

Public Service Commission of Wisconsin



**Universal Service Fund
Lifeline Outreach Grant Program**

Fiscal Year 2025

Grant Application Instructions

Docket 5-LLG-2025

Application Deadline

March 26, 2025

1:30 P.M.

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Introduction

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (Commission) is soliciting applications for the Lifeline Outreach Grant Program pursuant to [Wis. Admin. Code § PSC 160.063](#).

The purpose of the [Lifeline Outreach Grant Program](#) is to assist low-income customers to obtain affordable access to essential telecommunications through the Lifeline program, which provides a discount to eligible low-income households on essential telecommunication service.

The Lifeline Outreach Grant Program is organized around two program tracks: Outreach and Education (Track 1), and Research and Resource (Track 2). Refer to the Commission order establishing the grant program for additional detail. ([PSC REF#: 406892](#)).

- **Track 1:** The purpose of the **Outreach and Education** track is to increase awareness of, and subscribership to, the Lifeline program, including by explaining and assisting prospective subscribers with the eligibility process administered via the National Verifier (NV) eligibility tool, and the selection of an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC).
- **Track 2:** The purpose of the **Research and Resource** track is to conduct research to identify barriers faced by low-income communities to access the Lifeline program, and develop tools or strategies for reaching out to those communities.

Outreach and Education track—examples of eligible activities include, but are not limited to:

- a) direct outreach to potential clients, including community and virtual events, one-on-one follow-up to community events, school events designed to reach low-income families, career fairs, events for people who are non-native English speakers, events for people who are homeless, unhoused, or recently formerly homeless, or rehabilitation programs for people leaving incarceration; or
- b) outreach, training, or outreach network building to organizations and professionals across the state currently providing services to low-income populations (e.g., conference presentations, online webinars, the creation of multilingual outreach and training materials); or

- c) providing a ‘navigator’ type service to directly assist customers 1:1 to determine what telecommunications services, and provider, best meet their needs, and how to make the best use of that service.

Research and Resource track—examples of eligible activities include, but are not limited to:

- a) the use of existing datasets to identify barriers to accessing Lifeline discounts, and to propose solutions; or
- b) the development of a survey tool for professionals and/or direct consumers to identify barriers and potential solutions; or
- c) the development on an online application that may be used by professionals working with people who are low-income, or consumers, to identify opportunities for telecommunications and broadband discounts; or
- d) the development of a digital toolkit with ready-to-use program materials.

At the Commission’s discretion, awards may be made for at least one proposal, focusing on the Milwaukee metropolitan area, and at least one proposal with a statewide focus, if feasible. These awards may be made under either or both program tracks.

Applicants seeking funding under both program tracks must submit a separate application for funding under each track. Single applications addressing both tracks shall not be considered for funding.

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 certain telecommunications services in Wisconsin are required to contribute to the USF. The Commission administers several programs funded by the USF, including the Lifeline program and the Lifeline Outreach Grant program.

Lifeline Program

The [Wisconsin Lifeline program](#) is complementary to the Federal Lifeline program, and applies federal rules for subscribers’ eligibility, enrollment (one subscriber per household), and

minimum service standards. Through a network of ETCs¹ across the state, Wisconsin's Lifeline program provides a discount, in addition to the federal discount, to eligible low-income households on essential telecommunications services.

The discount is applied monthly to a customer's bill for phone and cell phones, internet, or both services, and it aims to a) reduce the bill to \$15 per month, or b) provide a maximum discount of \$9.25, whichever is least cost. To participate in Lifeline, all customers must receive an eligibility determination from the [National Verifier \(NV\)](#) using the secure, online web portal, or a paper application. Applicants may fill out the application on their own, or work with a family member, social worker, advocate, ETC or others to do so.

For 2024 Wisconsin's Lifeline program had a utilization rate of 20 percent of the potentially eligible subscribers.²

Lifeline Outreach Grant Program

Given the Wisconsin's Lifeline program low enrollment rate, the Lifeline Outreach Grant Program provides a funding opportunity to increase awareness and access to affordable telecommunication services. ([PSC REF#: 406892](#))

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants for this grant program under both tracks are:

- Non-profit organizations
- Community-based agencies,
- Political subdivisions, including Tribal governments

Eligible applicants, under the Research and Resource track only are:

- for-profit businesses,
- universities, and
- other institutions of higher learning are.

ETCs are not eligible for funding under this program.

¹ ETC - [Eligible Telecommunication Carriers](#) (2025 [List of Participating Providers](#))

² USAC: [Program Data - Universal Service Administrative Company](#)

Grant Funds Available

In accordance with [Wis. Admin. Code § PSC 160.063](#), the maximum available funds of \$250,000 is anticipated to be awarded in 2025 by the Lifeline Outreach Grant Program. The Commission may award up to a total of six grants.

Matching/Contribution Funds

Match funding is not required for this program. However, the Commission may consider applicant's proposed matching funds in evaluating projects and its award determinations.

If an applicant proposes to provide matching funds, 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 prior to release of any funding. If the source is the applicant, a statement of commitment of matching funds must be provided with the application or prior to release of any funding.

Communication Regarding the Application and These Instructions

Communications

The posting of these application instructions to the Commission's [Electronic Records Filing \(ERF\) System](#) in docket 5-LLG-2025 serves as notice of the opening of a new grant round. To receive future notifications in the docket, 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.

Reasonable Accommodations

The PSC does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the provision of programs, services, or employment. Any person with a disability who needs accommodations to participate in this docket or who needs to obtain this document in a different format should contact the PSC at the contact information at the end of this application.

The PSC is located in the Hill Farms State Office Building that is also physically accessible to individuals with disabilities through the entrances on the first floor of the building. Parking for people with disabilities is available on the ground floor of the parking garage. There is also

limited, free handicap visitor parking at the front of the Hill Farms State Office Building.

Clarification(s) and/or revision(s) to these Application Instructions

Any question concerning these Application Instructions must be submitted before the application due date. If an applicant discovers any significant ambiguity, error, conflict, discrepancy, omission, or other deficiency, the applicant should notify the PSC immediately at the contact information at the end of this application.

If it becomes necessary to provide additional clarifying data or information or, to revise any part of the Application Instructions, any revisions, amendments, and/or supplements will be posted in docket 5-LLG-2025. Any contact with state employees concerning this application is prohibited, except for those listed as contacts at the end of these instructions.

Request for Supplemental Information or an Application Cure

The Commission may request that an applicant submit a correction, supplemental or clarifying information, consistent with the application requirements. The Commission will use a curing process through the Grants System to request such information. If received and accepted, the cured information will be incorporated into the application and evaluated by the Commission using the established criteria to determine which applications should receive a grant award.

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.

Applications are due and must be submitted on the PSC Grants System

no later than, Wednesday, March 26, 2025, by 1:30 p.m. CST.

Please note the midday time.

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

Application Instructions (9 steps)

The instructions for completing a Lifeline Outreach Grant Program 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 an application. The User's Guide provides step by step instructions to create a system account, navigate the on-line grant application, validate the application, and submit the complete application.

If awarded a grant, the PSC Grants System account will also provide grant recipients with access to the online form and filing process to request reimbursement and submit program reports.

The second component of the instructions is this document, the Grant Application Instructions. This document provides specific guidance for completing an application for the FY2025 Lifeline Outreach 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 Lifeline Outreach Grant, 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 Grants System will now display the display the 'Grant Type' page of the **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 complete 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: Match or contributions are optional for this grant, in the case of no match please enter 0 in the '**Contributions**' tab. ([Information at User's Guide section: Contributions Tab](#) page.) If an applicant offers a match contribution to their project, select the 'Contributions' tab and fill in the required information. The

validation step applies to this tab as well. Entries here must agree with the data entered on the Details page to be saved.

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 13 questions. All 13 questions are important. The applicant should 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 the phrase '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 the overall merit evaluation of the application. (See details below for each question in this tab.)

Narrative Tab

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

Applicant Overview

1. Identify the project as either, 1) Education and Outreach or 2) Research and Resources track. Answer: Numeric only (1 or 2).
2. Indicate the entity type of the primary applicant, i.e. non-profit organization, community-based agency, political subdivision, Tribal government, for-profit business, university, or higher education. Answer: Short Open-ended (300 characters).
3. Briefly describe the applicant organization(s) including its organizational capacity, history, mission, current geographic area(s) of focus, and the target population(s) served. Answer: Open-ended (3,000 characters).
4. Describe the applicant's experience with low-income households as it relates to the identified grant track. Answer: Open-ended (3,000 characters).

Project Proposal

5. Provide a description of the proposed project, and why this project is a good fit for the applicant organization. Answer: Open-ended (3,000 characters).
6. If applicable, provide the name and description of any project partners and the role of each partner. Answer: Open-ended (3,000 characters).
If not applicable to your project, just type N/A
7. Provide a description of the proposed activities and an explanation of how those activities can increase participation of eligible households in the Lifeline Program. Answer: Open-ended (3,000 characters).

Please note, activities focused primarily on the development and distribution of literature or mailings, do not meet the spirit of the program and are not eligible.

Project Outcomes and Evaluation

8. Identify up to three realistic, measurable goals and outcomes, qualitative and quantitative, that are expected to result from the implementation of the proposed project. Anticipated outcomes should relate to the Grant Purpose. These goals and outcomes will be used to evaluate the success of the project. Answer: Open-ended (3,000 characters).
9. For each goal, explain how the proposed project activities and outcomes will be evaluated by the applicant. Describe measurement tools (e.g., pre-testing and post-testing), surveys, inventories, or reports that will be used to determine the extent to which the project achieves each of its outcomes. Answer: Open-ended (3,000 characters).

Project Implementation

10. Provide a project timeline that describes key benchmarks to be performed throughout the performance period anticipated to be July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026, including priorities, sequence, and necessary materials, equipment, or contracts. Answer: Open-ended (3,000 characters).
11. State how the progress of the project will be monitored to ensure that it will be carried out within the performance period. Answer: Open-ended (3,000 characters).

Budget Detail

12. Provide justification for the budget, in narrative form. For each category listed in the budget tab, describe the item, and provide additional detail. Answer: Open-ended (3,000 characters).

Budget items should only include costs directly attributable to the project. Eligible expenses for both tracks include: contractual, equipment, labor, other, training, supplies, rent/occupancy, travel, telecommunication, and internet service, and indirect.

Agency indirect costs are allowable up to 10 percent only.

Additional Information

13. For applicants that received previous Lifeline Outreach awards, discuss past performance and how this application relates to previous awards. Reference previous successes and provide statistics describing the previous award and how this application builds on that success.

For applicants that never received a Lifeline Outreach, type N/A.

Save and review before submitting.

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.

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-LLG-2025 in ERF. Only saved, but not submitted applications are not visible to the public. Applications that are saved but not submitted by the deadline will not be considered.

Review and Selection Process

1. Initial Screening

Commission staff will conduct an initial screening of all applications. The applications will be screened for a) applicant's eligibility, and b) application completeness.

After the submission of an Application, Commission staff may request additional information or a correction through the PSC Grant System. 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

Applications 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 Values Assessed	Scoring Range
<p>1. Applicant Overview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant clearly identifies the project track as either Education and Outreach or Research and Resources. • Indicates the primary applicant entity type. • Applicant’s mission, history, service area, capacity and target population are clearly described and align with the grant program goals and proposed project • Applicant clearly describes any experience with low-income households as it relates to the indicated grant track. • <u>If applicable</u>, applicant’s past experience with Wisconsin USF grant programs was successful. 	1-15
<p>2. Project Proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant clearly describes the proposed project, and it benefits the target population and Wisconsin’s Lifeline Program. • <u>If applicable</u>, provides a list the project partners, and the role of each partner. • Describes the project activities, and how those will increase Lifeline participation. 	1-20

<p>3. Project Outcomes and Evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant clearly identifies realistic and measurable qualitative and quantitative project outcomes. • Applicant explains how the project activities and outcomes identified will be evaluated, and related evaluation tools. 	<p>1-10</p>
<p>4. Project Implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant provides a project timeline with clear key benchmarks and details. • States how the project progresses will be monitored during the whole performance period. 	<p>1-10</p>
<p>5. Budget:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant provides a clear narrative justification for each budget category. The budget is reasonable, cost efficient and aligned with the anticipated project proposal and outcomes. 	<p>1-10</p>
<p>Final Assessment: Overall project merit across all five categories.</p>	<p>5-65</p>

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 make funding decisions in an Open Meetings of the Commission. The Commission will notify all grant applicants of its decision by adopting an Order awarding grants that will be posted to the docket 5-LLG-2025.

In its decision making, the Commission may consider any of the following: (a) the application, budget and supporting documents, (b) analysis of the review panel, (c) geographic distribution of the proposed grants, (d) areas of focus including a statewide focus, and a focus on the Milwaukee metropolitan area, (e) the number and performance of other USF grants awarded to the applicant, (f) the cost of the project relative to the anticipated benefits, (g) other criteria within the Commission’s statutory authority to

administer the Universal Service Fund and Lifeline Outreach Grant Program under [Wis. Stat. § 196.218](#) and [Wis. Admin. Code § 160.063](#) , and availability of funds.

At the Commission’s discretion, under either or both program tracks awards may be made for at least one project focusing on the Milwaukee metropolitan area, and at least one program with a statewide focus, if feasible.

Grant Agreement, Reporting and Payment Process

There is a one-year performance period for these grants from July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026. 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 using the PSC Grants System.

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.

Contacts

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.

Grant Program Email: PSCUSFLifelineOutreachGrant@wisconsin.gov.

For questions concerning the PSC Grants System, contact:

Staci Wilk by email at staci.wilk@wisconsin.gov.

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For questions concerning the PSC Electronic Records Filing System (ERF), contact Records Management Team at (608) 261-8524 or at pscrecordsmail@wisconsin.gov.

Public Service Commission of Wisconsin

North Tower, 6th Floor

Hill Farms State Office Building

4822 Madison Yards Way

Madison, WI 53705