Guidelines

I. INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE

The Smart Rural Communities℠ Grant will provide up to $5,000 to support the development and deployment of innovative broadband-enabled solutions to support rural commerce and economic development, education, energy, health care, public safety or other community-oriented initiatives. The successful applicant(s) will demonstrate how the broadband-enabled technology will generate improvements to community strength and growth consistent with the goals of this program.

II. STATEMENT OF ELIGIBILITY

Application is limited to telco members of NTCA who have registered for the Smart Rural Communities Provider℠ program.

III. PROPOSAL SUBMITTAL

A. FORM and DEADLINE

For current consideration, proposals must be received no later than December 31 (mailed proposals must be postmarked by this date). Proposals can be submitted any time before the deadline.

Mail submission
Signed original proposals must be enclosed in a sealed envelope or package and mailed to:

NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association
Smart Rural Communities Grant
4121 Wilson Blvd., Suite 1000
Arlington, VA 22203

Electronic submission
Applicants can submit electronically a signed copy of the original application. However, NTCA also must receive via mail the original signed copy. Applications that are submitted electronically before the deadline will be considered accepted even if the original signed version arrives after the deadline due to a mail or other delivery delay. Electronic proposals can be emailed to smartrural@ntca.org.

B. GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

The proposal shall be considered complete as filed.

The submission of a proposal shall be construed as indication that the Applicant is not prohibited or otherwise restricted from providing any of the services or offerings it proposes.
Such restrictions may include, but not be limited to, local franchise or other regulations; local zoning requirements; or other legal obligations or requirements. The submission of a proposal shall be construed as indication that the Applicant has investigated and satisfied itself of the conditions to be encountered and the character, quality and scope of the work to be performed. The submission of a proposal shall also be construed as indication that the Applicant has entered into the necessary agreements with relevant third parties.

C. PROPOSAL FORMAT and CONTENTS

1. **Length of Application**
   Applications shall not exceed 2,000 words.

2. **Contents**
   **(a) Section I – Organizational Information**
   In this section, provide specific information concerning the Applicant, including the legal name, address and telephone number of the applicant.

   **(b) Section II – Project Approach and Partners**
   In this section, provide a description of the application(s) and/or technology intended to be deployed, the purposes intended to be served and the underlying network infrastructure necessary to support the services. State whether the underlying network is currently deployed or, if not, the schedule for its deployment, including any regulatory or other legal issues implicated by the new deployment. The schedule should include to the extent practicable specific milestones and dates of completion.

   Describe collaborative efforts undertaken with other local interests to develop the proposal and the anticipated impacts of implementation.

   Provide demographic information about the local service area including, but not limited to, population, industry, land area and population density, and other information relevant to the proposal.

   **(c) Section III – Budget**
   Applicants must provide a detailed budget and schedule of anticipated expenditures. Applicants must demonstrate at least 50% (fifty percent) in matching funds from third-party sources; preference will be given to matching fund commitments from parties with whom the Applicant is collaborating.

   The matching funds requirements may be satisfied by third-party in-kind contributions of goods or services at fair market value. The proposed value of in-kind contributions
must be supported by documentation verifying the costs of those goods or services on the open market in arms-lengths transactions. These may include but are not limited to: real property; donated space; equipment, donated or loaned; supplies; and volunteer services.

(d) Section IV – Additional Information

In this section, provide additional information determined relevant to NTCA’s consideration of the proposal, including, but not limited to, economic, social and civic impacts of project. These are recommended to include quantifiable projections as well as qualitative projections.

IV. SELECTION PROCESS

C. REVIEW BOARD

The proposals will be reviewed by the SRC Advisory Committee (SRCAC) (in this context, the Review Board). Members of the SRCAC, the Innovation and Business Opportunity Committee, or the Associate Member Advisory Council who have either submitted a proposal or are otherwise a parent, subsidiary or otherwise related to an applicant are disqualified from reviewing proposals; industry consultants and engineers who are named in a proposal as a contracted vendor are disqualified from reviewing proposals. These disqualifications notwithstanding, members of the Review Board may contact disqualified persons or entities in writing in order to ask specific questions; responses must be provided in writing.

D. CRITERIA

Proposals may be evaluated using the following criteria (please note that there is no value or ranking implied in the order of this list):

1. Demonstrated experience, qualifications and expertise to perform the services described.
2. Local interests to be supported by the proposal.
3. Services to be initiated and provided pursuant to the proposal.
4. Anticipated quantifiable impacts, including economic, of the proposal.
5. Anticipated qualitative impacts of the proposal.
6. Collaboration with community leaders.
7. Other factors deemed relevant by the Review Board, including schedule for completion.
E. **RESERVATION OF RIGHTS**

The Review Board may in its sole discretion: waive informalities or minor irregularities in any proposal with the approval of the Applicant or reject any and all proposals. The Review Board may retain an incorrect proposal and request certain corrections. In requesting such corrections, the Review Board will consider: the overall conformance of the proposal to the guidelines; any unusual complexity of format and/or content; and whether the Applicant’s intent is otherwise reasonably discernible within the context of the entire proposal. The Review Board may, at its sole discretion, correct an error based upon surrounding context of the proposal. The Review Board may correct obvious clerical errors and may request clarification from an Applicant where an error is apparent.

NTCA may modify, reissue or cancel the program.

F. **AWARD**

NTCA reserves the right to select the proposal(s) which in the opinion of the Review Board best meets the goals of this initiative.

G. **NOTIFICATION**

All Applicants will be notified of their award or non-award after the Review Board has completed its process.

V. **FINALIST INTERVIEWS**

Following an initial screening, the Review Board may select Applicants for further evaluation. Interviews of those selected Applicants may be conducted by NTCA and may or may not be scored separately from the other criteria outlined, above.

VI. **POST-AWARD REQUIREMENTS**

H. **OBLIGATIONS OF AWARD RECIPIENTS**

Award recipients will be required to adhere to protocols and procedures outlined below. These are implemented in order to ensure the awards are utilized in the manner intended by NTCA and in a fashion consistent with the proposal upon which basis they are awarded.

Award recipients may not assign their liabilities under this agreement to third parties. NTCA shall remain indemnified against any claims arising out of projects supported by the program.
Following notification, awardees will have 15 (fifteen) days to accept or decline the award. Either acceptance or refusal must be provided to NTCA in writing. Acceptance of the award will constitute the recipient’s acceptance of obligations stated herein and any other requirements presented by NTCA prior to the earlier of acceptance or expiration of the 15-day acceptance period. Award recipients should understand fully the obligations that attend receipt of the award. No penalty or prejudice will accrue to any company that declines the award, and companies declining the award may resubmit a proposal or otherwise participate in subsequent phases of the SRC program without prejudice or penalty.

By accepting the SRC award, the recipient agrees to complete the project within the proposed time frame and budget. The recipient also agrees to the monitoring and reporting requirements set forth herein and in other materials that may attend conferral of the award. Collectively, these will be referred to as the post award requirements (PAR).

I. DISBURSEMENT OF AWARD FUNDS

Disbursement of any funds associated with the award will be administered by NTCA and may take the form of checks or an Electronic Transfer of Funds. Recipients will undertake due diligence to safeguard the funds following receipt. The disposition of funds advanced to the award recipient but not distributed beyond the recipient after 30 days will be addressed on a case-by-case basis by NTCA. Changes to this schedule may be implemented in extraordinary circumstances subject to the discretion of NTCA.

J. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Recipients will be required to submit quarterly performance reports describing their compliance with the milestones set forth in the proposal. These reports must include project progress, budget information and milestone indicator information. These quarterly reports are due 30 days after the end of each calendar year quarter, until the project is completed. Information in these reports may be shared publicly through the NTCA-SRC website and other forums.

K. MODIFICATIONS

Notification of modifications must be provided to NTCA. Modifications that have the effect of either increasing the cost or diminishing the capabilities of any aspect of the proposal must be approved by NTCA. Other modifications for which notice must be provided include: change in project scope; change in key person; change in corporate structure or name; absence of key person; sub-contracting not contemplated in initial proposal that could affect the schedule of milestones; other events that could affect the schedule of milestones, including those within and beyond the control of the award recipient; other events that may affect the fulfillment of the proposal.
Requests for modifications must be submitted in writing with a clear and detailed explanation underlying the reasons and needs for the amendments. The narrative should explain whether the modification will affect budget or schedule considerations.

L. CLOSEOUT

Upon completion of the project, the award recipient shall complete and deliver to NTCA within 30 (thirty) days a summary report of the project; this report may summarize the quarterly reporting tendered until that time. The applicant shall provide to NTCA additional reports six (6) months after completion and 60 (sixty) days after the first anniversary of the closeout describing the impacts of the program on the community and an evaluation of its success and impact.

M. USE OF THE SMART RURAL COMMUNITY TRADEMARK

Award recipients will receive a limited right to use NTCA’s SRC trademark in relation to the project for informational purposes subject to review and approval by NTCA. Use of the service mark must adhere to the Visual Style Guide as provided by NTCA.

N. USE OF NAME, IMAGES AND CORPORATE MARKS

NTCA shall have the right to use the name, image and corporate logo of prize recipients, as well as information about the proposal and project, publicity or informational purposes.

VII. GENERAL INFORMATION

O. RULES and REGULATIONS

1. The issuance of this proposal does not constitute any award commitment on the part of NTCA, and NTCA shall not pay any costs incurred in the preparation of or otherwise associated with preparation of any proposal. All costs and expenses associated with any proposal shall be borne by the Applicant.

2. NTCA reserves the right to reject any or all proposals.

3. NTCA may waive any deviation in a proposal. Such waiver shall not modify the requirements of the proposal.
4. All Applicants submit their proposals with the understanding that Review Board recommendations and subsequent NTCA awards are final and subject to review only by NTCA.

5. NTCA will endeavor to restrict distribution of material designated as confidential to the Review Board. Applicants are cautioned that NTCA does not seek to receive confidential or proprietary information, and that material designated as confidential and proprietary should be provided only as necessary to support the proposal. Upon submission, all proposals shall be treated as confidential and proprietary to NTCA until the award process is completed. NTCA shall determine in consultation with awardees which portions, if any, of an awarded proposal shall remain confidential in order to protect the proprietary interests reflected in the proposal. Non-awarded proposals will remain confidential and proprietary. NTCA notes that local, state, or other government or nongovernment third parties may require specific information arising out of the proposal. In those instances, it will be the responsibility of the Applicant to secure any necessary agreement from those or other third-parties.