

Digital Equity – Competitive Applicant Training Part 3

Funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)

Administered by the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)





Disclaimer



This document is intended solely to assist applicants in better understanding the Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program and the requirements set forth in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and follow-on policies and guidance for this program. This document does not and is not intended to supersede, modify, or otherwise alter applicable statutory or regulatory requirements, the terms and conditions of the award, or the specific application requirements set forth in the NOFO. In all cases, statutory and regulatory mandates, the terms and conditions of the award, the requirements set forth in the NOFO, and follow-on policies and guidance, shall prevail over any inconsistencies contained in this document.





Table of Contents

- 4 Introduction
- 6 Key Dates
- 8 Project Narrative
- 20 Project(s) Description Form
- 32 Project Plan
- **36** What's Next?



INTRODUCTION





Introduction



This is the **third part of a five-part Applicant Training** for the Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program. This training is intended to assist applicants in better understanding the Project Narrative, Executive Summary, Project(s) Description Form, and Project Plan requirements listed in the Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

TRAINING GOALS OF PART 3

- 1 Understand the required elements of the Project Narrative
- 2 Understand the required elements of the Executive Summary
- Understand the required elements of the Project(s) Description Form
- 4 Understand the required elements of the **Project Plan**







KEY DATES





Key Dates Reminder



Please note the following key dates and deadlines coming up for the Competitive Grant Program.

Application Due Dates



Complete applications from Eligible Entities, including Native Entities, must be received by the NTIA Grants Portal no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time (ET) on **September 23, 2024**. (NOFO Section IV.F)

Complete applications from U.S. Territories must be received by the NTIA Grants Portal no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time (ET) on *October 22, 2024*. (NOFO Executive Summary Section M)



Issuing Awards

NTIA expects to complete its review, select successful applicants, and begin award processing by Winter 2024. NTIA may, subject to NIST Grants Office Approval, announce awards made under the Competitive Grant Program on a rolling basis. (NOFO Section IV.F)





Except for measurement and evaluation activities required under the Digital Equity Act and the NOFO, grant recipients must expend the grant amounts within four (4) years after the date on which the entity is awarded the grant. **No extensions to the four-year Period of Performance or the one-year evaluation period will be granted.** (NOFO Section II.B)







PROJECT NARRATIVE





Application Sections



The Competitive Grant Program application has 10 parts in the NTIA Grants Portal (NGP), as shown below. This session will cover NGP section 2 Project Narrative. This includes the Project Narrative, Executive Summary, Project(s) Description Form, and Project Plan.

- 1. General Applicant Information
- 2. Project Narrative
- 3. Budget
- 4. Applicant Capability
- 5. Project Information
- 6. Match
- 7. Other Funding Sources
- 8. Certifications and Assurances
- 9. SF-424
- 10. Standard Forms







Focus of Competitive Grant Program Projects



The Competitive Grant Program is the third component of the Digital Equity Act's framework for addressing digital equity and inclusion. NTIA seeks to fund activities that address the root causes of digital inequities in a measurable way.

Projects must consider:



ALIGNING WITH THE GOALS OF THE DIGITAL EQUITY ACT

- Prioritizing Covered Populations, including their subgroups
- Prioritizing projects with the greatest impact potential



USING MEASURABLE IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

 Basing activities on objectives that are measurable, achievable, sustainable, timebound, and are designed to address identified disparities directly and logically



PROMOTING LONG LASTING, MEANINGFUL CHANGE

- Addressing systemic barriers and gaps to digital access
- Sustainability



INVOLVING STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

 Involving and encouraging stakeholders who are directly affected by the proposed strategies to provide feedback







Project Narrative Elements



The Project Narrative must provide a description of the overall goals of the grant proposal and the portfolio of activities the grant award would support and how the Digital Equity Project will promote the goals of the Digital Equity Act and this Program. The Project Narrative has three components listed in NOFO Section IV.B(7).









Project Plan





Executive Summary Elements



The Project Narrative must include an Executive Summary with the following elements listed in the NOFO Section IV.B(7)a.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ELEMENTS:



An overview of the goals of the Digital Equity Project



The specific barriers to digital equity the Digital Equity Project will address



The Covered Populations to be served, including the expected number of individuals to be served within each Covered Population



The amount of funding to be devoted proportionally to each Covered Population



A high-level overview of the activities and/or interventions proposed, how they will address the barriers to equity identified, and how they will increase Internet access and the adoption of broadband across Covered Populations



A baseline assessment with supporting data showing a need for these services



A description of how the Digital Equity Project aligns with, or addresses a gap in, the State Digital Equity Plans of the State(s) or Territory(ies) within which it will be implemented



The timeline on which funds will be expended



The geographic scope of the project



The basis on which the applicant believes the Digital Equity Project will be effective in increasing Internet access and adoption of broadband





Executive Summary



The Executive Summary must include a description of the overall goals of the grant proposal and the portfolio of activities the grant award would support and how the Digital Equity Project will promote the goals of the Digital Equity Act and the Competitive Grant Program.

2.1.1 Executive Summary

Provide a description of the overall goals of the grant proposal and the portfolio of activities the grant award would support ("Digital Equity Project") and how the Digital Equity Project will promote the goals of the Digital Equity Act and this Program.

The executive summary should include:

- (1) An overview of the goals of the Digital Equity Project;
- (2) The specific barriers to digital equity the Digital Equity Project will address;
- (3) the Covered Populations to be served including the expected number of individuals to be served within each Covered Population;
- (4) The amount of funding to be devoted proportionally to each Covered Population;
- (5) A high level overview of the activities and/or interventions proposed, how they will address the barriers to equity identified, and how they will increase internet access and the adoption of broadband among the Covered Populations;
- (6) A baseline assessment with supporting data showing a need for these services;
- (7) A description of how the Digital Equity Project aligns with, or addresses a gap in, the State Digital Equity Plan of the State or Territory within which it will be implemented;
- (8) The timeline on which funds will be expended;
- (9) The geographic scope of the project; and
- (10) The basis on which the applicant believes the Digital Equity Project will be effective in increasing internet access and adoption of broadband. (7500 character limit)

Please note, NTIA may use all or a portion of the Executive Summary as part of a press release issued by NTIA, or for other public information and outreach purposes. Applicants are advised not to include information that concerns business trade secrets or other confidential commercial or financial information as part of the Executive Summary. See 15 C.F.R. §4.9(b) concerning the designation of business information by the applicant.

Response						

2.1.1 Executive Summary | Provide a description of the overall goals of the grant proposal and the portfolio of activities the grant award would support ("Digital Equity Project") and how the Digital Equity Project will promote the goals of the Digital Equity Act and this Program.

Note: NTIA may use all or a portion of the Executive Summary as part of a press release issued by NTIA, or for other public information and outreach purposes.

Applicants are advised not to include information that concerns business trade secrets or other confidential or financial information as part of the Executive Summary.

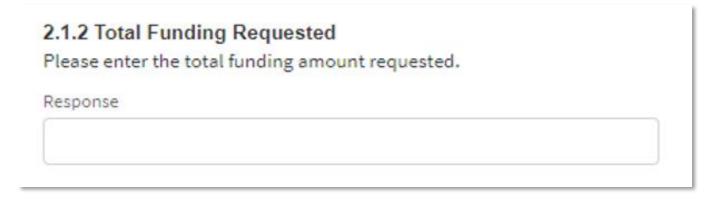




Total Funding Requested



NTIA expects to make individual Competitive Grant Program awards to Eligible Entities within a range of \$5 million and \$12 million. This *funding range is not a required minimum or maximum*, but Eligible Entities requesting award amounts outside that range must explain why their application falls below or above this range and must provide a compelling justification for that variance. (NOFO Section II.A)



2.1.2 Total Funding Requested | Please enter the total funding amount requested.

For **U.S. Territories**, NTIA expects award amounts to be between \$1,000,000 and \$2,500,000. This is not a required minimum and will be determined based on the number of applications and amount of funding requested; however, individual awards to U.S. Territories will not exceed \$2,500,000.





Barriers to Digital Equity



The applicant must select which of the barriers to digital equity will be addressed.

2.1.3 Barriers to Digital Equity				
lect all that apply) Which of the following barriers to Digital Equity does your project seek to address? Please elaborate in the Executive Summary				
text above.				
* Response				
(1) The availability of, and affordability of access to, fixed and wireless broadband technology				
(2) The online accessibility and inclusivity of public resources and services				
(3) Digital literacy				
(4) Awareness of, and the use of, measures to secure the online privacy of, and cybersecurity with respect to, an individual				
(5) The availability and affordability of consumer devices and technical support for those devices				

- **2.1.3 Barriers to Digital Equity | Select all that apply** to answer the question: "Which of the following barriers to Digital Equity does your project seek to address?" Please elaborate in the Executive Summary text above.
- 1) The availability of, and affordability of access to, fixed and wireless broadband technology
- 2) The online accessibility and inclusivity of public resources and services
- 3) Digital literacy
- 4) Awareness of, and the use of, measures to secure the online privacy of, and cybersecurity with respond to, an individual
- 5) The availability and affordability of consumer devices and technical support for those devices





Covered Populations Served



The application must include the Covered Populations to be served, including the expected number of individuals to be served within each Covered Population. (NOFO Section IV.B(7)a)

2.1.4 Covered Populations Served						
(Selectallthatapply)WhichofthefollowingCoveredPopulationswillbeservedthroughyourproject?PleaseelaborateintheExecutiveSummary						
text above.						
* Response						
(1) Individuals who live in covered households (i.e., with an income no more than 150 percent of the federal poverty threshold)						
(2) Aging individuals						
(3) Incarcerated individuals (as defined by the State or Territory)						
(4) Veterans						
(5) Individuals with disabilities						
(6) Individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who are English learners and have low levels of literacy						
(7) Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group						
(8) Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area						

- **2.1.4 Covered Populations Served | Select all that apply** to answer the question: "Which of the following Covered Populations will be served through your project? Please elaborate in the Executive Summary text above."
- 1) Individuals who live in Covered Households (i.e., with an income no more than 150 percent of the federal poverty threshold.
- 2) Aging individuals
- 3) Incarcerated individuals (as defined by the State or Territory)
- 4) Veterans
- 5) Individuals with disabilities
- 6) Individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who are English learners and have low levels of literacy
- 7) Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group
- 8) Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area

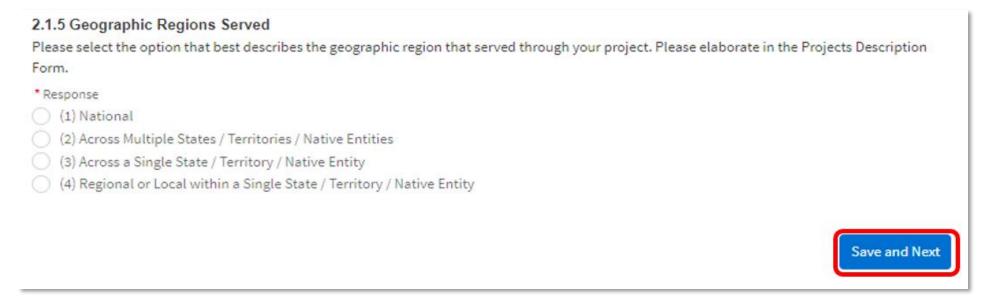




Geographic Regions Served



The application must include the specific geographies to be served or a statement that the activities will be state or territory wide. (NOFO Section IV.B(7)b.viii)



- **2.1.5 Geographic Regions Served** | Please select the option that best describes the geographic region that is served through your project. Please elaborate in the Project(s) Description Form.
- National
- 2) Across Multiple States / Territories / Native Entities
- 3) Across a Single State / Territory / Native Entity
- 4) Regional or Local within a Single State / Territory / Native Entity





Activities and Interventions



The applicant must provide the required information for each specific implementation activity and/or intervention that will be part of the Digital Equity Project, and which will use Competitive Grant Program funding, in the Project(s) Description Form. This form will be covered in more detail in the next section of this training.



2.2.1 Upload Files | Describe each specific implementation activity and/or intervention that will be part of the Digital Equity Project, and which will use Competitive Grant Program funding.

Complete the Project(s) Description Form provided, filling out all fields as applicable, and upload it.

The Project(s) Description Form serves as a tool to capture project details for each of the specific implementation activities and/or interventions to be funded by the Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program.

When applicable, each section has a character count limit of 2500 (approximately 500 words).

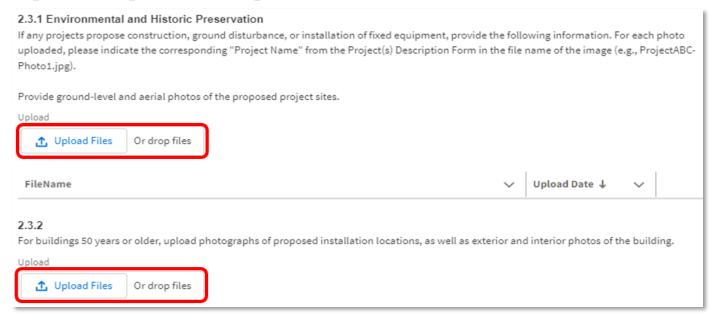




Environmental & Historical Preservation



If any projects propose construction, ground disturbance, or installation of fixed equipment, the applicant must include a description and photos, as required in the NOFO Section IV.B(7)b.xi.



- **2.3.1 Upload Files** If any projects propose construction, ground disturbance, or installation of fixed equipment, provide the following information: for each photo uploaded, please indicate the corresponding "Project Name" from the Project(s) Description Form in the file name of the image (e.g., ProjectABC-Photo1.jpg). Provide ground-level and aerial photos of the proposed project sites.
- 2.3.2 Upload Files | For buildings 50 years or older, upload photographs of proposed installation locations, as well as exterior and interior photos of the building.



PROJECT(S) DESCRIPTION FORM





Project(s) Description Form Overview



The Projects(s) Description Form serves as a tool to capture projects details for **each** of the specific implementation activities and/or interventions to be funded by the Competitive Grant Program. When applicable, it is required that each section has a character count of 2500 or less (approximately 500 words).



Project Name



Societal and Economic Goals of the Digital Equity Act



Relationship to Digital Equity Plan



Covered Population Served



Legal Identifiers of Subgrantee



Environmental and Historical Preservation



Subgrantee Legal Name



Estimated Outputs



Estimated Population to Be Served



Covered Households



Barriers to Digital Equity



Implemented Directly or Via Subgrant



Summary



Evaluation Strategy



Geographies Served





Project Name and Summary



The Project(s) Description Form requires applicants to summarize the activity or activities the project intends to complete or implement for the purposes of the Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program.



Project Name (Column B) Describes Name and Purpose of the Project



Project Summary
(Column C)
Specific Activity or Set of
Activities the Project Intends to
Complete or Implement





Digital Equity Barriers



The Project(s) Description Form also requires applicants to describe the barriers or challenges to digital equity they want to address.



Barriers to Digital Equity (Column D)

- Applicants must describe barriers and challenges to digital equity that will be addressed through their projects.
- They must include relevant data and data sources that describe the current barriers in their narratives via the form.

Applicants are encouraged to engage with the Covered Populations and to connect with organizations working with and for the Covered Populations in the digital equity space to better understand the existing need.

Applicants can review and leverage the barriers to Digital Equity identified within the State and Territory Digital Equity Plans.





Covered Population Information



The Project(s) Description Form asks for the **Estimated Population to be Served (Column E)** and also requires additional details for **Covered Populations Served (Column F-M)**. The formula below will be used to calculate the percentage of the population to be served.

Covered Populations Served

To calculate these percentages, please divide the total number of individuals that fall within each Covered Population category by the total number of individuals the project will serve (value in Column E), and multiply the result by 100. For example, if you had 200 Aging Individuals within the 1000 individuals the project will serve, you would divide 200 by 1000, and multiply the result by 100 to get your percentage. (e.g., 200/1000 = 0.2, 0.2 x 100 = 20%). Because individuals may be members of more than one covered population, the percent of all covered populations served may be more than 100%.

4	Individuals who live in covered households (i.e., with an income no more than 150 percent of the federal poverty threshold)	Aging individuals	Incarcerated individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
	Provide the estimated percentage of the population to be served that belongs to the "covered households" covered population.	Provide the estimated percentage of the population to be served that belongs to the "Aging individuals" covered population.	Provide the estimated percentage of the population to be served that belongs to the "Incarcerated individuals" covered population.	Provide the estimated percentage of the population to be served that belongs to the "Veterans" covered population.	Provide the estimated percentage of the population to be served that belongs to the "Individuals with disabilities" covered population.	Provide the estimated percentage of the population to be served that belongs to the "Individuals with a language barrier" covered population.	Provide the estimated percentage of the population to be served that belongs to the "Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group" covered population.	Provide the estimated percentage of the population to be served that belongs to the "Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area" covered population.

How to estimate the percentage of the population to be served that belongs to a covered population (example above):

(Total # of individuals within the Covered Population) / (Total # of individuals the project will serve (Column E)) × 100.





Societal and Economic Goals



The Project(s) Description Form requires applicants to describe how the proposed activity/activities or intervention(s) facilitate the Societal and Economic Goals of the Digital Equity Act.

Societal and Economic Goals of the DE Act (Column N)

Applicants must describe how the proposed activity or intervention facilitates the purpose of the Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program, specifically by promoting one or more of the following:



Economic stability, including workforce development and employment opportunities



Access to quality education



Access to healthcare



Social and civic engagement



Community access to the benefits of Internet technology





Evaluation Strategy



All applicants must provide their evaluation strategy/strategies for measuring successful implementation in the Project(s) Description Form. These strategies must include the near-and-long-term outcomes of the proposed activities or interventions.

The Evaluation Strategy (Column O) must include the following:



Key Outcomes

What are *the key* outcomes to be measured?



Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

What are the proposed procedures for data collection and analysis?



Evaluation Frequency and Scope

How frequently will applicants be evaluating their project impact and outputs? What is the scope of these reviews/evaluations?



Plan for Continuous Improvement

This includes obtaining input from beneficiaries and stakeholders to inform project adjustments to maximize effectiveness and sustainability





Project Implementation



The Project(s) Description Form will require an applicant to designate whether a project will be implemented directly by the applicant or via a subgrantee. If the project is sub-granted, additional information will be required.

- Will the applicant directly implement the proposed project?
 - If yes, use Column P in the Project(s) Description Form
 - If no, provide subgrantee details in Columns P-R of the Project(s) Description Form
- "Directly implement" refers to activities done by the Authorized Representative.
- Subgrantee activities include activities done by partners.

Implementation via Subgrantees

If an applicant is designating a subgrantee as the one implementing one of their proposed projects, the following information is also required:

Legal Identifiers:



- Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) [Column R]
 - Subgrantee is required to have a UEI prior to receipt of federal funds



Employer Identification Number (EIN) [Column S]





Relationship to Digital Equity Plan

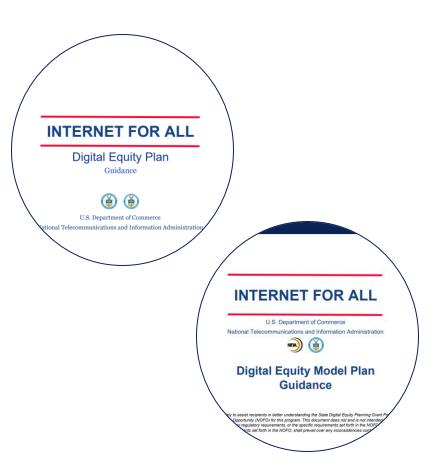


The Project(s) Description Form also requires applicants to describe how their efforts are connected to any State or Territory Digital Equity Plan(s).

Relationship to Digital Equity Plan (Column T)

Applicants must describe how their proposed projects align with, or address a gap in, the State Digital Equity Plan(s) of the State(s) or Territory(ies) within which it will be implemented.

Applicants can review and leverage the barriers to Digital Equity identified within the State and Territory Digital Equity Plans.







Geographic Information



The Project(s) Description Form also requires additional details for geographies served and Covered Households.



Geographies Served (Column U)



Applicants must *indicate specific geographies served* or provide a statement that activities will be State/Territory-wide.



If applicants identify multiple geographic areas for the project in the State/Territory, they must identify all areas in the corresponding row (as depicted below).

Indicate the specific geographies served or a statement that the activities will be State- or Territory-wide.

State A, State B, State C

Region 1 and Region 2 of State B



Covered Households (Column V)



The metric that the form requires applicants to provide (if available) is the percentage of Covered Households within the geographic area served.



A percentage of Covered Households must be provided for each geographic area identified in Column U.



Note that 'Covered Households' may be a different metric than the percentage required for 'Individuals who live in Covered Households' (Column F) due to regional parameters.

*As a reminder, Covered Households are households with taxable income of not more than 150% of the poverty level.





Estimated Outputs



The Project(s) Description Form asks applicants to provide estimates of the anticipated outputs for each project.

The Estimated Outputs (Column W) of a Project/Activity include, for example:



Number of Hours of Training to be Provided



Curricula to be Developed



Number of Certifications to be Awarded





Environmental & Historical Preservation



Applicants must also include details surrounding Environmental and Historical Preservation (EHP) as applicable. The descriptions in this form must match the EHP information provided in 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 in the NGP.



Fixed Equipment Installation (Column X)

- Respond **Yes** or **No**:
 - Does the the proposed project involve
 - Construction,
 - Ground disturbance, or
 - Installation of Fixed Equipment?



Description of Installation (Column Y)

- Applicants must provide a description of:
 - Physical location
 - Total extent and method of ground disturbance
 - Age(s) of the building(s) impacted







PROJECT PLAN





Project Plan Requirements



The Project Plan describes project activities, timelines, and key milestones among other strategies.

Project Plan Requirements



A description of all major project activities, which may include, for example, monitoring and evaluation and standing up stakeholder engagement



Timelines, including the **timing of planning and implementation stages** for a multifaceted project plan



Key **milestones** and when each major project activity will **start and end**



Potential risks to the timeline and proposed mitigation strategies, which may include, for example, ensuring deployment of technology will not have adverse consequences on Covered Populations





Project Plan Alignment



The Project Plan must be in alignment with the Consolidated Budget Form and the Project(s) Description Form.



Consolidated Budget Form | Costs that are detailed in the Consolidated Budget Form must align with the activities identified in the Project Plan.



Project(s) Description Form | The details for each proposed project in the implementation strategy, including timelines and strategies, should align with the Project Plan.



Activities Subject to Caps Applicants creating the Project Plan must abide by the spending caps outlined in the NOFO. Per Section IV.C.1 of the Competitive NOFO, there is a:

- □ 10% Cap on Administrative Costs, including the combined total of indirect and direct administrative costs
- □ 10% Cap on Evaluation, including measuring and evaluating the activities supported with the grant funds

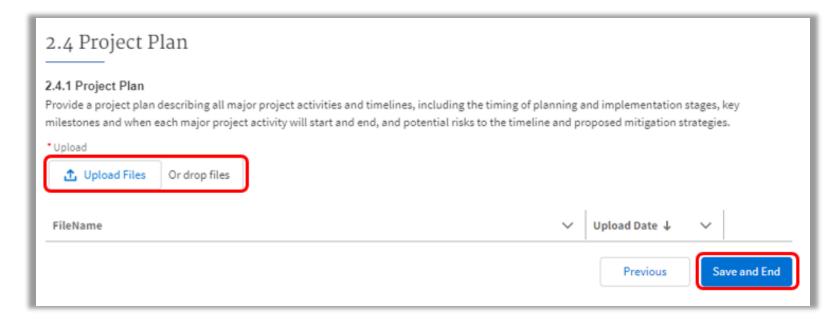




Project Plan



Applicants must upload the Project Plan as part of the overall Project Narrative section. This will include the timeline, key milestones, and risk mitigation strategies.



2.4.1 Project Plan: Provide a project plan describing all major project activities and timelines, including the timing of planning and implementation stages, key milestones and when each major project activity will start and end, and potential risks to the timeline and proposed mitigation strategies.







WHAT'S NEXT?





What's Next? | Scheduled Information Sessions





Application Webinar Part 1

What Topics will be Covered?

- SF-424
- Lobbying Standard Forms
- Negotiated Indirect Cost Agreements

What was covered?

- Completing the SF-424
- Completing the Lobbying Standard Forms
- Information on NICRA



Application Webinar Part 2

What Topics will be Covered?

- General Applicant Information
- Partnerships
- Eligible Entities

What was covered?

- Breakdown of the General Applicant Information
- Details to include for partnerships



Application Webinar Part 4

What Topics will be Covered?

- Evaluation Strategy
- Risk mitigation
- Other required plans



What will we be covering?

- Details to include for each plan
- How to submit the plans



Application Webinar Part 5

What Topics will be Covered?

- Related Costs
- Consolidated Budget Form



- Review of Consolidated Budget Form
- Review of NICRA
- Review of Budget Caps

Recording Available Now

Upcoming Information Sessions







QUESTIONS



