant Program \(wi.gov\)](https://www.wisconsin.gov/PSC/LifelineOutreachGrantProgram)

For questions concerning the Commission's PSC Grants System, contact Alex Fortney
alex.fortney@wisconsin.gov.

For questions concerning the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin's Electronic Regulatory Filing System (ERF), contact the Records Management Team at (608) 261-8524 or at
pscsecs@psc.state.wi.us.

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