



PUBLIC NOTICE

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FCC INVITES APPLICATIONS FOR CERTIFICATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE NATIONAL DEAF-BLIND EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM FOR THE STATE OF OHIO

On July 2, 2012, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) announced the launch of the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP) as a pilot program.¹ The Commission also announced the selection of 53 applicants to become certified programs authorized to distribute equipment under the NDBEDP in each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.² The Commission selected the Ohio Deaf-Blind Outreach Program as the NDBEDP certified program for the state of Ohio.³

In November 2016, the Ohio Deaf-Blind Outreach Program informed the Commission that it would not continue participating in the NDBEDP and that it would relinquish its certification as of December 31, 2016.⁴ To ensure that Ohio is able to continue participating in the NDBEDP, the Commission invites applications from entities interested in receiving certification to distribute equipment under the NDBEDP pilot program to qualifying residents in Ohio.⁵ The Commission will accept applications for this purpose until December 16, 2016.⁶

¹ See *Commission Announces Launch of the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program*, Public Notice, 27 FCC Rcd 7403 (2012). See also *Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Section 105, Relay Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals*, Report and Order, 26 FCC Rcd 5640 (2011) (*NDBEDP Pilot Program Report and Order*).

² See *Commission Announces Entities Certified to Participate in the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program*, Public Notice, 27 FCC Rcd 7397 (CGB 2012) (*NDBEDP Certification Public Notice*).

³ See *Id.* at 7401.

⁴ E-mail from Pat Ryan, Director of Finance, Ohio Deaf-Blind Outreach Program, to Jacqueline Ellington, NDBEDP Administrator, Disability Rights Office (DRO), Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau (CGB), FCC (November 18, 2016).

⁵ As noted in the *NDBEDP Pilot Program Report and Order*, the Commission reserved the right to accept applications for certification at any time during the pilot program, as may be needed to fill program gaps, with the goal of ensuring that one certified program is operating in every state. *NDBEDP Pilot Program Report and Order*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5647, para. 14, n.49.

⁶ In the *NDBEDP Pilot Program Report and Order*, the Commission announced a 60-day filing deadline for entities seeking certification to operate an NDBEDP program. *Id.*; *FCC Announces 60-Day Period to Apply for Certification to Participate in the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program*, 26 FCC Rcd 13118 (CGB 2011). Here, we set a 15-day deadline in order to expeditiously replace the Ohio Deaf-Blind Outreach Program with another certified entity. Because the initial certification process already has been conducted, interested parties are more likely to be familiar with the filing requirements and in some instances may wish to re-use prior filings with minor modifications.

Section 105 of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 (CVAA), signed into law by President Obama on October 8, 2010,⁷ directed the Commission to establish rules that define as eligible for funding support programs that distribute specialized customer premises equipment to low-income individuals who are deaf-blind. In accordance with this directive, in April 2011, the Commission established the NDBEDP as a pilot program to distribute equipment used for telecommunications services, Internet access services, and advanced communications, including interexchange services and advanced telecommunications and information services, to eligible people who are deaf-blind.⁸ As noted above, the Commission launched the pilot program in July 2012. On August 4, 2016, the Commission adopted rules to convert the NDBEDP from a pilot program to a permanent program.⁹ The pilot program will end June 30, 2017,¹⁰ and the rules implementing the permanent program will be effective July 1, 2017.¹¹

Certification to Receive Funding: As provided in the Commission's NDBEDP pilot program rules,¹² the Commission will certify a single entity for to be the sole authorized entity to participate in the NDBEDP for Ohio. The entity selected will have full oversight and responsibility for distributing equipment and providing related services in Ohio,¹³ either directly or through collaboration, partnership, or contract with other individuals or entities in-state or out-of-state, including other NDBEDP certified programs.¹⁴ The entity selected will be eligible to receive reimbursement for its NDBEDP activities from the Interstate Telecommunications Relay Service Fund (TRS Fund).¹⁵ The certified program selected for Ohio will be reimbursed for eligible NDBEDP related costs that they incur after their selection and during the remainder of the NDBEDP pilot program, which will end June 30, 2017.¹⁶

⁷ Pub. L. No. 111-260, 124 Stat. 2751 (2010); *see also* Amendment of Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Pub. L. 111-265, 124 Stat. 2795 (2010) (making technical corrections to the CVAA). Section 105 adds section 719 to the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, and is codified at 47 U.S.C. § 620.

⁸ *See generally NDBEDP Pilot Program Report and Order*, 26 FCC Rcd 5640.

⁹ *Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Section 105, Relay Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals*, Report and Order, 31 FCC Rcd 9178 (2016) (*NDBEDP Permanent Program Report and Order*).

¹⁰ *Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Section 105, Relay Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals*, Report and Order, 31 FCC Rcd 6149 (2016) (extending the NDBEDP pilot program through June 30, 2017).

¹¹ *NDBEDP Permanent Program Report and Order*, 31 FCC Rcd at 9269, para. 220.

¹² 47 CFR § 64.610(b).

¹³ *See NDBEDP Pilot Program Report and Order*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5659-5676, paras. 45-80 (discussing various categories of related services).

¹⁴ 47 CFR § 64.610(b).

¹⁵ Claims for reimbursement must be submitted, at a minimum, within 30 days after the end of each six-month period of the Fund Year. 47 CFR § 64.610(f)(2); *NDBEDP Pilot Program Report and Order*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5678-79, paras. 86-88; *Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Section 105, Relay Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals*, Order, 27 FCC Rcd 2812 (2012) (conditionally waiving the Commission's rules to permit NDBEDP certified programs to submit claims for reimbursement on a monthly or quarterly basis).

¹⁶ The Commission will announce by public notice the time period during which new and incumbent entities may apply for certification under the permanent NDBEDP or notify the Commission that it does not wish to participate in the permanent NDBEDP. *NDBEDP Permanent Program Report and Order*, 31 FCC Rcd at 9186-87, paras. 15-16.

Who May Apply: Any public program or private entity may apply to the Commission for certification to become the sole authorized entity for Ohio to participate in the NDBEDP and receive reimbursement for NDBEDP activities from the TRS Fund.¹⁷ For example, public programs, such as state equipment distribution programs, vocational rehabilitation programs, assistive technology programs, or schools for the deaf, blind or deaf-blind may apply. Likewise, private entities, such as organizational affiliates, independent living centers, or private educational facilities, may apply. Local or national entities may also apply.

Applications: There is no application form or fee to apply for certification in the NDBEDP pilot program. Applicants may compile their application in any manner that they believe will most effectively present their qualifications for certification. The Commission will review applications and determine whether to grant certification based on the ability of a program to meet the following qualifications, either directly or in coordination with other programs or entities, as evidenced in the application and any supplemental materials, including letters of recommendation:¹⁸

- expertise in the field of deaf-blindness, including familiarity with the culture and etiquette of people who are deaf-blind, to ensure that equipment distribution and the provision of related services occurs in a manner that is relevant and useful to consumers who are deaf-blind;
- ability to communicate effectively with people who are deaf-blind (for training and other purposes), by among other things, using sign language, providing materials in Braille, ensuring that information made available online is accessible, and using other assistive technologies and methods to achieve effective communication;
- staffing and facilities sufficient to administer the program, including the ability to distribute equipment and provide related services to eligible individuals throughout the state, including those in remote areas;
- experience with the distribution of specialized customer premises equipment, especially to people who are deaf-blind;
- experience in training users on how to use the equipment and how to set up the equipment for its effective use; and
- familiarity with the telecommunications, Internet access, and advanced communications services that will be used with the distributed equipment.

Applicants are encouraged to include the identity of the other programs or entities with whom the applicant will collaborate, partner, or contract, and the functions or services that they or individual contractors (who do not need to be identified by name) will fulfill. Applicants may also include recommendations with their certification applications from members of the deaf-blind community in their state, experts or others with direct knowledge of their capabilities and qualifications.¹⁹

¹⁷ 47 CFR § 64.610(b)(2).

¹⁸ 47 CFR § 64.610(b)(3).

¹⁹ *NDBEDP Pilot Program Report and Order*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5649, para. 21.

Applications may be submitted electronically to NDBEDP@fcc.gov or mailed to the following address:

NDBEDP Administrator
Disability Rights Office
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

This Public Notice summarizes the qualifications for obtaining certification to participate in the NDBEDP pilot program. We encourage every applicant to familiarize itself with the complete requirements for program participation and the rules governing the NDBEDP pilot program contained in 47 CFR § 64.610 before submitting its application. The certified applicant must comply with the NDBEDP pilot program rules.²⁰

ACCESSIBLE FORMATS: To request materials in accessible formats for people with disabilities (Braille, large print, electronic files, audio format), send an e-mail to fcc504@fcc.gov or call the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau at 202-418-0530 (voice), 844-432-2275 (videophone), or 202-418-0432 (TTY).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jackie Ellington, Disability Rights Office, Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, 202-418-1153, e-mail Jackie.Ellington@fcc.gov; or Rosaline Crawford, Disability Rights Office, Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, 202-418-2075, e-mail Rosaline.Crawford@fcc.gov.

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²⁰ See *NDBEDP Pilot Program Report and Order*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5694-5701, Appendix A (setting out the NDBEDP pilot program rules); 47 CFR § 64.610.