

Public Service Commission of Wisconsin



**Universal Service Fund
Nonprofit Access Grant Program**

**Fiscal Year 2025
Grant Application Instructions
Docket 5-NF-2025**

**Application Deadline
March 6, 2025
1:30 P.M.**

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Background

The Wisconsin Universal Service Fund (USF) was created to promote and assist with the availability and affordability of telecommunications services in Wisconsin. Companies providing telecommunications services in Wisconsin are required to contribute to the USF. The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (Commission) administers several programs funded by the USF, including the Nonprofit Access Grant Program which provides funding to nonprofit groups to facilitate affordable access to telecommunications services.

Under the requirements of the Nonprofit Access Grant Program, any nonprofit group (defined as an IRS § 501(c)(3) organization) may apply for funding from the USF to cover up to 75 percent of total project or program costs to assist in providing access to telecommunications services for low-income customers, and/or customers with a disability, and/or customers in areas of the state that have relatively high costs of services, in obtaining affordable access to a basic set of essential telecommunications services. There is no specified dollar limit for any particular project as long as USF requested funding does not exceed 75 percent of total project costs.

Eligible Applicants

Any nonprofit organization (IRS § 501(c)(3)) may apply for funding from the Nonprofit Access Grant Program.

Grant Funds Available

In accordance with Wis. Admin. Code § PSC 160.125(2)(f), the maximum available funds of \$500,000 is anticipated to be awarded in 2025 by the Nonprofit Access Grant Program.

Matching/Contribution Funds - Requirement

Applicants are required to provide at least **25 percent matching funds toward the total cost of the project or program** (a three-dollar-for-one-dollar match).

Always start your calculation with the total cost of the project. Examples: For a project with a total cost of \$25,000, the applicant must provide \$6,250 (25%) as match funds, as no more than \$18,750 (75%) can be funded from this grant program.

Total Project Cost	Match funds	% Match	Grant Request (& %)	Correct Match (Y/N)
\$25,000	\$6,250	25%	\$18,750 (75%)	Y - Correct match
\$25,000	\$5,000	20%	\$20,000 (80%)	N - Incorrect match

Make sure you do not request grant funds amounting to more than 75 percent of the total project cost. This may jeopardize grant award eligibility.

Matching funds provided as cash or in-kind contributions are acceptable. Matching funds may not include items purchased with USF grant dollars from prior years, nor may the in-kind match items be used to meet the grant match requirement for more than one USF grant award.

Matching/contribution funds listed on an application may not be used to meet the grant match requirement for other non-USF grant applications.

To meet the cash matching requirement, any non-USF funding sources, including federal, state, and private foundations, can be used. To meet the in-kind matching requirement, in-kind contributions may be professional services that are donated or discounted by the donor. Matching funds, both cash and in-kind contributions, must relate to the proposed project.

In the Grants System, matching funds are noted as contributions funded, and must be indicated as cash or in-kind on the note column of the budget form.

The application must identify the source and amount of matching funds. If the source of the match is not the applicant, documentation that matching funds are committed must be provided with the application or before a grant agreement will be issued. If the source is the applicant, a statement of commitment of matching funds or documentation of in-kind funds must be provided with the application before a grant agreement will be issued.

Communication Regarding the Application

The posting of these Application Instructions to the Commission's [Electronic Records Filing \(ERF\) System](#) in docket 5-NF-2025 will serve as 'official notice' of the opening of a new grant round. The 'official notice' is the means by which the Commission will provide information related to the application(s) in docket 5-NF-2025. Interested parties must proactively subscribe to the docket on ERF to ensure they receive timely information related to the process. Parties may subscribe at [ERF-EZ Subscriptions](#) or go to [Subscribing Instructions](#) for more information.

Application Submission and Deadline

All applicants are required to submit an application using the Commission's online grant application system. The [PSC Grants System](#) will automatically upload the application to the appropriate ERF account when the application is submitted. The PSC Grants System will not permit late applications. Applicants are encouraged to start early and leave plenty of time to work with the grant application and system.

Applications are due and must be submitted on the PSC Grants System no later than, Thursday, March 6, 2025, by 1:30 p.m. CST.
Please note the earlier time.

The deadline is final. The PSC Grants System does not permit late applications and cannot accept any application submissions after the deadline.

Application Instructions (9 Steps)

The instructions for completing a Nonprofit Access Grant application have two components, both available on the PSC website.

The first component of the instructions is the PSC [Grants System User's Guide](#) for Grant Applicants and Recipients. The User's Guide is the primary resource an applicant should consult to use the [PSC Grants System](#) and enter their application. The User's Guide provides step by step instructions to create a system account, navigate the online grant application, validate their application, and submit the complete application.

If awarded a grant, the PSC Grant account will also provide grant recipients with access to the online form and filing process to request reimbursement.

The second component of the instructions is this document, the Grant Application Instructions. This document provides step-specific guidance for completing an application for the FY 2025 Nonprofit Access Grant. An applicant should use this document to understand what information is requested for each page and each question in the grant application form.

These instructions also describe in detail the questions in the Narrative section tabs of the application form.

Step 1: Open the [PSC Grants System](#), and navigate to the **login page**. For the first instance of logging in, an applicant will need to create a system account. (Steps are outlined in the [User's Guide section: Getting Started](#).) An applicant must remember their username and password. For all subsequent instances, an applicant will use this username and password.

You also need your individual ERF account. Make sure to have at hand your ERF Login ID and password. If you forgot your ERF Login ID or your ERF password, go [here](#) for resetting. If you don't have an individual ERF account, go to the [PSC ERF System](#) and create one.

Step 2: On the **Grant System page** titled **Available Grants**, find the row for the 2025 Nonprofit Access Program, and click on the 'Apply' button. (Information at [User's Guide section: Grant Applicant Landing Page](#).) The first page you will fill out is the '**Grant Application Details**' page. Enter the information requested and click 'Create' (button on the bottom left) to save and continue your Grant application. ([Information at User's Guide Section: Grant Application Details tab](#)). Application data must be validated before moving to the next page/tab. Once create it, you will see a 'Save' button to continue to subsequent page.

Step 3: The PSC Grant System will now display the 'Grant Type' page of **Grant Application form**, which is arranged in a series of tabs along the top of the form.



Each tab must be completed (tab-specific instructions listed below). Before leaving any page of the form, the applicants must save their work using the 'save' icon at the bottom of the page. If not saved, *any unsaved entries will be lost*.

Step 4: Next, select the '**Contacts**' tab and completes the information required. (Information at [User's Guide section: Contacts Tab page](#).) Applicant must provide at least one Primary Contact and one Authorized Representative contact (the person legally authorized to sign the Award Grant Agreement); if it is the same person please repeat it in both categories. Additional contacts can be added by selecting Add New Contact and assign the contact type. (If the applicant receives a grant, a grant recipient can use this page to update the Contacts for the grant if needed.). Click save.

Step 5: Then, select the '**Contributions**' tab and fills in the required information. Contributions mean Match in the system. The contributions/match amount must be at least 25 percent of the total project cost. (Information at [User's Guide section: Contributions Tab page](#).) There is an automatic validation step built-into this tab; for entries be saved here, they must agree with the data entered earlier on the Details page. Click save. If there is any discrepancy, the system will display a warning, so you can fix it. Then clicked save to continue.

Step 6: Next, select the '**Budget**' tab and completes the required information. (Information at [User's Guide session: Budget Tab Page](#).) The budget numbers must be entered rounded to the whole dollar amount.

There is another automatic validation step in this tab; entries must agree with the data on both the Details tab AND the Contributions tab.

The Budget page requires applicant to enter for each of the budget category, the total cost of all items that will be purchased for the related category.

For each budget category, the form requires the applicant to split the total amount between the part that will be funded by a potential grant and the part covered by their contributions/match.

If no costs are associated with a budget field, applicants must enter zero. No empty fields are allowed. Click save.

Step 7: Then, select the '**Communities**' tab and completes the required information. (Information at [User's Guide Session: Communities Tab page](#)) Click save.

Step 8: Then, select the '**Narrative**' tab and fills in the required information. (Information at [User's Guide session: Narrative Tab Page](#).) The Narrative consists of 11 questions. All 11 questions are important. The applicant must answer every question and save their work before advancing to the next page of the Narrative. No empty questions are allowed. Applicant is allowed to write in 'n/a' and move on to the next question, but that means the applicant is passing on a question that either, determines the applicant's eligibility to apply for a grant, or contributes to increase the overall merit of the application. (See details below for each question in this tab.)

Narrative Tab (11 Questions)

Make sure to SAVE each answer, before moving to the next question.

1. **Eligibility**: Is the applicant a nonprofit organization as defined by the IRS in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code? Answer: Yes or No.

The applicant must be a nonprofit to be eligible.

If an applicant answers "no," the application will not be eligible.

2. **Applicant Overview**: Briefly describe the applicant organization(s) including the history, mission and programs or services. Answer: Open-ended.

Briefly describe the applicant organization(s).

3. **Project Purpose**: Describe how the project meets at least one of the purposes of the Universal Service Fund? Answer: Open-ended.

Describe how the project meets at least one of the following purposes of the Universal Service Fund:

- To assist customers located in areas of the state that have relatively high costs of telecommunication services in obtaining affordable access to a basic set of essential telecommunication services.
- To assist low-income customers to obtain affordable access to a basic set of essential telecommunication services.
- To assist customers with disabilities to obtain affordable access to a basic set of essential telecommunication services.

4. **Project Need**: Describe a public need that is not currently being met, which will be targeted by the project. Describe how this need was identified and defined. Answer: Open-ended.

Describe the population that this project will reach, provide data or information on their need.

5. **Project Impact:** Identify up to three realistic, measurable goals and outcomes expected to result from the implementation of the proposed project (please number them). Answer: Open-ended.

Identify realistic, measurable goals and outcomes expected to result from the implementation of the project. Anticipated outcomes should relate to the Project Need and Purpose described in the application. These goals and outcomes will be used to evaluate the success of the project.

6. **Unduplicated People:** Provide the number of different individuals projected to be served by the proposed project during the two-year performance period (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2027). Count each person only once. Answer: Numeric.

Only a whole numeric value will be accepted.

7. **Project Implementation -A:** For each goal, describe the activities, providers, equipment, and project/programs approach, to be implemented throughout the performance period to address the needs and achieve the goals.

Answer: Open-ended.

- Describe the activities to be performed throughout the timeframe of the project, including priorities, sequence and necessary materials, equipment, or contracts.
- Identify providers for each portion of the services or equipment needed for the project.
- Explain the approach to the problem, plan of work, and why this approach was selected.

8. **Project Implementation -B:** Describe any partnerships, community support or other collaborations with individuals or organizations that will be involved in the proposed project. Answer: Open-ended.

The applicant can indicate N/A if this does not apply.

9. **Project Evaluation:** Explain how the identified project goals and outcomes will be evaluated. Describe the performance measurement tools, such as pre- and post-testing, surveys, reports, and qualitative interviews that will be used to determine the extent to which the project meets each of its goals.

Answer: Open-ended.

10. **Budget Detail:** Provide justification for the budget, in narrative form. For each category listed in the budget tab, describe the item, and provide additional detail. Explain how the proposed project meets the desired public need in a least-cost manner. Answer: Open-ended.

Rent for general administrative purposes may not be included as a grant-funded expense; however, it can be included for matching purposes as a contribution-funded in-kind cost.

For each budgeted expense please provide a short narrative of cost details.

- If the budget contains labor costs of \$10,000 or more, the applicant must provide position details including the position title(s), the amount of time anticipated on the project, and the rate of pay. For example, Digital Navigator, 0.25 FTE, \$22/hr.
- If the project will be done by existing staff, explain why that approach was chosen.
- Identify the providers of the telecommunications services or equipment and provide a specific description of the components of the project.
- Administrative costs should only include costs directly attributable to the project. If a percentage of the organization's overhead is used to determine administrative costs, the amount and what is included in that percentage must be described.

11. **Additional Information:** For applicants that received previous awards, discuss past performance and how this application relates to previous awards. For new applicants, provide any additional information on the organization or the proposed project.

Answer: Open-ended.

For applicants that received funding in previous cycles of the Nonprofit Access Grant Program, reference previous successes and provide statistics describing the previous award and how this application builds on that success. SAVE.

Step 9: Finally, select '**Submit**' tab and follow the instruction. A manual validation step is built-into this page to help you to check that all information and questions on each tab have been completed. (Information at [User's Guide session: Submit Tab page.](#)) Once validation is completed and applicant has fixed any error, a 'Submit Application' button will appear. Click the 'Submit Application' button.

Once your application is submitted in the PSC Grants System, no change can be made by the applicant. After the submission of an Application, Commission staff may request additional information or a correction through email or through the PSC Grants System.

All applications become the property of the Commission, and are subject to Wisconsin's open records laws. Applications will be available for the public to review on the Commission's website by searching under docket 5-NF-2025 in ERF. Only saved, but not submitted applications are not visible to the public.

Review and Selection Process

1. Initial Screening

Commission staff will conduct an initial screening of all applications. The applications will be screened for: a) eligibility of applicant as a nonprofit organization, b) addressing the Universal Service Fund Purpose, c) the commitment of at least 25 percent matching funds, and d) application completeness.

Applications not meeting the initial screening requirements may not be considered for funding, and may be excluded from the review process.

2. Application Review and Merit Categories

Application passing the initial screening, will be reviewed by a panel of technical or program professionals. The review panel provides review and expertise. Reviewers will also use a rating checklist that determines the relative merit of each application based on the **grant application criteria** described above and in the below table. Results of this analysis and review will be reported in a memorandum to the Commissioners and posted on ERF.

Reviewers Evaluation Summary	
Merit criteria and Rating	
Merit Category and Value assessed	Scoring range
1. Project Purpose and Need: Applicant’s proposal meets at least one of the purposes of the Universal Service Fund. The proposed project describes how it will address a public need that is not currently being met.	1 - 10
2. Project Impact: Applicant has identified up to three realistic, measurable goals or outcomes expected to result from the implementation of the proposed project	1 - 10
3. Project Implementation: Applicant’s proposal describes project approach, activities involved and partnerships or other collaborations with individuals or organizations that will be involved in the proposed project.	1 - 10
4. Evaluation: Applicant’s proposal explains how the project goals or outcomes identified will be evaluated.	1 - 10
5. Budget: Applicant’s proposed budget is feasible given the scope, details, and timeline of the proposed activities. The budget meets the desired public need in a least-cost manner.	1 - 10
Final Assessment: Overall project merit score across all five categories.	5 - 50

Commissioners are not bound by the above merit criteria or resulting recommendations from the panel, which are intended for advisory purposes only. The Commissioners utilize their experience, technical competence, and specialized knowledge. The Commissioners, as the finder of fact and decision makers, are charged with evaluating all available information and applying any relevant statutory criteria, as well as the below criteria and any pertinent others, to reach well-reasoned decisions.

3. Final Decision on Grant Awards

After the screening and review process is complete, the Commission will decide which projects to award a grant. The Commission makes its decisions in Open Meetings. The Commission will notify all grant applicants of its decision by adopting an Order awarding grants that will be posted to the docket.

In addition to the merit categories above, the Commission may consider other factors in its decision-making such as: analysis provided by staff, analysis of the review panel, geographic distribution of the proposed grants, diversity of needs addressed by the proposed grants, the number of previous USF grants awarded to the applicant, cost of the project relative to the number of individuals receiving benefits, past performance on previous grants and availability of funds.

Grant Agreement, Reporting and Payment Process

There is a two-year performance period for these grants from July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2027. An executed Grant Agreement will be required of all Grant Recipients. Grantees will submit reimbursement requests via the online PSC Grants System. Interim and Final Reports will be submitted in the manner indicated by the Commission.

Each approved grant applicant will be required to enter into a grant agreement with the Commission. The Commission order awarding grants and the grant agreement, including any amendments, will together constitute the entire agreement of the state and the applicant, and will supersede any representations, commitments, conditions, or agreements made orally or in writing prior to the issuance of the order.

False, Misleading, or Omitted Statements

False or misleading statements, or omissions that render the information provided on an application to be false or misleading, are grounds for rejection of an application, for denial, or for termination of funding. In addition, the Commission reserves the right to take any other action allowed by law.

For further information or to request reasonable accommodations, contact:

Milena Bernardinello, Universal Service Fund and Digital Opportunity Director

Phone: (608) 267-6919

Email: Milena.Bernardinello@wisconsin.gov

Web: [PSC Nonprofit Access Grant \(wi.gov\)](https://www.wisconsin.gov/PSC-Nonprofit-Access-Grant)

For questions concerning the Commission's PSC Grants System, contact Staci Wilk by email at staci.wilk@wisconsin.gov.

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