Funding Opportunity: NTIA Releases Connecting Minority Communities Program Solicitation

Lewis-Burke Associates LLC – August 4, 2021

The U. S. Department of Commerce (DOC) National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) released a notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) for the Connecting Minority Communities (CMC) Pilot Program. The CMC Pilot Program provides new federal funding to eligible recipients seeking to expand remote learning opportunities, stimulate economic development, create employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, and advance broadband access within eligible institutions and their surrounding communities.

The CMC Pilot Program aims to directly address the lack of broadband access, connectivity, and equity that impacts Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), Minority Business Enterprises (MBEs), and the communities they operate in. Eligible recipients may use award funds to:

1. Purchase broadband internet access or expand broadband capacity at the eligible institution;
2. Purchase or lease eligible equipment and devices for student or community use; and
3. Hire and train IT personnel who are a part of the eligible institution or consortium.

Project proposals should include activities to achieve at least one of the following goals:

- Building broadband and IT capacity of eligible institutions;
- Providing access to broadband, technology, and digital literacy education to students, eligible organizations, and community members;
- Providing subsidized broadband to low-income students and communities;
- Improving use of broadband services by eligible organizations to deliver digital literacy programming and workforce development programs within the community;
- Increasing the use of broadband for economic development, education, and telehealth;
- Building skills and workforce capacity in eligible institutions in various IT related fields;
- Evaluating the needs of eligible institutions and their communities to plan relevant education, workforce, and digital skills development programs; and
- Gathering data on programs funded by the grant to evaluate their effectiveness.

More information on types of projects that can be funded with through the CMC Pilot Program can be found in NTIA’s full solicitation. NTIA will be hosting informational webinars in August, September, and October on this funding opportunity. The August webinars will be held on August 18 and 19, 2021 from 2:30-4:00 PM ET. Additional information on the webinars is linked below.

Award Information: NTIA intends to award a total of up to $268,000,000 in federal funds for the CMC Pilot Program with the average size of awards ranging from $500,000 to $3,000,000 with an award duration of two years. 40 percent of funds available through this program will be set aside for HBCUs and 20 percent of funds will be set aside for HBCUs, MSIs, and TCUs to provide broadband access and eligible technology to their student populations. Projects that receive funding to provide broadband access to students must prioritize students receiving Pell grants and other forms of federal or state
financial aid, as well as those that are considered low-income individuals or have received unemployment benefits since March 1, 2020.

**Eligibility and Limitation Information:** HBCUs, TCUs, MSIs, or a consortium that is led by a HBCU, TCU, MSI that also includes a MBE or a nonprofit organization are eligible for this program. Additionally, to be eligible, the institution or consortium must be in an “anchor community,” defined in the notice as a community that has an estimated median household income of 250 percent of the poverty line or less and is within 15 miles of a HBCU, MSI, or TCU. The CMC Pilot Program applicants can view, search, and access their own “anchor community” profiles for eligible institutions on NTIA’s eligibility dashboard. More information regarding NTIA’s method to identifying eligible institutions in “anchor communities” can be found in NTIA’s full solicitation.

**Cost Share:** There is no cost sharing requirement for the Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program.

**Due Date:** Applications must be submitted by **11:59 PM ET on December 1, 2021.**

**Sources and Additional Information:**
- Additional information on the NTIA Connecting Minority Communities Webinar Series, including registration links for the upcoming webinars, is available at [https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/resources/grant-programs/connecting-minority-communities-pilot-program](https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/resources/grant-programs/connecting-minority-communities-pilot-program).