

**Public Service Commission of Wisconsin**



**Universal Service Fund  
Nonprofit Access Grant Program**

**Fiscal Year 2023  
Grant Application Instructions  
Docket 5-NF-2023**

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

## 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 Nonprofit Access Grant Program which provides funding to nonprofit groups to facilitate affordable access to telecommunications services.

Under the requirements of the Nonprofit Access Grant Program, any nonprofit group (defined as an IRS § 501(c)(3) organization) may apply for funding from the USF to cover up to 75 percent of project or program costs to assist in providing access to telecommunications services for low-income customers and/or customers with a disability. There is no specified dollar limit for any particular project as long as USF requested funding does not exceed 75 percent of total project costs.

## Eligible Applicants

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

## Anticipated Funds Available

In accordance with Wis. Admin. Code § PSC 160.125(2)(f), up to \$500,000 will be made available in 2023 for the Nonprofit Access Grant Program.

## Matching / Contribution Funds Requirement

Applicants are required to provide at least **25 percent matching funds toward the total project cost** (a three-dollar-for-one-dollar match). For example, if the total project budget is \$20,000, no more than \$15,000 can be funded from this grant program. A grant request of \$20,000 with 25 percent of the request or \$5,000 in matching/contributed funds would **not** meet this requirement. In this case, the project total would be \$25,000 and the match requirement would be \$6,250. The match is for the entire project request.

	Grant Request	Match Funds	Total Project Budget
<b>Correct Match</b>	\$15,000	\$5,000	\$20,000
<b>Incorrect Match</b>	\$20,000	\$5,000	\$25,000

Matching funds may be provided as cash or in-kind contributions. Matching funds may not include 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. Matching / contribution funds may not be used to meet the grant match requirement for other non-USF grant applications.

Any non-USF funding sources, including federal, state, and private foundations, may be used to meet the matching requirement. In-kind contributions may 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 indicated as cash or in-kind on the note column of the budget in the Grants System. In the Grants System matching funds are noted as contributed funded.

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.

## **Communication Regarding the Application**

The posting of these application instructions to the Commission's [Electronic Records Filing \(ERF\) System](#) in docket 5-NF-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-NF-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. CST, 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 Nonprofit Access grant 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 online grant application, validate the application, and submit the complete application. The PSC Grant account will also provide the online 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 online 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 Nonprofit Access 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 Nonprofit Access Program 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. Twenty-five percent of the total project costs must be contributions/match. (Information at [User's Guide pages 6-7.](#)) 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 eleven questions. All eleven 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**

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-NF-2023 in ERF. Saved, but not submitted applications cannot be viewed by the public.

1. **Eligibility:** Is the applicant a nonprofit organization as defined by the IRS in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code? Answer Yes or No.

The applicant must be a nonprofit to be eligible.

If an applicant answers "no", the application will not be eligible.

2. **Applicant Overview:** Briefly describe the applicant organization(s) including the history, mission and programs or services.

Briefly describe the applicant organization(s).

3. **Project Purpose:** Describe how the project meets at least one of the purposes of the Universal Service Fund?

Describe how the project meets at least one of the following purposes of the Universal Service Fund:

- 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.
- To assist low-income customers to obtain affordable access to a basic set of essential telecommunication services.
- To assist customers with disabilities to obtain affordable access to a basic set of essential telecommunication services.

4. **Project Need:** Describe a public need that is not currently being met, which will be targeted by the project. Describe how this need was identified and defined.

Describe the population that this project will reach, provide data or information on the need.

5. **Project Impact:** Identify up to three realistic, measurable goals or outcomes expected to result from the implementation of the proposed project.

Identify realistic, measurable goals and outcomes expected to result from the implementation of the project. Anticipated outcomes should relate to the Project Need and Purpose described in the application. These goals / outcomes will be used to evaluate the success of the project.

6. **Unduplicated People:** Provide the number of different individuals projected to be served by the proposed project during the performance period (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2025). Count each person only once.

Only a whole numeric value will be accepted.

7. **Project Implementation:** Describe the activities, programs or services to be implemented throughout the performance period of the project to address the needs and achieve the goals.

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.

8. **Project Implementation**: Describe any partnerships, community support or other collaborations with individuals or organizations that will be involved in the proposed project.

Describe any partnerships, community support or other collaborations with individuals or organizations that will be involved in the project. The applicant can indicate N/A if this does not apply.

9. **Project Evaluation**: Explain how the project goals or outcomes identified will be evaluated. Describe the measurement tools, such as pre- and post-testing, surveys, reports and qualitative interviews.

Explain how the project goals and outcomes identified above 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 goals.

10. **Budget Detail**: Provide justification for the budget, in narrative form. For each category listed in the budget, describe the item and provide additional detail. Explain how the proposed project meets the desired public need in a least-cost manner.

Rent for general administrative purposes may not be included as a grant funded expense; however, it can be included as a contribution funded in-kind cost for matching purposes.

For each budgeted expense please provide a short narrative of cost details. If you have a labor cost of \$10,000 on the budget form, the applicants should provide details including the position, the amount of time anticipated on the project and the rate of pay. For example, Digital Navigator, 0.25 FTE, \$22/hr. If the project will be done by in-house staff, explain why that approach was chosen. Identify the providers of the telecommunications services or equipment, and provide a specific description of the components of the project. Administrative costs should only include costs 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.

11. **Additional Information**: For applicants that received previous awards, discuss past performance and how this application relates to previous awards. For new applicants, provide any additional information on the organization or the proposed project.

For applicants that received funding in previous cycles of the Nonprofit Access Grant Program, reference previous successes and provide statistics describing the previous award and how this application builds on that success.

## **Review and Selection Process**

### **1. Initial Screening**

Commission staff will conduct an initial screening of all applications. The applications will be screened for: addressing the Universal Service Fund Purpose, completeness, eligibility of applicant as a nonprofit organization, and the commitment of at least 25 percent matching funds.

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

### **2. 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.

### **3. Final Decision on Grant Awards**

After the screening and review process is complete, the Commission will decide which grants to award. The Commission makes its decisions in 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.

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 degree to which the Program Purpose is met.



- The intended project goals and outcomes.
- The overall cost of the proposed project or program relative to the addressed public need.

The Commission may consider other factors in its decision-making such as: analysis provided by staff, analysis of the review panel, geographic distribution of the proposed grants, diversity of needs addressed by the proposed grants, the 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.

### **Grant Agreement, Reporting and Payment Process**

This is a two-year performance period for these grants from July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2025. 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](mailto:Laura2.Fay@wisconsin.gov)

Web: [PSC Nonprofit Access Grant \(wi.gov\)](https://www.wisconsin.gov/PSC-Nonprofit-Access-Grant)

For questions concerning the Commission's PSC Grants System, contact Alex Fortney by email at [Alex.Fortney@wisconsin.gov](mailto:Alex.Fortney@wisconsin.gov).

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