



PUBLIC NOTICE

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APPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEAF-BLIND EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM CERTIFICATION DUE JUNE 30, 2021

CG Docket No. 10-210

Under the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP), also known as “iCanConnect,” the Commission may provide up to \$10 million annually from the Interstate Telecommunications Relay Service Fund (TRS Fund) to support programs that distribute equipment to eligible low-income individuals who are deaf-blind, so that these individuals can access telecommunications service, Internet access service, and advanced communications services.¹

In accordance with the *NDBEDP Permanent Program Order*,² the Commission’s Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau (CGB) certifies a single entity for each state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, as the sole entity for that jurisdiction eligible to receive reimbursement for NDBEDP activities from the TRS Fund.³ The current certification cycle of the NDBEDP will end on June 30, 2022. Consistent with the Commission’s rules, entities interested in participating in the NDBEDP for the next five-year certification cycle (July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2027) must submit applications by **June 30, 2021**.⁴

Certifications for the NDBEDP will be granted for a five year period.⁵ Each entity selected must comply with the NDBEDP rules⁶ and will be responsible in that state for distributing equipment and providing related services, such as outreach, assessments, installation, and training, either directly or through collaboration, partnership, or contract with other individuals or entities in-state or out-of-state,

¹ Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 (CVAA), Pub. L. No. 111-260, 124 Stat. 2751; Amendment of Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Pub. L. 111-265, 124 Stat. 2795 (making technical corrections to the CVAA). Section 105 of the CVAA adds section 719 to the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, and is codified at 47 U.S.C. § 620.

² *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, 9278-87, Appendix D (Final Rules) (2016) (*NDBEDP Permanent Program Order*); see also 47 CFR §§ 64.6201-64.6219.

³ 47 CFR § 64.6207; see also *NDBEDP Permanent Program Order*, 31 FCC Rcd at 9184, para. 9 (directing the Bureau to certify one entity for each state and territory to receive NDBEDP funding). Collectively, the entities selected to participate in the NDBEDP are referred to as “certified programs” or “state programs.”

⁴ 47 CFR § 64.6207(b)(2), (e) (providing that a program may apply for certification or renewal of its current certification by filing a new application at least one year prior to the expiration of the certification period.)

⁵ 47 CFR § 64.6207(e).

⁶ 47 CFR §§ 64.6201-64.6219; see also *NDBEDP Permanent Program Order*, 31 FCC Rcd at 9278-87, Appendix D (setting out the NDBEDP permanent program rules).

including other NDBEDP certified programs.⁷

WHO MAY APPLY? Any public or private entity,⁸ within or outside of a state,⁹ may apply for certification to participate in the program and receive reimbursement from the TRS Fund.¹⁰

To qualify for certification, applicants must show:¹¹

1. Expertise in the field of deaf-blindness, including familiarity with the culture and etiquette of people who are deaf-blind.¹²
2. The 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.
3. Staffing and facilities sufficient to administer the program, including the ability to distribute equipment and provide related services to low-income individuals who are deaf-blind throughout the state, including those in remote areas.
4. Experience with the distribution of specialized customer premises equipment, especially to people who are deaf-blind.
5. Experience in training consumers on how to use the equipment and how to set up the equipment for its effective use.
6. Familiarity with telecommunications service, Internet access service, and advanced communications services.
7. Administrative and financial management experience in managing programmatic funds, recordkeeping, and generally accepted accounting principles.¹³

⁷ 47 CFR § 64.6207.

⁸ For example, equipment distribution programs, vocational rehabilitation programs, assistive technology programs, schools for the deaf, blind, or deaf-blind, organizational affiliates, independent living centers, or private educational facilities may apply. *Id.*

⁹ *NDBEDP Permanent Program Order*, 31 FCC Rcd at 9191, para. 25. For example, an out-of-state entity that works with in-state partners to provide services may function well in states that do not have sufficient resources of their own. When making its certification selections, CGB will consider the benefits that a local entity can bring to its state's residents, such as through established relationships with state networks and the ability to meet consumers' needs as they arise, especially when weighing the merits of equally qualified applicants. *Id.*, 31 FCC Rcd at 9191, para. 26.

¹⁰ 47 CFR § 64.6207(a).

¹¹ 47 CFR 6207(c)(1)-(8).

¹² *NDBEDP Permanent Program Order*, 31 FCC Rcd at 9187, n.53.

¹³ *Id.*, 31 FCC Rcd at 9189, para. 22. Certified programs are reimbursed for the reasonable costs of equipment and authorized related services, up to their funding allocations under this program. 47 CFR § 64.6213(a). Upon certification and at the beginning of each TRS Fund year, certified programs may elect to submit reimbursement claims on a monthly, quarterly, or semiannual basis. 47 CFR § 64.6213(b). Within 30 days after the end of each reimbursement period during the TRS Fund year, each certified program must submit documentation that supports its claim for reimbursement. 47 CFR § 64.6213(c). Because the program operates on a cost-reimbursement basis, it is also important for an applicant to have the financial expertise to maintain the necessary cash flow, along with having the administrative experience to support the equipment purchase, control, and inventory processes, the reimbursement process, and the annual audit. *NDBEDP Permanent Program Order*, 31 FCC Rcd at 9189-90, n.73.

8. If the applicant is seeking renewal of certification, the ability to provide equipment and related services in compliance with the Commission's rules, as demonstrated by the applicant's past performance.¹⁴

In addition to these qualifications, an applicant must disclose in its application any relationship, arrangement, or agreement with a manufacturer or provider of equipment or related services that poses an actual or potential conflict of interest, as well as the steps the applicant will take to eliminate such actual or potential conflict or to minimize the associated risks.¹⁵ If an applicant for certification learns of a potential or actual conflict while its application is pending, it must immediately disclose such conflict to the Commission.¹⁶

FILING AN APPLICATION: There is no application form, fee, or specified format that must be used to apply for NDBEDP certification. However, all applications, including renewals, must contain sufficient detail to demonstrate the applicant's ability to meet all certification criteria and a commitment to comply with all NDBEDP requirements.¹⁷ Applicants may also submit supplemental materials to evidence their qualifications, including letters of recommendation.¹⁸

Applications to participate in the NDBEDP should be submitted electronically to NDBEDP@fcc.gov. If electronic filing is not available, applications may be mailed to:

NDBEDP Administrator
Disability Rights Office
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street, NE
Washington, DC 20554

After the deadline for submitting applications, CGB will release a public notice listing all of the entities that have applied for certification. CGB will release additional public notices announcing entities selected for certification after conducting its reviews of all applications and supplemental materials received for each state.

The Commission also reminds currently certified NDBEDP entities that an entity planning to discontinue its participation in the NDBEDP must comply with certain requirements to ensure the ongoing operations of the program being exited, including providing written notice to the NDBEDP Administrator at least 90 days in advance of its intended exit date, submitting a final reimbursement claim, semi-annual report, and final audit report to the Commission, transferring data and equipment

¹⁴ See *id.* at 9186, para. 14.

¹⁵ 47 CFR § 64.6207(d)(1); see also *NDBEDP Permanent Program Order*, 31 FCC Rcd at 9190, paras. 23-24. The Commission may reject an application for NDBEDP certification, or may require an applicant, as a condition of certification, to take additional steps to eliminate, or to minimize the risks associated with, an actual or potential conflict of interest. 47 CFR § 64.6207(d)(1).

¹⁶ 47 CFR § 64.6207(d)(1).

¹⁷ 47 CFR § 64.6207(c). We encourage every applicant to familiarize itself with the complete requirements for program participation and the rules governing the NDBEDP before submitting its application. See *NDBEDP Permanent Program Order*, 31 FCC Rcd 9178.

¹⁸ *Id.*; see also *NDBEDP Permanent Program Order*, 31 FCC Rcd at 9187-89, paras. 17-22. 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 letters of recommendations from members of the deaf-blind community in their state, experts, or others with direct knowledge of the applicants' capabilities and qualifications.

inventory to its successor, and notifying consumers.¹⁹

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.

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

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¹⁹ *Id.*, 31 FCC Rcd at 9197, paras. 35-50; *see also* 47 CFR §§ 64.6207(g), (j).