

The responses and hours associated with each response on the following non-forms comprise the burden for this package.

Rural in character determination request. Due to the “adjacent” and “contiguous” language in the statutory definition of rural and rural area, a project may be in a rural “pocket” even though located near a city or town with a population of 50,000 or greater. If an applicant believes they are in one of those pockets, a unit of local government may petition the Under Secretary of Rural Development for a “rural in character” designation. The petition must document why the petitioner believes the area is “rural in character” including, but not limited to, the area’s population density, demographics, and topography and how the local economy is tied to a rural economic base

Environmental analysis. Applicants are required to provide documentation as outlined in 7 CFR 1970, “Environmental Policies and Procedures”. This information is necessary for the Agency to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).

**Concept Proposal.** Applicants may submit a concept proposal not less than 60 days in advance of the application deadline to receive an Agency review of program eligibility components, strengths and weaknesses of the proposal as well as an encouragement or discouragement letter. A discouragement letter does not preclude an applicant from submitting a complete application package. The concept proposal consists of the following items:

- Partnership information. Information on the membership and structure of the rural jobs accelerator partnership and the amount and source of matching funds is necessary for the Agency to determine applicant eligibility and ensure that financial requirements are met.
- Geographic region. A description of the geographic region to be served including the total population, economic characteristics of the region such as unemployment rates and income levels, industry sectors, their status, size and economic contribution to the region and all communities including metropolitan statistical areas and nonmetro low income communities within the region must be provided. The availability and planned enhancements of broadband service and other assets of the region should also be identified. The Agency will use this information to determine project eligibility, ensure compliance with statute and regulation and for scoring purposes.
- Industry cluster. The industry cluster(s) that will be prioritized by the Partnership with information on the firms and support industries in those clusters; descriptions of the

status of the industry (as emerging, existing, or declining) any existing interconnection and networks within the industry cluster and a description of participation and scale of small and disadvantaged businesses within the industry cluster must be provided. Descriptions of opportunities or potential of industry growth in the region and competitive advantages of the region and industry cluster should be highlighted along with opportunities within the industry for the creation of or upgrading to high-wage jobs is also part of this discussion. The Agency will use this information to determine project eligibility and ensure compliance with statute and regulation. This information will also be used for scoring purposes in a complete application.

- Executive summary. An executive summary, project plan and scope of work must be provided with the applicant's strategy, activities, budget, goals, and objectives for the use of RISE funds. Information on the sustainability of the partnership and jobs accelerator at the conclusion of the RISE grant period must also be provided. This information is used by the Agency to determine project eligibility and for scoring purposes.

## **Application Content**

- SAM registration. To do business with the Federal government, the lead applicant is required to register in the System for Award Management (SAM). Registration in SAM allows the applicant to complete the Online Representations and Certifications Application which replaces several paper forms.
- Identify known relationship or association with Agency employee. The lead applicant is required to notify the Agency whether or not they have a known relationship or association with an Agency employee. The Agency uses this information to determine if there is a potential conflict of interest and whether that conflict requires additional action by the Agency.
- Update previously submitted items. Applicants that submitted a concept proposal are not required to submit duplicate documents; however, they are required to update any information that has changed. The Agency will use the new information to ensure compliance with statute and regulation.
- Readiness demonstration. Applicants are required to provide descriptions of: the readiness of all partners in the partnership to contribute to the project; evidence of a formal agreement among the partners to deliver the RISE program; the demonstrated readiness to administer the RISE grant funds; how the project will be marketed in the

region and how the partnership will measure success; plus, the timeline to complete proposed tasks and the schedule of implementation of each task. The Agency will use this information to ensure that, if awarded, grant funds will be used expeditiously and to set benchmarks and follow-ups during grant servicing to ensure project success.

- Targeted initiatives. Applicants are required to provide documentation on how the RISE project will deliver program initiatives and the project's impact to rural workers, small businesses, and jobs. The Agency will use the information to ensure that the project meets approved activities, statutes and regulations.
- Jobs and benefits to small and disadvantaged businesses. Applicants must identify the potential for their project to produce high-wage jobs and benefit rural small and disadvantaged businesses. The Agency will use the information to ensure that project meets approved activities, statutes and regulations.
- Region identification. The applicant is required to provide demographic information, a discussion on local and regional support for the proposed project and elaborate on current and future broadband services in the targeted region. The Agency will use the information to ensure that project meets approved activities, statutes and regulations.
- Financial information. Applicants must identify matching funds and any other sources of funds for the project, provide current financial statements and a narrative demonstrating financial feasibility and sustainability of the project. The information will be used by the Agency as part of the eligibility determination.
- Bonding and insurance. If awarded funding, the applicant must provide satisfactory evidence to the Agency that all officers of the applicant organization are authorized to receive and/or disburse Federal funds and are covered by such bonding and/or insurance requirements as are normally required by the applicant. This requirement provides documentation to the Agency to ensure proper safety measures are in place regarding the receipt of funds.
- Matching funds availability. The applicant is responsible for providing documentation that the required matching funds for the project have been received or remain committed at the date a financial assistance agreement is executed with the Agency. The Agency uses this to ensure that the project is financially feasible as well as its continued compliance with statutory requirements.

- Transfer of applicant. Any change to the jobs accelerator partnership prior to the obligation of funds must be approved by the Agency and will only be considered if the partnership entities are eligible in accordance with § 4284.1112.
- Application modification. Once submitted and prior to Agency award, an applicant may modify its application or scope of work. If the change is to the applicant partners or if the scope of work change is significant, the application will be treated as a new application.
- Application withdrawal. During the period between the submission of an application and the execution of grant award documents for an application selected for funding, the applicant must notify the Agency, in writing, if the project is no longer viable or the applicant is no longer requesting financial assistance for the project.

## **Servicing**

Programmatic changes – project cost or scope. Grantees may make changes to an approved project's cost or scope of work with Agency approval. Prior Agency approval is required for all increases in project costs. Prior Agency approval is required for a decrease in project cost only if the decrease would have a negative effect on the long-term viability of the project. The request for change of project scope will be used by the Agency to determine approval of the change request and whether the change will impact the remaining grant amount.

Programmatic changes – change in contractor or vendor. Grantees may make change an approved vendor or contractor with Agency approval. When seeking a change, the grantee must submit a written request to the Agency for approval. The proposed new contractor or vendor must have qualifications and experience acceptable to the Agency. The written request must contain sufficient information to demonstrate to the Agency's satisfaction that such change maintains project integrity.

Transfer of Financial Assistance Agreement. After the project is obligated and operational, the applicant grantee may request, in writing, a transfer of the financial assistance agreement to another entity. The information contained in the request must allow the Agency to determine if the proposed transferee is an eligible entity and can continue with the grant purpose using the available funds.

Disposition of acquired property. If, for any reason, a grantee disposes of any assets acquired with Federal grant funds, they must abide by the disposition of acquired asset requirements as outlined in 2 CFR 200 and departmental regulations. Required notifications and information are used to ensure proper disposal of acquired assets and reimbursement, if applicable, to the government.

Financial management. The grantees must provide for a financial system that will include: (i) accurate, current, and complete disclosure of the financial results of each grant; (ii) records that identify adequately the source and application of funds for grant-supporting activities, together with documentation to support the records. Those records must contain information pertaining to grant awards and authorizations, obligations, unobligated balances, assets, liabilities, outlays, and income; and (iii) effective control over and accountability for all funds. The grantee must adequately safeguard all such assets and must ensure that funds are used solely for authorized purposes. Records are to be made available to the Agency upon request.

Records management. The grantee will retain financial records, supporting documents, statistical records, and all other records pertinent to the grant for a period of at least 3 years after completion of the grant period. Retention of these records ensures the information is available for grant close out and in the event of questions or concerns regarding grant administration.

Audit requirements. If applicable, grantees must provide an annual audit in accordance with 2 CFR part 200 subpart F. This requirement keeps grantees in compliance with Federal auditing standards.

Semi-annual performance report. To be completed by the grantee on a semi-annual basis for the first two years and annually thereafter. This narrative is used by the Agency to confirm that progress is being made toward achieving the approved objectives and tasks of the project and monitor the performance of the applicant.

SAM registration maintenance. Each grantee (unless an exception, as outlined in 2 CFR 25.110(a) through (d), is approved by the Agency) is required to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award. Renewals to the applicant's SAM registration are required annually. The Agency uses the SAM site to ensure continued eligibility to receive Federal financial assistance.

Request for time extension. Grantees may request a one-time, no-cost extension of the grant term. Requests must be in writing and submitted no later than 90 days before the expiration

date of the Federal Financial Assistance Agreement. The Agency will use the grantee's written documentation of challenges that prompted the request for extension to determine whether an extension is warranted.

Request for appeal. Agency decisions that are adverse to the individual participant are appealable, while matters of general applicability are not subject to appeal; however, such decisions are reviewable for appealability by the National Appeals Division (NAD). All appeals will be conducted by NAD and will be handled in accordance with 7 CFR part 11. The Agency and appeals staff will use information provided to determine appealability of issues as well as formulate responses.