

Connecting Minority Community Pilot Program- Session 7b

Moderator: Cameron Lewis

October 21, 2021

Carole Garner

1:18

Hello, and thank you for joining us today.

1:21

Before we begin, we did want to let you know that due to the format of our webinar, we regret that phone dial in audio is not available for this webinar. If you'd like to listen to this webinar on your mobile device, you must download the GoToWebinar app for Android or Apple.

1:39

If you're not able to download the app, rest assured this webinar will also be available for on demand viewing at

Cameron Lewis

<https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/events/past-events> no later than October 27th. Thank you, again, and we'll begin shortly.

2:14

Hello, my name is Cameron Lewis, and I would like to welcome you all to the Connecting Minority Communities Technical Assistance Webinar.

2:21

In this webinar, we will be discussing key factors in your application, so be sure to take notes and as questions present themselves, feel free to enter them into the chat box, and we will address them during the Q&A portion of the presentation.

2:33

Now, this presentation, transcript, and recording, will all be available on the BroadbandUSA website by October 27th for your review. So, feel free to take a look and while you're there, you can also watch our previous webinars under the past events tab.

2:47

Now that we have housekeeping out of the way, I would like to take a moment to introduce our speakers for today's presentation. First up, we have Scott Woods, our senior Broadband Program Specialist and CMC team lead. Pandora Beasley-Timpson, our Management and Program Analyst. Janice Wilkens, our Broadband Program Specialist, and Dr. Francine Alkisswani, our telecommunications policy analyst.

3:13

In wrapping it all up is myself, Cameron Lewis, and I have the honor of serving as your moderator. Now before we take off and get to these key factors, I would like to walk you through today's agenda.

3:25

To open our presentation, Scott will deliver a brief introduction and overview before introducing Pandora and Janice to talk about preparing a detailed budget and budget narrative. We will then see Francine and she will talk about developing a Results Framework and Human Subjects Protection. Afterwards, you will see me again for Q&A.

3:48

Now, without further ado, I would like to invite our CMC team lead Scott Woods to the screen to kick off our agenda. Scott.

Scott Woods

4:00

Good afternoon, everyone, and happy Thursday. It's my pleasure to be here with you.

4:05

I just wanted to take a few minutes and do a brief introduction and overview of today's technical assistance session, which is quite different than the technical assistance session that we presented yesterday.

4:18

So, today, we are going to present information on the budget and the budget narrative, as well as evaluation and research and data collection.

4:28

In an effort to help you, you know, fill out and submit your CMC application, we really are excited, the team is excited to continue to conduct our outreach. So, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us and schedule your 1 to 1 meeting with us. We look forward to meeting with you, look forward to hearing about all the wonderful ideas and proposals that you have. So, I just wanted to take a few minutes at the top of today's webinar, just to say, thank you for joining us. We're really excited to work with you, and we hope that this information is helpful for you to submit, successfully, your CMC application.

5:12

So with that said, I'm going to turn it over to Pandora who will start today's content. Pandora, over to you.

Pandora Beasley-Timpson

5:23

Thank you, Scott. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us as we share this important information with you.

5:29

Let's discuss budget preparation. Please note that it is essential that your budget and cost effectiveness are clearly stated in your application. Your budget will simply describe the resources you propose to use to complete the project in the time period specified by you.

5:48

Your budget must include the cost of all items needed to complete the project. Let me point out that cost sharing and matching funds are not required for this grant. However, if they are included in the budget, you the applicant, must

identify the non-federal source, for example, state funding, and distinguish non-federal and federal portions of the budget in the detailed project budget and the budget narrative.

6:18

Here are more important notes. Each grant application must contain a detailed project budget and budget narrative. The detailed project budget must be a spreadsheet, formatted at 8.5 x 11 inches. It must match the SF-424A costs categories, such as personnel, fringe benefits, supplies, etcetera.

6:43

It must include itemized calculations for each cost placed under these categories, and, lastly, it must reflect the same amount as the SF-424, and SF-424A.

6:57

The budget narrative must be a Word document, and it too should match your SF-424A cost categories. Again, personnel, fringe benefits, supplies, etcetera.

7:12

The budget narrative must explain necessity and basis for all costs, and it must reflect only allowable costs that are consistent with the project scope. Lastly, it too, should reflect the same amount as the SF-424 and SF-424A.

7:32

As a reminder, applicants are required to have a SAM.gov account. If your Sam.gov account has been updated since February 2, 2019 to include certifications, the SF-424B is not required.

7:47

The purpose of the detailed project budget is to estimate the total cost of your project. It should include a detailed estimate of all costs that you're likely to incur before the project is completed. Please remember to present these costs in an Excel format.

8:03

Here's an example of how the detailed project budget will look in a spreadsheet format. As a reminder, matching funds are not required but if they are included, they would be listed here on this spreadsheet as non-federal funds.

8:19

Next Janice Wilkins will further discuss the budget narrative. Thank you.

8:27

Thanks, Pandora. Hello, and welcome. Some may ask, what is the purpose of a budget narrative? A budget narrative serves two purposes. It explains how the costs were estimated, should justify how the budget items are necessary to implement project goals and objectives and proposed outcomes.

8:52

The budget narrative complements the information provided in the SF-424 and SF-424A. Here is an example of a budget narrative. Remember, the budget

Janice Wilkins

narrative must be on a Word document and reflect the same cost categories as on the SF-424A.

9:15

We have also provided the links to both examples on the resource page.

9:21

This slide shows a few reminders on how to present your budget narrative. Format your narrative to allow readers to easily access the cost in relation to the budget, and be certain to use the same headers in the budget narrative as you use in your budget, such as salaries, fringe benefits, and travel, et cetera.

9:49

This will allow readers to quickly skim the budget and the budget narrative to find specific items of cost.

9:58

Application Completion reminders: Remember, completing a grant application can take weeks. The application package can be downloaded from grants.gov in the form of a PDF. And progress can be saved as form fields are filled in.

10:17

These fields require everything from basic organization information to the explanation of proposed work in financial data.

10:28

When an application packet has been completed per instructions and checked for errors, it must be submitted through grants.gov. No paper submission or e-mail versions will be accepted.

10:43

These links are resources to help you prepare your budget.

10:49

Now, Dr. Francine Alkisswani will discuss the importance of results framework, and human subject protection.

Francine Alkisswani

11:05

Good morning. Good afternoon to everyone. I'm Francine Alkisswani. I am a member of the Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program Team.

11:16

Let me first thank Pandora and Janice for their presentation of the budget narrative, budget details. That will be very helpful to you as you develop your project plan.

11:27

And it leads right into the topic of evaluation.

11:32

I want to tell you or remind you first, that evaluation is an allowable expense. You're able to fund program evaluation, data collection activities, that will document best practices for replicable and sustainable programs.

11:49

Again, this means that costs for an evaluation, including that of a sub-award or contract to conduct evaluation are allowable expenses. Given that, it's also the case that project evaluation is an important five points in the review of your proposal.

12:13

Reviewers will assess the extent to which the project gathers data, and conducts an evaluation of the program activities funded by the grant to determine their effectiveness and to develop best practices to facilitate broadband connectivity, digital inclusion and broadband adoption.

12:34

It will also be useful as you prepare your progress report and your final report to NTIA. Evaluation is the means of monitoring the implementation of new programs and to make possible mid-course corrections, providing valid and reliable evidence regarding program planning, operation, and effectiveness of achieving your goals.

13:07

So, one key question for CMC evaluations will be, was the project that you proposed, indeed, implemented? So, as you prepare your Project Plan and your Program Narrative, that narrative should include a Project Results and Evaluation section that will include a description of your projects intended results.

13:33

How you plan to evaluate the benefits of that project, description of performance measures that will be used to evaluate the project's success and the benefits delivered to the project beneficiaries and the proposed metrics planned collection and other evaluation methodologies.

13:53

This means you have to be intentional and deliberate as you define and state your project goals, and to think about how you are going to operationalize it.

14:07

That is, to put them in terms whereby you can collect data to show evidence that the project you have developed has indeed been implemented. But by then, you can help to determine success and benefits that you have delivered and that you have delivered them to your intended beneficiaries, whether this is solely developed and designed to provide Internet, the services on your campus, and whether or not you are partnering with minority business enterprise or a 501c3 or both, to provide services to communities in those designated census tracts. And whether or not what you intended to do in those communities was, in fact, delivered. And that you can assess the extent to which you have delivered those services.

15:11

So, how you define and write your project plan will help determine what kind of metrics you will use, what kind of data collection and other evaluation methodologies you will use.

15:26

So, what is evaluation? I think we've made it pretty clear, but just to summarize, it is this systematic analysis of data and information related to your work. First of all, it's the systematic collection of those data and the analysis of those data.

15:46

It's a tool. It's a tool for helping you with program planning, implementation, and ongoing management. That means that it's not an afterthought. Program evaluation should be an integral part of your program plan. And begin with day one.

16:06

It's a means of monitoring your implementation. It's a continuous information feedback loop, is one way to think about it. It will allow for mid-course corrections. And it provides evidence regarding implementation operations, and effectiveness of achieving your goals. Now it might seem like we are being redundant here, but we want to make sure that those points are embedded in your mind as you plan your project, as you write your program narrative.

16:42

So, what is an evaluation plan? This is a narrative description of how and why a program is expected to work.

16:51

Components, very simple. The context of the problem, or statement of desired change. You're going to state the problem that you want to solve, and you're going to state what change you'd like to have take place as a result of implementing that problem that you've identified, and the methods for solving that problem.

17:13

You're going to state the goals and results needed to achieve that change, that end state. And the other final component is project interventions.

17:25

What are the interventions you have identified the need to drive that change? And Evaluation Plan is a results framework. In creating your framework, we want you to remember to answer these questions: First, what's the problem statement. What is the challenge that the project is designed to address?

17:47

Sounds familiar? It is.

17:51

What does your project seek to accomplish? Those are your goals. What are the project objectives? What are the drivers of change to further those project

goals? What is the project doing to achieve each objective and how will success be measured? What you have here is a chart, a logic model. I'm sure many of you have seen it.

18:18

It looks as though it's a linear process, but I'd like to underscore the fact that it is not. All of those arrow's turning back are meant to indicate that this is a continuous feedback process.

18:36

As it says along the bottom there, we are going to focus on all the things I've identified previously, you're going to collect data, going to analyze those data, and interpret them and develop a report.

18:52

So let's start at the beginning. Please review your proposal and the goals specified. Ask what will be necessary to show that they have been achieved. What data must be collected to show evidence that the goals are being achieved or have been achieved? And how will I collect the requisite data and document necessary characteristics and program implementation?

19:23

Well, if you're starting from the very beginning of your project plan, you will have identified the situation, you have done your needs assessment. You will have identified what's the problem you want to solve, or what is the current state of affairs that you want to change.

19:43

And who are the stakeholders, who are the target populations, whether it's your campus faculty, whether it's your students, whether it's the community that is surrounding your anchor institution.

20:00

So, you establish what those priorities are, and you will consider your mission, your resources, who your collaborators are and this is even who your competitors are, and what the intended outcomes might be. Now that means you really need documentation, I'm still in this blue box. You want to document, document, document.

20:29

Documentation is critical. One must gather baseline data for characteristics of partners, the characteristics of your end users, and the characteristics of the target population. A clear definition of the problem, the demographics of the community, other data essential to planning. You need to identify questions for monitoring.

20:57

Are the end users a target population? Namely those intended to be served. Are they receiving the services proposed? Are the services that you have proposed actually being delivered? Is the technology appropriate to the task? And is the

technology usable? Is your staffing adequate? Those are all very critical elements of this.

21:28

All of that determines where you will have identified your inputs. Namely, what have you invested? Have you documented, and make clear what your research base is, what the equipment is, what the technology, what the partners are. And all of that should feed into, what the activities are that you've identified, and who the participants are.

21:52

As identified here, green box. You're going to clearly state what the activities are. What are you going to do? Are you going to train folks? Are you going to install equipment? Are you going to expand broadband deployment on your campus?

22:10

Who do you intend to reach? Who are going to be the recipient of your services? And that leads to making the case for evaluability of your project.

22:24

We're talking about a two-year project, three years max. We know that that is not likely a sufficient time to have long term outcomes, to assess impact, but it is sufficient to be able to identify what your short-term impact has been. Those results that you can report on what has happened based on that blue box, what you've done.

22:56

Along the way, all of these elements; your inputs at each stage, your outputs, should be assessed and provide real, near, real time feedback to you for continuous monitoring of your project.

23:17

So, in sum, a lot of words. At the bottom line is, evaluation is a tool for near real-time feedback, for continuous program improvement. That, at heart, is what it is all about, but there's also another element.

23:39

Your program evaluations will also provide the agency, NTIA, our management, with information that will help us know whether or not we have done our job and whether or not Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program has met its goals. Feedback from you, from your evaluations, will allow us to determine what are the necessary changes to any such program. What would improve it.

24:15

How can we make it better so that we better serve minority communities and provide avenues for connecting minority communities.

24:28

Shifting gears once more, we have evaluation, and all evaluation that's funded by the federal government must go through a Human Subjects Protection

review. So, what we want to know is whether or not, or what you want to know, is whether or not your pilot program project is indeed research.

24:53

Where does your plan fall within the Human Subjects Protection Framework? When creating your Project Framework, your evaluation plan, we want you to think about whether the project is research based, it most likely is not a research project.

25:14

Most CMC project evaluations will be formative evaluations that will use tools such as needs assessments, evaluability assessments, and implementation or other process evaluations. So, we'll put this in the category of non-human subjects research.

25:38

So, any project that does not involve research, a human subject, or a clinical investigation, is non-human subject research.

25:49

Projects that involve quality improvement, case reports, program evaluation, may not be considered human subjects research, so long as that project does not involve a systematic investigation designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge.

26:10

So, what are the expectations when conducting a project that is non-human subjects research? Simply means that each of you and your evaluation team are expected to adhere to ethical principles for non-human subject research projects. Including, when appropriate, informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality protections, and sound design and procedures.

26:39

Now, before moving to our final slides, I'd like to step back just one moment and clarify what we mean about formative evaluations and those tools. Just to better help you understand where most of your evaluation plans will fall.

27:02

So formative assessments have as their goal to monitor implementation, to provide ongoing feedback can be used to improve and make mid-course corrections, to identify and address problems, barriers, and constraints.

27:22

Every point along the way of your project implementation is an opportunity for monitoring, for stepping back and doing process improvement as needed. You should implement your findings in order to improve or make recommendations for the improvement of post projects. Now, a needs assessment is one tool of formative evaluation, is a systematic process for determining addressing the needs of the gaps between the current condition and the desire condition or state of affairs. That discrepancy between the correct condition, and the wanted condition must be measured to appropriately identify the need.

28:09

Think blue box in our logic model. An example might be assessment of current campus Internet service, current capacity of students to assess online learning, the knowledge base of IT staff, and personnel. An evaluability assessment is a systematic process that helps identify whether your program evaluation is justified, if your evaluation plan is feasible, if the project you've planned is feasible, and likely to provide useful information.

28:46

It involves a systematic assessment of quality and logic of the project's plan and basis for intervention. It's a link to the project's monitoring framework and the identification of potential evidence gaps.

29:02

Finally, what's the process for implementation evaluation? It's going to determine whether your program activities have implemented it.

29:12

You can't assess, you can't do an outcomes assessment if your project activities have not been fully implemented as intended.

29:22

But your report will state why the project was not implemented, what the barriers and constraints were that you encountered, how you attempted to solve those, and what would be done differently, if you are starting over.

29:39

To put that simply, the focus of an evaluation of the implementation process is one of the types and quantities of policies and interventions delivered.

29:52

Whereas, it is, I'm sorry, an assessment on the types and the quantities of policies and interventions delivered. The beneficiaries of those policies and intervention, the resources used to deliver those policies and interventions and the practical problems encountered and the ways in which such problems where we sound.

30:14

So, I hope that has given you fairly good overview and information that will help you determine how often develop your project evaluation plans and how to look at it from the standpoint of whether or where you fall within human subjects protection framework.

30:34

Our final points pertain to a summary of the fact that the Department of Commerce has human subjects research requirements. First of all, all grant recipients must comply with the Department's regulations relating to the protection of human subjects for all research conducted or support it with grant funds.

30:58

I hope our previous treatment of what is human subjects research or non-human subjects research, and what the types of evaluation processes are will help you address that.

31:12

NTIA is required to make a determination of whether or not the project Evaluation Plan meets the definition of human subjects research. Again, I've tried to cover that topic for you and hope that has been helpful.

31:27

And, finally, the thing you probably want most to take away from this, no work involving human subjects may be undertaken, conducted, or any costs incurred or charges made for human subjects research, until the appropriate documentation is approved in writing by the Grants Officer.

31:51

That means you may not incur costs for human subjects research, but you must also make plain and provide documentation, that is approved in writing Grants office that evaluation is not involving human subjects, that it is not research.

32:14

So, all conditions must be met, documentation provided, and approval given in writing from a grants officer before you may undertake the research or charge any costs to your grant for research.

32:34

If you have any remaining questions on this or thoughts that need to be clarified, you may go to these sites for additional information. The guidance and further explanations will be posted to the NTIA website. Thank you for your time, for your attention.

32:56

I think we'll now turn this back over to Cam Lewis for the question and answer period. Thank you so much.

Scott Woods

33:13

Good afternoon, everyone. I am Cam Lewis and I am here to facilitate the Question and Answer session for today, and the word of the day is upgrade! Just joking. Internal team break. I am a joke. I'm taking over for Cam today to facilitate our question and answer session for today.

33:39

I'd ask the panelists to come on video as we get ready to address some of the questions that we received. I'll start by thanking everyone for your questions. We've really gotten really good questions in the chat and e-mail so thank you very much.

33:58

I'm gonna start with the first question Ming, to you, the grants office question. And the question is: Are indirect cost agreements allowable for sub awards? If

so, does the institution or the applicant need to submit an IDC agreement for all sub awards as an attachment with the application?

Ming Qiu

34:20

Thank you for that question. There are two parts of that question there, right?

34:25

First part is, indirect cost is allowable for sub awards. The answer is yes. indirect cost is allowable for sub awards, according to the proof rate of the sub recipient. And, the second part is that we are not requesting the sub award indirect cost rate to be submitted as part of the award package.

34:46

However, documentation is necessary for the prime recipient of the prime organization, um, if they are requesting indirect cost rate. So, the prime recipient has to verify their rate and make sure that, you know, the cost included in this sub award budget is calculated in accordance, what the indirect cost rate this approved for the sub recipient.

35:12

So we need the base and calculation only, and itemization, along with the rest of the sub budgets.

35:20

So we do not require that as part of the proposal package or submitted the NTIA and NIST's office.

Scott Woods

35:31

Thank you. Ming, we have another question for you. This is about the entering the application information into the SF-424.

35:41

The question is: they try entering the full NTIA broadband connectivity grant program, 2011 in the CD 511, but it doesn't fit and I know we've issued guidance on this. But the question is, can we abbreviate and Ming I'll let you answer and address that question?

Ming Qiu

35:59

Sure. Yeah. So, I think, you know, even within the, the other program that we had with NTIA, we experienced the same issue. So, there's a limited space that you can enter in that section.

36:12

So, we acknowledge that the full funding opportunity number does not fit within the application field in the CD 511. So, the applicant can, you know, should either type out as much as the NOFO name, as they can until the field is completely filled, or you can use the abbreviation of NTIA-CMCP-2021. So, you can use the abbreviation or the NOFO number, or you can type out in the full name, until you fill out the space.

36:53

Scott Woods

Thank you very much for being our go to the next question. And this question is for Francine. Alright. The question is: Can you speak to the role of the evaluator and stress to support project success?

37:08

Does the evaluator need to have expertise in broadband networking or related projects? Or is that expertise in grant project evaluation closer to the evaluator's role for this grant award?

Francine Alkisswani

37:24

Thank you for the question. I would say the evaluator does not need to have expertise in broadband networking, but it is essential for the evaluator to have experience in evaluation and knows your project very well. That's why it's really important. The role of evaluator is a part of your project planning, and a part of your project implementation. The closer the evaluator knows and understands and is familiar with your Project Implementation Plan, the more likely your evaluation plan will be an effective one and one that addresses the needs of your project.

38:10

Working with the Project Planning team allows the evaluator to help establish those baseline data that are required, and to ensure that the evaluation questions and data collection plan are mapped to that project plan.

Scott Woods

38:26

Thank you.

38:28

OK, next question here, the next question is: Can you provide some examples of eligible free award costs, and I know, in the NOFO, we provided some examples of allowable costs and allowable activities. And I guess this question is, can we provide some additional examples of those pre award costs? And I'm going to address this to Emy, can you address this question?

Emy Tseng

38:54

So, examples of eligible pre award costs may include staff and consulting expenses, directly related to preparing the application. Also costs related to planning and associated analysis that you would have to do to determine what technology you might want to apply for, and what training programs you might want to implement, as well as expensive to gathering, supporting data.

39:27

Scott Woods

Thank you very much.

39:30

The next question is, can CMC funding be used to support the development of a mesh network within an anchor community?

39:38

You know, and I'll take that because we've talked about yesterday, we talked a lot about construction and what's allowable. You know, generally, you know, the CMC program, you know, does not allow for development or construction or

expansion of any type of broadband networking into the community. I know that's been somewhat of a source of confusion.

40:01

You can do broadband services, utilizing existing services, utilizing an existing service provider, but CMC funds cannot be used to, you know, to develop, to build, or expand any additional infrastructure. Now, if you are extending campus infrastructure to cover a neighborhood area around the school, and that school qualifies as an anchor community under the guidelines, I ask that you contact us. Let's walk through that again, because there are certain nuances with the consortia eligibility, if that's going to contain an MBE or a tax exempt 501C3 organization. So again, I encourage you to contact our program team, let's walk through that, but as a general matter, the funding cannot be used to support the development or expansion of mesh networks or broadband networks within the surrounding anchor community.

41:00

In addition to that, I think we've addressed this in the last FAQ 3 that's been posted on the CMC website, so thank you for that. Thank you for that question.

41:12

Kevin Hughes

But, Scott, if I could just jump in on that one really quickly. While they, you know, it's sort of complicated for them to try to do it outside of the university or the college campus, they are able to utilize a mesh network on the college campus.

41:33

Scott Woods

That's correct, the question was specifically for the anchor community, on the campus community.

Kevin Hughes

That is exactly, I just wanted to make sure that they were clear on that. But, yes, thank you.

41:47

Scott Woods

Next question, Are IT related infrastructure costs? And the question is specifically beyond broadband equipment permitted. For example, our virtual machines for computer science students that are working remotely are those allowable equipment costs, and I'll shoot that over to Emy as well. Emy, can you address that?

42:10

Emy Tseng

Sure, so equipment and technology related to promote and remote learning are allowable costs. So these are eligible costs. So it's not just the basic broadband equipment like laptops, but it is software, hardware, different types of applications related to remote learning. Thank you very much.

42:37

Scott Woods

Very good answer to that question. Next, these questions are coming in, so excuse me, I'm scrolling through and trying to facilitate at the same time. The question is: Does NTIA use evaluation as synonymous with assessment?

42:55

I will throw that over to Francine.

42:59

Francine Alkisswani

Thank you. Not exactly, no. There are different types of assessments that are under the rubric evaluation, such as a needs assessment. So evaluation is a term broader than that of assessment.

43:27

Scott Woods

The next question we have is, I think this is referring to an indirect cost agreement, but it states that, their campus or this institution has a policy to claim 48% of received grant awards. Would this be allowable as a line item? And what is the best way to incorporate these costs into the grant, if possible?

43:51

And I'm going to shoot that over for Ming, but if I can extrapolate that question a little bit, I'm assuming that the institution has a negotiated indirect cost agreement, and that percentage is 48%. Again, if that is indeed the case, Ming, I will throw that over to you to answer within that context.

Ming Qiu

44:12

Sure. It's not 100% clear to me. I think, what assumption is there, if they have an approved indirect cost rate agreement. I mean, there's no restrictions from the CMC program that they are not allowed to charge indirect cost rate. So therefore if they have an approved indirect cost rate, they are allowed to allocate that cost to the sub award. In terms of where they put it, I'm assuming from the indirect or from the sub recipient budget or from the main, what budget for the main budget? It will be, just a sub award costs total reflected on the main budget from the applicant. But in the detail narrative that needs to be explained, know, the costs associated with the sub award.

45:10

Scott Woods

Thank you, Ming. Here's another question regarding sort of an assessment and evaluation. And the question is: Is there a requirement to assess the performance of equipment purchased for a project?

45:24

I can take that.

45:25

Generally, no, We're not asking any of our recipients to assess the performance of the equipment, but rather of the performance of the program as a whole, as it relates to your target: you know, student body, or the target student or community group of your proposal or project.

45:49

And I'll kick the second part over to Francine: just to confirm that again. Francine, when you are talking about evaluation, we're not talking about the evaluation of the equipment that's purchased, the performance of that equipment, but more so the outcome and the impact of the CMC program project or source of the application. Is that correct?

46:11

Francine Alkisswani

I would agree with you. Yes, that is correct. An exception might be whether or not the particular equipment, or software met the needs of the proposed project. I think that would, that would be a difference.

46:31

So that you would want to know if, if, in fact, it did not meet the need, then you would want to be able to make that correction or make some adjustment there. But, otherwise, I totally agree with your answer, yes.

Scott Woods

46:46

Next question, regarding allowable activities. It says it allowable to provide support, such as technology, like computers to students at eligible institutions who do not live in the anchor communities, right?

47:03

We are, in this instance, they put context on it. We are planning to prioritize students from anchor communities, but our college also serves low-income students who are not living in anchor communities. So, I'm assuming they're talking about their college students, their student body, students who attend the college.

47:23

Emy, I'll let you take that question.

47:26

Emy Tseng

And I know that this is somewhat of a source of confusion, because we dealt with several of these questions yesterday. So, there's a difference between the projects that serve an eligible institution that serve your own students and your own faculty and build the capacity of your institution. You are allowed to serve your students while prioritizing the students most in need. And that is not subject to the geographical constraints, that anchor communities.

48:01

However, if you have a consortia, if you are applying as a consortia, and are proposing to serve people who are not necessarily students and anchor communities, then you'd have to basically follow the anchor community rule. But if you're an eligible institution, you are able to serve your student body, no matter where they might reside.

48:27

And, again, with the with the caveat that that the program does require a prioritization of low-income students, students in need.

48:40

Scott Woods

Thank you. Another question for you, Emy. Are projects related to improving access to health care using technology and underserved communities? Is that allowed as a potential or possible project?

48:55

Emy Tseng

That is allowed, depending on, this is actually where the definition of the constraints around anchor communities would have to apply. So, there can be training programs that can be, for example, an equipment program to allow

more remote health access in anchor communities, is if you're, again, seeking to reach. reach folks that are outside your enrolled students. But, yes, generally, yes, but it depends on the detailed, the aim of the eligibility around a consortia.

49:40

Scott Woods

Thank you. We have another question for Francine. This is for you, your topic and evaluation is hot and heavy right now. The question is, do you recommend we hire an external evaluator, and are they expected to come on site? Or can they conduct evaluation activities remotely.

50:05

Francine Alkisswani

That's an interesting question. Typically, the rule of thumb is you want a disinterested, not uninterested third party to serve as your evaluator.

50:18

However, I think it has showing through past projects, whether it was BTOP or the Technology Opportunities Program, that that evaluator does not have to be external. It may be a part of your team, as long as there is that distance, is kept there. So, I would not say that that you have to hire an external evaluator and what was the other part of the question? Scott? Sorry.

50:54

Scott Woods

No that was it. It was just whether that generally, the evaluators don't have to be on site. They can do work remotely, so that was the other part of it. Yes, I noticed that a great deal of the one.

51:06

Francine Alkisswani

You know, so much of our work is done remotely these days, and there are many virtual evaluation teams and research teams. So, I think that would have to depend on scope and depth of the evaluation that you're planning. For example, it would be, people are holding virtual focus group sessions.

51:29

Scott Woods

Whether or not you require on-site inspection of whether you want to observe any particular group, But for the most part, a great deal of what you do can be done virtually. We're all working in virtual teams, such as all of us here today. Yeah, it's a good example. So yes, I think you could do that very nicely.

51:56

Thank you very much. Next question, Kevin, we will put you on the spot. The question is, if projects are more than \$3 million, will the proposal be rejected?

52:09

Kevin Hughes

No, there is no cap on the CMC grant. All applicants are free to apply for any amount of funding that they wish. However, our grant has \$268 million available that we need to maximize all across America and all across its territories.

52:33

So we ask that you exercise good judgement. But no, there is no cap on the CMC grant with regards to an applicant's request for funding.

52:47

Scott Woods

Absolutely. And if I can follow up on that as well, because we addressed this several times. And I know it's in the NOFO, we put the range of an estimated range, of \$500,000 to \$3 million. But also, there's a caveat language after that, that says, it's not a mandatory minimum or maximum. However, any project above that \$3 million threshold, we just asked for additional details, and context for that.

53:13

And as Kevin said, you know, we're asking everyone to be reasonable, right, we understand, and I'm going to make this this case as often as I can, we understand that the need out there greatly, greatly, greatly is more than the money that we have in this pilot program, but we want to make sure that we can efficiently and effectively fund as many projects as we possibly can, obviously, within the statutory guidelines and adherence to the statutory purposes. And so, we're asking folks, you know, again, the idea is reasonableness. You know, let's be reasonable. You can come in with a request for \$30 million. That is, well within your rights to do with the proper justification and documentation, you know. But again, we ask that you think about, we only have \$268 million and we do understand that this need is great within, you know, all of our institutions of higher education. And we do appreciate you adhering to that standard of reasonableness, so thank you.

54:24

All right next question. The question is can you repeat where the clarification on mesh networks where that was posted at?

54:34

Yes, so I think we addressed that in the last September webinar.

54:38

We also addressed that in an FAQ, I believe, FAQ 3 as well, and we'll actually answer that in our frequently asked questions on September 27th, 2021. And that is available on a link on our website. A more full answer is available in the FAQ on September 27th, 2021. And again, that is available as a link access on the CMC website.

55:11

Next question in terms of for eligible applicants. The question is, may an eligible university submit separate applications for extension of a school's network as part of a consortium, and also submit a funding request for distance and remote learning equipment?

55:31

Emy, I'm gonna throw that interesting curve ball to you. We've dealt with this question.

55:39

Emy Tseng

I think there are two aspects of this question. One is: Can an institution be part of two separate applications, and that is no. So, an eligible institution needs to only submit one application. However, you can have dual roles and different projects underneath the same application. So, say, for example, you want to

serve as the lead applicant for a consortia, as well as to do things that build your own on-campus or distance learning capacity.

56:21

You can do, do those 2 different focused activities, but you have to do it under one application.

56:31

The issue, in this specific question, around extension of a school network, I think that's what Scott was just addressing, which is the network. It depends on whether the network is really on campus or off campus. So, I'm assuming that if you're talking about consortia, are proposing an off-campus network, which, in that case, would not be allowable.

57:01

Thank you.

57:02

Scott Woods

Another question, and this is for Kevin. Can a university partner with a for-profit online education provider launch remote learning programs?

57:15

Kevin Hughes

Yes. A university can partner with a, a non-profit organization. For that type of training. That's absolutely allowable. Yes.

57:28

Scott Woods

And just as a follow up to that, we addressed that somewhat a similar question. In the last webinar, in the FAQ three. Again, it is the lead applicant's responsibility to understand the relationship between sub recipient and vendors. We included on our FAQ, and in the NOFO References to that governing CFR that cover sub recipients and vendors. We just ask that you review that, and, again, when filling out the application, you know, you have to document all of your unfunded and funded collaborators and partners in the project. So, again, just note that.

58:12

All right, these questions are coming in. Here we go, another question. Let me see. Scrolling through and make sure we can get a vast sample questions. Here we go, here.

58:32

Here's a question for the group, are there preferences on systems used for collaboration ie. there are free Google Works spaces that are available and are those preferable because they are free as opposed to the alternatives which may cost money?

58:49

Emy, I will let you address that question.

58:55

Emy Tseng

Sure, it's really up to what you all decide is best suited for your students of for your community project. So things like, what software you choose, what

learning management platform. That is really up to your choice and your analysis as to what best fits your own campus needs.

59:20

Scott Woods

And, Emy, while you're up, I'm going to ask you a follow up question from a previous question regarding the use of equipment. And the question is: If we issue a request to purchase virtual machines to enable distance learning, Is it also permissible or allowable to hire someone to manage those virtual machines if the institution does not currently have that capacity.

59:45

Emy Tseng

Yes, we do. We do support building the IT capacity in multiple ways, including contractors and staff, and also professional development of your own staff. If you choose to do so. So yes, we do believe that technology is not, can't be operated solely that there actually has to be trained personnel to support and maintain the equipment and technology.

1:00:15

Scott Woods

These are great questions everyone. Really do appreciate the time and the thought that you've put into these questions. Francine. Have another question regarding evaluation. I'm going to address this to you. It says, does the project have to have an evaluation, If there is no human subject research?

1:00:33

Francine Alkisswani

Well, yes, the NOFO requires an evaluation plan and I think it's 5% or associated with that, that element of your project plan. So, yes, an evaluation is required, and I want you to look very carefully at the NOFO and that section of the NOFO, And be sure that you, you do include a very good evaluation plan.

1:01:07

The simple answer is yes.

1:01:10

Scott Woods

Thank you. I'll just take this next question.

1:01:15

It says, does the NTIA or CMC, I'm assuming, show preference or deference to specific equipment selected for hotspots?

1:01:26

It raises an interesting question regarding the use of hotspots. I don't know if you are aware that there's a, know, buy American requirement in a lot of the telecommunications space, but we don't show preference or deference to know any specific equipment. Unless, again, this is a note.

1:01:46

You have to note this unless that equipment or the manufacturer is on the disbarment or barred list and you will provide additional guidance as we move forward into the approval process and the grant making process regarding special award conditions, regarding that. So, again, we don't show preference. However, the federal government does recognize and will not allow certain manufactured equipment to be purchased or to be used by federal

government, federal government funds, federal grant award. So, stay tuned for more detailed guidance on that.

1:02:34

Next question. This is under the topic of consortia. The question is, if we partner with a local government, or non-profit for IT internships, but no funds go to the entity, must we form a consortia or can we submit as a single institution? Those internship funds will go directly to students.

1:02:58

Emy, that's an interesting question. I think I'm going to see if you can if we can tag team on the answer on this one.

Emy Tseng

1:03:06

I guess it depends. I mean, if you are to provide direct, pay the stipend. For example, to the student, then I don't see that. And then so you are you are implementing a program, you issue the stipends and then you basically place student interns in different in local government, different institutions. That to me seems like it would not have to involve a consortia.

1:03:36

But then I'll, Scott, do you want to elaborate what cases may need to involve a consortia?

Scott Woods

1:03:46

Yeah, I think that as a CMC team we understand that the use of consortia in universities and grants generally is a little bit different, and I'll call to the attention of everyone the consortia eligibility requirements for this particular program is actually set out in the NOFO. So if you want to submit a consortia eligibility application specifically to the CMC pilot program, you have to adhere to the requirement as outlined in the NOFO and that's including a (unintelligible) or a tax-exempt 501C3 organization. To the extent, in this example, lets use a partnership. If your partnering with a local government or non-profit, you know, you have to have letters of commitment, you have to take on funding collaborators, and list the informal, unfunded collaborators. So again, if you have any questions about that, contact us and we can walk you through that. We understand that there is some confusion with respect to this notion of consortia as it relates to how that term or phrase is generally used when you're partnering with another entity, and specifically a consortia application for the CMC program, which directly relates to the eligibility for the CMC pilot program. So again, please feel free to contact us and we can walk you through that nuance there to ensure that you are making the right application decision for that project.

1:05:30

Alright we're coming up close to time. We have a couple more questions. Kevin, this one is for you, this is a response to an answer that we provided earlier. And the question is, can we as an institution support the implementation of broadband access in a neighboring anchor community neighborhood?

Kevin Hughes

Yes, that question, I believe, we answered a little bit earlier on with regards to providing connectivity into the neighborhood. We're not, the CMC grant does not facilitate, or does not allow for a blanket approach to providing connectivity to a neighborhood or community, for example. So, for those types of situations, if you are desirous in doing something like that, the best course of action is to reach out to us directly.

1:06:55

And we realize that there are a lot of you that are very interested in connectivity as well. We should. That's why we're here to address the digital divide and to serve those that are unserved and underserved. But we must adhere to the parameters of the CMC grant and the NOFO in terms of what we can do and what is allowable.

1:07:18

So, we want to always bring your focus back to, as much as possible, the university, and taking care of the students and addressing the greatest unmet financial need amongst your student population by utilizing the broadband connectivity, equipment, or the IT personnel, all three of which you can take care of with the grant.

1:07:42

So, if you're interested in providing connectivity into the community, again, your best bet is to contact us directly, and we'll talk you through the process and see, you know, what can be done in your specific situation.

1:08:01

Scott Woods

Thank you, Kevin. We have time just for a few more questions. We have a question on the budget, so I want to address this question to either Pandora or Janice. The question is: is tuition an eligible expense, or must budgets be structured to cover the costs of the training.

1:08:23

Janice Wilkins

Sorry Scott, I couldn't hear you. So, where are you reading from that and can read it myself?

1:08:32

Scott Woods

So the question asks, is tuition an eligible expense, or must budgets be structured to cover the costs of the training. I can take the first part because I know that generally tuition is not an eligible expense.

Emy Tseng

1:08:46

Scott. sorry to interrupt, but your audio isn't working. We're having a hard time hearing you or understanding you. Let me see if I can find the question.

1:09:05

OK, that is tuition, an eligible expense, or must budget be structured to cover the cost of training, I think that yeah, was that the question you just asked?

Janice Wilkins

1:09:28

But to answer that question as, a whole, on training has to be incorporated in the 424 A., simply put.

1:09:44

OK.

Emy Tseng

1:09:47

I have another, Can a cybersecurity training non-profit partner with more than one institution on the grants. And I think there is another question similar to that.

1:09:59

So, a non-profit can, can participate in multiple, um, multiple applications. So, you don't have to be restricted to one application, but again, an eligible institution, the primary recipient can only be in one application.

1:10:26

Let me see what else is here. Um, let's see, another question is: If multiple departments within our college are going to work together to administer a program, do we need letters of commitment from each department? Is that still considered a single institution application? and I guess I'll answer that. Yes, if you are from the same institution, then you would, you consider the same entity, and you would need one letter of commitment, and you would apply together.

1:12:13

OK, there is a question about tribal lands. Does a tribal reservation automatically qualify as an anchor community if the reservation itself meets the 250% median poverty rate requirement?

1:12:34

And, yeah, so, there are different rules for how we define anchor communities in tribal lands. And, so, therefore, the whole reservation would be considered an anchor community.

1:12:56

Francine Alkisswani

Emy, one question is: Is tuition an eligible expense? Or must budgets be structured to cover the cost of training. That was an interesting question.

1:13:08

Emy Tseng

Right, and I guess my, my question is, I would like to understand what they mean, because my, my sense is that it would be the cost of the training itself, unless, like, there was something like a stipend and or some type of fellowship related to some type of a technology training program, or such, but not necessarily the tuition itself.

Francine Alkisswani

No tuition reimbursement, right.

1:14:00

Here's one question. I'll help you read them. I don't know who's going to answer this. Can a Consortium application contain, I don't think we've answered this,

contain multiple HBCUs, TCUs and MSIs? Can a consortium be across those categories? And may more than one of any of those collaborate on a project for a consortium application?

1:14:31

As an interesting question, I'm going to add one part of that. One of those would have to be the lead institution, right? But are any and all schools allowed to collaborate on other projects, so long as they're not receiving funds, can they be collaborating partners on projects?

Emy Tseng

1:14:57

We don't put restrictions on collaborating projects, supporting projects if they don't receive funds, however, we do have, according to our FAQ, if multiple schools can collaborate with a lead HBCU, TCU or MSI to propose a project, but then the following consortia, or requirements for the application do apply around to conducting activities within the anchor communities, as well as being listed as sub recipient.

1:15:49

Kevin Hughes

The other thing I wanted to mention really quickly with regards to what you both said, Francine and Emy, obviously just to punctuate for those who are on the call with us today, that the key applicant or the lead applicant submitting an application for the CMC grant must be a university or college, OK?

1:16:10

Again, if you are submitting an application for the CMC grant, the lead applicant, the persons of the entity submitting the application, must be a college or university.

1:16:22

Additionally, you must also be careful as a college or university, that if you are receiving other federal funds, for services that you intend to request under the CMC grant, that that is not allowable.

1:16:43

OK, so, you, in other words, you can be receiving funding for, let's say, laptops or tablets under another federal program and then request that same laptops or tablets under CMC funding, that is not allowable. So, I just wanted to just draw that out really quickly.

1:17:06

Emy Tseng

OK, great actually, can we go on, are there any last comments or last issues amongst the panelists that you would like to address?

OK, so Francine, why don't you go for it.

Francine Alkisswani

OK, I'd just like to say, if anyone would like to discuss an evaluation plan, or you'd like feedback, I'm happy to do so, and I think others of our team would also be willing to do so. I'm not the only one you can talk to about your evaluation plan.

1:17:47

Ming, are there any last words? I would like to say.

Ming Qiu

1:17:51

There was a question kind of regarding to the application button in grants.gov, so I can maybe adjust that question there.

1:18:07

The question was, was that, when they searched NTIA CMC PP2021 on grants.gov, the apply button is not, is unavailable for that person. We verify and the Apply button in grants.gov appears to be active, and it is working.

1:18:28

So, I think, you know, my recommendation is that contact grants.gov helpdesk by e-mail at support@grant.gov, or call them by phone, 1 800-518-4726. It appears to us it's working, so you may want to contact grant.gov to resolve the issue.

1:18:51

Then I want to just thank everyone for participating in today's webinar.

Emy Tseng

1:18:58

Janice, are there any words of advice that you would like to give?

Janice Wilkins

1:19:02

Sure. Just to sum up that training, the training in a budget. And I just want to just, you know, reiterate, so yes, put it on the 424A, as well as your detailed budget and your narrative.

All right.

Emy Tseng

1:19:35

Pandora would you like to say anything, particularly about merit review?

1:19:42

I think you are Muted.

Pandora Beasley-Timpson

1:19:48

Yeah, I do not want to focus on merit review, but I do want to reflect on budget preparation and really drive home the fact that budget details and cost effectiveness has to be clear. And we want to applicants to really take time to describe the resources and the cost of items that they will use. And thank you everyone for joining us today.

Kevin Hughes

1:20:16

Yes, I just wanted to mention that, if there's anyone on the call here today that would like an opportunity for a one-on-one meeting with the CMC team and its members, all you have to do is reach out to us. At the end of the webinar, there'll be a slide with our contact information and we'll be happy to talk to you and answer any questions that you have.

1:20:44

The CMC, grant represents an awesome opportunity for universities and colleges all across America and its territories to gain funding for broadband

connectivity, equipment, and IT support. And I urge you to take advantage of this. I want to reach out, especially to those community colleges, those smaller colleges.

1:21:05

We know that you're out there, and we know that you need funding. This is a great opportunity to receive that, and there's no match required. I'm very passionate about this grant, as I hope you are, based on this opportunity that it is awaiting you. The application window for the grant is open.

1:21:25

So if you are ready, you can move forward and go to [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and apply for the CMC grant when you are ready.

1:21:34

And again, please check the NOFO to make sure that you stay in line with the requirements of the NOFO as it pertains to your specific application. And again, I want to thank all of you for participating here on this webinar today. Thank you.

1:21:52

Emy Tseng

Much as I would love to end on that note because of a very eloquent ending, I do want to address a couple last questions that did come in. One is our non-credit workforce training participants considered eligible student or a comprehensive community college. And if they are students of your community college, we don't distinguish between credit and non-credit and credit. They are your students. And then there was, again, that question about if tuition is not reimbursable can residence in low-income communities have minimal fees covered for enrolling in a course. The cost of actually implementing the course are, are eligible expenses. If you choose to use the funds to implement, to hire staffing, again, purchase equipment, to actually implement the course, those are eligible, and then you would have the freedom to charge minimally or not at all to qualifying students or community participants.

1:23:06

So, with that, I will leave it up, well, let's see if Scott is. Able to uh...

Kevin Hughes

1:23:15

You want to take it out?

Scott Woods

1:23:18

I'll try. Do I sound like I'm underwater? No? Thank you very much everyone. You see why we are such a fantastic team?

1:23:28

We're surrounded by just excellent professionals and so, you are indeed in good hands. I will just re-iterate what everyone has said, please contact us. We have one more planned webinar session for November. It's going to be in mid-November. That's coming up.

1:23:47

It's going to be, I believe, on the 17th and the 18th of November.

1:23:53

We will put out notice, we're going to do an open Q and A, technical assistance. We're going to ask and answer questions, We're going do last-minute preparations for you to submit your application to the CMC Pilot program. We're going to address the FAQs by then, we'll have, I believe, 4 or 5 rounds of FAQs that will be posted on our website. So, we're going to wrap everything up on the 17th and 18th with this wonderful group.

1:24:21

We're going to be here to answer your questions, to ensure that you get your applications in prior to the December 1 deadline application deadline.

1:24:31

So, thank you all for, we can go to the final slide. Thank you all for joining us today. Thank you for the great questions, again, link to our CMC webpage, contact us at our Broadband SA e-mail address. You know, again, visit the Anchor Community Dashboard. And, again, if you need any other additional context, our indicators of broadband need map, is also available. That provides some context of connectivity around your school or in your community. So, on behalf of the CMC team here, this wonderful rockstar team, we thank you very much for joining us. And, again, we look forward to helping you, talking to you, working through whatever issues or questions you may have here, as we roll through the application date, the deadline of December 1. So, thank you to the team here, on the call, on the video screen, the team that's behind the scenes that you don't see, and, most importantly, thank you for attending, for joining us today, and we look forward to our continued work and engagement.