OFFICE OF STATEWIDE BROADBAND

Connect Maryland:

FY22 Maryland Emergency Education Relief Grant Program

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

Issued April 20, 2022

LARRY HOGAN
Governor

BOYD K. RUTHERFORD
Lt. Governor

KENNETH C. HOLT
Secretary

OWEN McEVOY
Deputy Secretary

Executive Summary

Broadband internet access has become an essential part of everyday communications and everyday life. This was the case before the pandemic and COVID-19 has further exposed the digital divide in Maryland and its consequences for all residents. Families who do not have access to the internet or cannot afford internet service are at an impossible disadvantage. When classes went from in-person to online distance learning for our K-12 and post-secondary education students, the lack of accessible broadband made it virtually impossible for some Maryland students to continue their education.

In 2020, school districts, with funding assistance from the Governor's Office of Rural Broadband (ORB), the precursor to the newly formed Office of Statewide Broadband (OSB), used innovative solutions to provide broadband to their unserved students. These solutions included providing cellular hotspots and paying for broadband subscription costs to ensure that all students could attend virtual classes through the 2020-2021 school year regardless of circumstances.

The office has developed a plan to incorporate the Governors Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER) into the Maryland Emergency Education Relief (MEER) grant program, a temporary $14 million grant program to help schools, libraries and other anchor institutions provide the tools and services their communities need for educational purposes. In order to best use the resources at its disposal, the OSB is looking to partner with local school systems, libraries, and anchor institutions seeking to close the digital divide in Maryland. This grant opportunity is designed to provide relief to K-12 students and related school staff to close the gap for students who lack necessary internet access or the devices they need to connect to classrooms. Given their purpose, the grant opportunity will help communities close existing gaps and lay the groundwork for improved broadband access, adoption, and utilization.

The office understands that technology and population distribution may require creative options for ubiquitous student support. As such, the OSB is technology neutral; any technology capable of meeting speed and latency requirements set forth in this document is permissible.

Participation in this RFA is voluntary. Neither the OSB nor the Department will pay for the preparation of any information submitted by an applicant in response to the RFA or for the OSB's use of that information.

1. Summary of Program Requirements

This is a summary of the Maryland Emergency Education Relief grant requirements.

Eligible Applicants

To be eligible to apply, an applicant must meet one of the following criteria:

Schools
- Elementary/Middle/High school: a non-profit institutional day or residential school, including a public K-12 charter school, that provides elementary/middle/high school education, as determined under state law.
- Secondary school: a non-profit institutional day or residential school, including a public secondary charter school, that provides secondary education, as determined under state law except that the term does not include any education beyond grade 12.

Libraries
- Public Library offering schoolwork/homework programs for K-12 students

Anchor Institutions
- Community Centers offering schoolwork/homework programs for K-12 students

Eligible Grant Purposes

Grant funds may be used to finance relief for students, school staff, and community members in closing the gap for students who lack necessary internet access or the devices they need to connect to classrooms. Covered costs for eligible schools, community centers and libraries: laptop and tablet computers; wireless access points, Wi-Fi hotspots; modems; routers; and broadband connectivity purchases for on or off-campus use by students, school staff, and community members. Project costs for eligible purposes incurred after September 1, 2021 are eligible for reimbursement.

Funding may be requested under two categories:

1. Equipment - Eligible equipment includes, but is not limited to:
   - Wireless access points
   - Wi-Fi hotspots
   - Modems (including air cards),
   - Routers, devices that combine a modem and router,
   - Signal amplifiers/extender,
   - Connected devices (laptop and tablet computers for use solely within the purchasing institution)
2. Service – Eligible service includes:

- Internet services to a school, library, or community centers necessary to provide student connectivity;
  - Internet service costs covered by E-rate or similar funding are not eligible for reimbursement.
- Services that deliver internet access within schools and libraries (internal connections, basic maintenance of internal connections, and managed internal broadband services);
- Construction of new networks to provide remote learning and the equipment needed for data casting services (only if the institution can demonstrate it has no existing available service options sufficient to support remote learning)

Miscellaneous

Installation, activation, and initial configuration costs, taxes, shipping charges, and other reasonable fees incurred with the purchase of the eligible equipment and services.

Ineligible Grant Purpose

The Grant may not be used for the following purposes:
- Administrative costs, e.g., personnel expenses, consultant fees, payroll, training, customer service, project management, records management, etc.
- Charges for termination liability, penalty surcharges, and other charges not associated with purchase of the eligible equipment and services.
- Separate costs for non-connected accessories, e.g., cases, mouse pads, cable clips, laptop bags, tablet stands, wall mounts, charging stations, etc.
- Mobile phones, including smartphones.
- Technical support, maintenance costs, separate costs for warranties and protection plans.

Covered Populations:

While the grant program and its funding offer the ability to serve all K-12 students in Maryland the following covered populations are identified as most at need:

- Economically disadvantaged students;
- Vulnerable children (students who often encounter challenges in receiving a quality and equitable education. Vulnerable youth may face many barriers, including traumatization, high mobility, and undiagnosed behavioral and health conditions.);
- Students who might have chronic conditions; and
- Students who do not have other access to the internet.

Timeframe

Applications are due on or before COB May 20, 2022. It is the OSB's intent to award funds by June 17, 2022. Projects should be for immediate response and must be completed between September 1, 2021 and September 15, 2022 with invoices due to OSB no later than September 28, 2022.

Funding Limits

The Office will provide financial assistance for up to 100% of eligible program costs. Funding will be provided for qualifying **expenses and projects completed between September 1, 2021 and September 15, 2022.**

Minimum grant amount: $50,000

Maximum grant amount: $350,000 (*per application)**

*Applicant may apply for multiple projects.

While not required, we highly encourage applicants to identify other funding sources to leverage the available grant funding.

2. Application Criteria

Through the MEER grant program, the OSB will provide funding to selected applicants to assist in the implementation of projects that provide broadband internet access for students enrolled in school programs that do not otherwise have broadband internet at home or do not have adequate broadband internet speeds at home. The office will review submitted applications to ensure that the information contained therein is complete and proposes an eligible project. While the Department will provide financial resources to help fund the project, the applicant will be responsible for the overall funding, implementation and operation of the project.

Application Form

The application form must be completed in its entirety. Any missing information may result in the application being deemed ineligible. Instructions for the application form are provided to help guide applicants.

Executive Summary

The executive summary should provide a brief, comprehensive summary of the overall project, the needs of the population to be served and how the funding will contribute to a solution.

Project Overview: Indicate how this project fits into your institution's goals or how the program will enhance student's capabilities and access to the internet. Include whom the project will serve, what the desired outcome is and how it will meet unmet needs in the community.

Potential Barriers: Discuss any barriers you might encounter.

Partners and Local Engagement: Applicants should include a list of community partners and describe their involvement in the project. Partners may include but are not limited to: entities of local jurisdictions (city and county personnel), educational institutions (K-12, community colleges and universities), libraries, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and internet service providers. We encourage applicants to reach out to any partners in advance of developing their application.

If you are not a local jurisdictional agency, please indicate whom you are working with from the local jurisdiction.

Intended Outcomes and Metrics: Describe the intended outcome(s) and metrics for the project. Discuss how you will define success.

Statement of Experience: Applicants must provide a written narrative describing their demonstrated capability and experience, if any, as it relates to the proposed project. The applicant must include principal employees' relevant work experience that would ensure the success of the project.

Network Design (*if applicable*): The description of the network to be constructed should provide the network speed, latency capabilities and backhaul requirements. The description should discuss pole attached vs. underground for wired networks and tower type and equipment expectations for a wireless network. Identify whether the network build-out will be performed by the applicant, or if contracted services will be utilized, or a combination of the two. While it is anticipated that the applicant will ultimately own and operate the network constructed, please confirm the operations and any restrictions to be placed on the future use of any equipment and network constructed as part of the Project.

Community Profile: Provide a description of the community and any existing internet service in the area as well as demographic data relating to the community and residents of the Project area. Please also provide information on how many residents you plan will utilize the network. If offering service plans please provide information on how many subscribers you expect to enroll.

Schedule: Describe the proposed schedule for implementing the Project. Provide a timeline with key milestones showing the project's completion by September 15, 2022.

Funding Scope & Budget

A scope of work related to the funding must be provided. The scope of work should be specific to the funding requested.

Please include a simple budget that shows how you plan to spend the funding. The budget should be in the following categories:

- Operations (payroll, supplies, materials etc.)
- Contracted services (payments to independent contractors, external organizations, etc.)
- Travel (must be related to program deployment)
- Please also include any other funding necessary for the project including the anticipated source of the funds.

3. Additional Information

1. The OSB reserves the right to waive any formalities of the RFA process, to re-issue the RFA, to amend the RFA, to extend the dates provided herein, or to suspend the RFA as the OSB may determine, at its sole discretion, is in the best interest of the OSB.

2. No reimbursement will be made by the OSB for any costs incurred in responding to this RFA, developing or submitting responses to the RFA, or attendance at meetings or interviews.

3. The OSB reserves the absolute right to conduct such investigations as it deems necessary to assist in the evaluation of any response to the RFA, to establish the claimed participant experience, the responsibility, reliability, references, reputation, business ethics, history, qualifications and financial ability of the applicant, proposed partner(s), independent consultants and suppliers.

4. Successful applicants will be chosen based on qualifications, evaluation of Responses, and a possible interview. The OSB reserves the right to conduct such discussions or negotiations as it deems necessary to assist in the evaluation of any proposal, to secure maximum clarification and completeness of any proposal, and to select the Responses that best meet the requirements of the OSB and the public interest.

5. All awardees will be required to execute a Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") that outlines the obligations of the awardee and State to the Project.

6. Questions should be addressed to Ronnie Hammond, Program Manager, Office of Statewide Broadband at ronnie.hammond@maryland.gov or 301-429-7514.

OFFICE OF STATEWIDE BROADBAND
Maryland Emergency Education Relief Grant
FY22 Grant Application Form

(additional information required – see RFA for all application requirements)

Applicant Information

Applicant's Legal Name (must match W9):

Federal EIN Number: _____   DUNS Number: _____

Unique Entity ID (SAM.gov): _____

Attach a copy of your most current IRS W-9 Form & Certificate of Good Standing from the Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation (if applicable).

Address:

Street: _____

City: _____

County: _____

State: _____   Zip: _____

Identify type of Organization

☐ School/School System   ☐ Library/Library System   ☐ Anchor Institution

Contact Information

This should be the primary contact for the person coordinating all elements of this application for the Applicant. This is the person the Office will contact with any questions regarding the application.

Name: _____   Title: _____

Email: _____   Phone: _____

Project Information

Estimated Funding

State: _____ (funding requested from OSB)

Applicant: _____ (funding provided by applicant)

Local Jurisdiction: _____ (funding provided by local jurisdiction)

Other: _____ (funding provided by any other source)

Project Total: _____

Projects should be for immediate response and must be completed between September 1, 2021 and September 15, 2022 (check all that apply).

☐ Project includes invoices between September 1, 2021 and May 31, 2022

☐ Project includes invoices between June 1, 2022 and September 15, 2022

Identify the Project Use Broadband Delivery Method (check all that apply):

☐ Eligible Broadband Equipment _____

☐ Eligible Broadband Services _____

☐ Miscellaneous/Other _____

Please briefly describe what the funding will be used for:

_____

_____

Other Required Information

The following should be attached to your application:

1. Executive Summary
2. Funding Scope & Budget
3. Federal Form W-9 & Certificate of Good Standing

CERTIFICATION OF GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW

I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge and belief, the information provided in this Application is true and correct. I further certify that I have reviewed the Request for Applications, FY22 Maryland Emergency Education Relief Grant Program documentation including eligibility of costs.

_____   _____

Signed by Authorized Representative   *Date*

_____

Typed Name

_____

Title