Virtual Information Session Transcript

July 21, 2020
3:00-4:00 p.m. ET

RURAL TECH PROJECT

About the Virtual Information Session

The Rural Tech Project hosted a virtual information session on July 21, 2020 at 3:00 p.m. ET. In the session, U.S. Department of Education Assistant Secretary for Career, Technical, and Adult Education Scott Stump and Program Specialist Albert Palacios discussed the growing opportunities for the technology workforce and the advanced skills students will need for careers across industries. They explored how distance learning and competency-based education can help rural communities create new learning opportunities and how the Rural Tech Project will support educators in using these flexible models. The Rural Tech Project team also presented an in-depth overview of the challenge, explained the resources currently available to interested schools and districts, and answered questions.

Transcript

Isake Smith: Okay, let's get started. First of all, welcome, and thank you for joining the Rural Tech Project information session. The Rural Tech Project is a national challenge to advance rural technology education. My name is Isake Smith. I use she/her pronouns, and I'm a Senior Associate at Luminary Labs, a strategy and innovation firm based here in New York. We have been engaged by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education at the U.S. Department of Education to run this challenge, and we're here today to share with you our vision for equipping educators who prepare students for the careers of today and tomorrow. If you haven't already, please type your name, your title, and your location in the chat, and as you have questions, please type them in the Q&A section that you can see along the bottom of your screen.

We'll begin the discussion today by providing an overview of what the Rural Tech Project is. We'll walk through the challenge structure and how to participate, including the key dates and what creating a Rural Tech Project proposal will involve. We'll have time for questions at the end, so please take note of any questions and place them in the Q&A section, and we'll try and make sure we get to as many of them as possible.

Before we get started, please make sure your microphones are on mute. If you have any technical issues as we progress, please use the chat function to inform us or send us an email at hello@ruraltechproject.com.

We're joined by the Department of Education team that has spearheaded this initiative, and I'd like to begin introductions with Scott Stump.

Scott Stump: Thank you, Isake. This is Scott Stump, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, United States Department of Education.

Albert Palacios: Hi, I'm Albert Palacios. I'm also in the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, in the Division of Academic and Technical Education here at the U.S. Department of Education.

Richard Pettey: I'm Richard Pettey. I manage policy and strategy in the Office of the Assistant Secretary at the U.S. Department of Education.

Isake Smith: Thanks. We're going to hand off to Scott and Albert to share an overview of OCTAE's work advancing STEM education, and the vision that is connected to this initiative.

Scott Stump: Thank you again, Isake. First, I want to say that I'm participating in this via my cell phone, so I wasn't able to see the full chat of all the list of names, but they kept popping up on the screen. As I was seeing the names float through, I'm so excited to see so many CTE directors, instructors, business and industry leaders, those that are interested in STEM education, nonprofit and non-governmental organization groups. Thank you for being a part of today's conversation.

On behalf of the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, which we commonly call OCTAE, I want to welcome you and just let you know that we administer and coordinate programs that are related to career and technical education in community colleges, adult education, and literacy. Within OCTAE, our Division of Academic and Technical Education, or DATE, is responsible for helping all students acquire challenging academic and technical skills to be prepared for high-skilled, high-wage, or high-demand occupations in the 21st-century global economy.

Albert Palacios: My name's Albert Palacios, and I have, over the past few years, been leading a portfolio of challenges called the Ed Prizes challenges. These challenges are an array of different innovation technology challenges with the intent of strengthening career and technical education and education systems around the country.

We had three challenges over the past few years. The first one was a Reach Higher Career App Challenge that inspired the development of more career guidance applications that could be put in the hands of students. The next is the EdSim Challenge that inspired AR and VR, augmented and virtual reality, developers to develop better ways of integrating AR and VR into the classroom. Then the last one was a CTE Makeover Challenge, which was the ... Sorry, I'm looking at the other screen over here. Was the CTE Makeover Challenge, which inspired high schools to put maker spaces into their high schools. So that leads us to our current one, which is the Rural Tech Challenge.

We've been developing this over the last year or so, and we wanted to figure out a better way to enable students in rural communities to both be educated in rural communities, but also work in rural communities in

growing technology sectors. So we talked to a variety of industry representatives and educators to ask them what were the needs, where were the needs. And we understand there are significant needs and different approaches to teaching in rural communities. So we wanted to see if we could inspire, through this challenge, new solutions and new innovations to develop competency-based distance learning models that would enable the students and educational systems in rural communities to craft programs that meet the unique needs of their community. Rather than trying to come up with a new model for the entire country, we were looking for rural communities to tell us what the best solutions for their communities are. And we're doing that through this challenge.

Scott Stump: Thank you, Albert. Appreciate your work and Richard's work and all of our team's work on this process so far. I will tell you what this is rooted in. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that high-tech jobs will continue to grow at a much faster rate than overall jobs growth rate. Many of the fastest-growing career opportunities will require mastery of rigorous computer science and information technology skills. This is evidenced by many states adding in computer science standards to their general curriculum as they work their way through the K-through-12 system.

But this presents a unique opportunity [and challenge] for rural communities as remote technology careers are growing in the U.S. [while at the same time, there is] of a lack of instructional capacity in those areas and access to technology, in some cases, broadband. There was a 159% increase in people who are teleworking or working remotely from 2007 to 2017 in the U.S., and prior to COVID, already 4.7 million people in the U.S. currently telecommuted. And then you think about where that's headed in the months and years ahead as individuals have spent the past four to five months in more of a telework posture.

In addition to creating opportunities for technology careers, technology education fosters skills that will be helpful in any profession. When you think about technology students gaining skills like mental agility, persistence, a growth mindset, and logic, these skills give students an economic advantage because they're directly relevant to industries and careers of the future. These careers are largely unknown. Some estimates say that 85% of the jobs today's learners will be doing in 2030 aren't even categorized in the dictionary of occupational titles yet.

But technology education will help students be ready for anything. And just as technologies from artificial intelligence to biomedical data science are causing seismic shifts in how businesses and societies operate, future industries will continue to evolve; so, too, will the needed skill sets. Understanding how to learn new technologies will enable today's students to flourish in their formal education and beyond.

Just want to note that the top 10 in-demand jobs in 2010 did not exist in 2004 prior to Perkins IV. So today, my children, Greg and Ross and

Emma, could become a drone air traffic controller or augmented reality journey builder, roles that did not exist 10 years ago, and the trend is only accelerating.

Yet, traditional teaching models may not effectively deliver transferable technology skills, especially in rural communities. In our conversations with educators in rural communities, we've heard that there are often more students interested in IT pathways than places for those students to access, to get the learning they need. Students can normally access job shadowing experience without traveling 30 to 60 minutes to find someone who is doing the art of IT.

Rural schools have to navigate limited specialized staff and facilities as compared to larger schools, and this initiative aims to ensure that students in rural areas, like where my children grew up, and employers alike, do not miss out on the chance to place talented individuals into fulfilling tech careers.

The Rural Tech Project brings together what we have seen to be the key ingredients in making students in rural communities future-ready: competency-based education, distance learning, and technology education. Competency-based education supports the mastery of technology skills that employers need, and so it becomes more about the demonstration, the mastery of competency, as opposed to the amount of seat time or the age that the student is.

Distance learning uniquely meets the needs of rural students by expanding access to high quality, current technical education, and through both distance learning and competency-based education, we believe technology education can take many forms. And we can adapt it to serve different types of students, schools, and communities. This challenge is really about supporting the design and implementation of novel, rural, technology education programs.

Isake Smith: Thanks. With this mission in mind, we will now share details about how the Rural Tech Project is structured and the support we're offering to educators who want to create Rural Tech Project proposals.

The challenge will be conducted in two phases. During Phase 1, all eligible organizations will be invited to submit a program proposal. Submissions are open now and will close on October 8th. Up to five finalists will be invited to progress to Phase 2. The finalists will be announced in December of this year. Phase 2, the community implementation phase, will start next year in 2021. In this phase, you will plan, run, refine, and report on your proposed programs.

Up to five finalists will be selected, and we expect that they will be diverse in their strengths and characteristics. Phase 1 finalists will receive a

combination of $500,000 collectively and advance to Phase 2, where they'll receive ongoing support to bring their programs to life. Of the five finalists, one grand prize winner will be selected to receive an additional $100,000.

We'll now walk you through how you can participate in Phase 1. We've assembled resources to get you started. The general resources share our definitions of CBE, competency-based education, distance and technology education, as well as rural. We're welcoming a wide diversity within each of these areas, and we believe that any rural school can create a great program proposal that's customized to meet their needs. To this end, the entrant resources have been curated to support you crafting your submission. All resources are available on our website, ruraltechproject.com.

To be eligible, you must answer yes to these questions. Do you serve students between grades nine and 12? Are you publicly funded, and does the community you serve self-identify as rural? Now, we know that there's no one definition of rural, so if you need a guide to help you define how you are rural, consider using the mapping tool created by the Center on Rural Innovation. Also, see the Eligibility section of the Rules, Terms, and Conditions for more details on how rural is defined.

Your program proposal submission form will ask you to provide an overview of your proposed program, the career pathways it leads into, your implementation approach, how you will involve key stakeholders, and the background of your team. Local educational agencies and schools may submit. Regardless of who makes the submission, we encourage you to collaborate with educators, as any new program needs educators and administrators as well as other staff to support it.

The first section is the profile. We want to know more about you and the community you live in. We ask that you share brief information about your organization, the schools you serve in your community. As I mentioned earlier, you can consult our entrant resources for more information on how to define rural.

The program overview asks that you share with us a little bit more about what you would like to do with your students. You share your vision for your new competency-based distance program for technology education, including who the program would serve and how it would be designed and delivered. Here, you can use the entrant resources for more information on how to structure your learning programs for careers, assess mastery, and define a distance learning approach.

The next section is career pathways. Here, we'd like to see how you connect what will happen in the digital classroom to how learners can gain valuable work-based learning experience; share how your proposed

program will provide your students with skills that will prepare them to advance in one or more in-demand career pathways. You can consult the entrant resources for more information on how to understand career pathways, how to identify target career opportunities in your community, and how to connect secondary and post-secondary opportunities for your students.

The next section is the implementation section. This is really the nuts and bolts. We want to hear more about the logistics involved with building and maintaining your proposed program. We ask that you describe the approach, the infrastructure, and the resources you will need to implement and continue your proposed program in the 2021 to 2023 school years. You can consult the entrant resources for more information on how to choose competency-based education tools, how to assess your hardware needs, and how to test your connection speed.

Next is stakeholder engagement. A program like this will need the involvement from many different people. Who are the members of your community who can help? What kind of organizations would need to be involved? Maybe nonprofits or local government organizations. Share how you'll design and run your new program in collaboration with all of your community's stakeholders. You can use the entrant resources for more information on how to collect student feedback because they are, indeed, an important stakeholder, and how to establish or strengthen school-community partnerships.

Lastly, tell us about your team. It will take a village. This is a space to name partners, liaisons, or organizations that you'll be collaborating with in order to run your program. We've had many nonprofit organizations reach out to us and ask how they can be involved, and this is it. You can connect with your local high school or local educational agency to see how you can help with the Rural Tech Project proposal. The team section asks that you share what unique expertise and skills your team members have, and how they plan to advance your proposed program. You can consult the entrant resources for more information on how to identify potential community engagement managers.

The judges will review proposals against the following five criteria. First is quality of methodology, the extent to which the proposed program design thoughtfully uses competency-based education concepts or methods that will enable students in rural communities to master industry-recognized technology skills. Next is quality of planning, the extent to which the plan for the program implementation provides a sound and comprehensive approach to considerations such as budget, hardware and software requirements, infrastructure, staffing, training, sources of educational content, delivery methods, potential implementation challenges, and support for hands-on learning.

Third is community support, the extent to which the entrants proposed approach accounts for unique community needs and demonstrates input and commitment from stakeholders critical to program success. Not just educators, parents, school administrators, employers, and local community and/or government leaders. Fourth is continuous improvement, the extent to which the proposed program design presents a sound plan for evidence-based iteration and accounts for resources required to track outcomes and key metrics that support program improvement.

Last but not least is career relevance, the potential for the proposed program to impart technology skills to high school students that are highly relevant to identify local and/or national employer needs, and that are transferable to a range of post-secondary and/or career pathways. Judges and the Department of Education will also consider diversity and need for winner selection based on free and reduced-price lunch program enrollment, school size, and geography. We expect that finalists will have different levels of experience with distance learning models, competency-based learning models, and technology education.

Phase 1 finalists will be announced in December and advance through the community implementation period. The community implementation period is four phases. First is the Plan phase. The Rural Tech Project and a local community engagement manager will work with finalists to collect broad input from communities to finalize program implementation plans. This will include finalizing what metrics to measure and will think about what constitutes evidence of mastery, what sorts of rubrics they might use, and other aspects of the program design.

Next, we'll have Run. This will be the first academic year of your program. Community engagement managers will support schools in implementing the plans and in collecting and actioning on any feedback they get on what to keep doing and what needs to be adjusted. The Rural Tech Project and community engagement managers will support program design iteration for the second academic school year.

The next step is to Refine. Schools will action on any lessons learned from the first year of implementation and then document results and evidence on effective practices for rural, distance learning-enabled, competency-based, tech education program design. Lastly, there will be the Report step. We ask that you report on any lessons learned. The Rural Tech Project will share lessons learned with other rural communities, and we hope that all communities will continue running their programs.

Each finalist will help select a part-time local community engagement manager, or CEM, paid for by the Rural Tech Project. In order to support program setup, implementation and evaluation of each program. The

Rural Tech Project will also provide technical assistance to the community engagement managers for the finalist's benefit, including training on any needed skills.

In sum, there are many reasons to participate. The opportunity for funding to test out distance and blended learning for technology education, continued technology assistance from Luminary Labs, and a paid, part-time staff member to help launch and manage your new program. You would join a cohort that you can learn with and from, and you would be able to identify best practices that you can share with other rural communities. You can prepare students and connect them with opportunities that can advance their careers. So how do you enter?

You'll need to submit your proposal by 5:59 PM Eastern Standard Time on October 8th. We recommend that you have a look at the submission form now to familiarize yourself with what is required. The submission form is available on ruraltechproject.com/submit. Remember, you'll need to allow time to organize the team that will support your implementation, and get the confirmation of your local educational agency's support before submitting. It's a good idea to submit well before the 5:59 PM deadline in case you have any technical difficulties. And don't forget to visit the entrant resources page. It contains a selection of resources to help prepare your Phase 1 submission.

So we ask that you take the time if you have any questions to submit your questions in the Q&A section, we'll begin answering those questions one at a time.

Albert Palacios: I think we've gotten quite a few questions, and feel free to continue to submit your questions. We got a lot of questions around eligibility and what do the applicants look like and who can be on applicant teams. One thing you need to keep in mind, this is a challenge. This isn't a grant, so rather than applicants, we consider the group submitting entrants because we want you to submit an entry for this competition, this contest, to develop your best ideas.

One of the first questions was, can individual teachers who are not in career and technical education qualify, or is this just for CTE, career and technical education, or can it involve more than one teacher? The eligible entrant for this challenge is a high school or local education agency, so it would be broader than just one CTE program, one educator. It should be school-wide, and we want to make sure that eligible entrants must be receiving federal funds from the elementary and secondary education programs, which pretty much covers most every public school district. You can do a verification, but it's pretty much every public school district in the country. We expect that CTE will be an integral part of the team, but it doesn't necessarily have to be limited to CTE programs or teachers.

Kind of along those lines, are a consortium of LEAs eligible to be a single entrant? In those cases, you need to designate one LEA, one local education agency, to be your lead entrant. Either a single high school or a single LEA needs to be your lead entrant. Beyond that, that lead entrant, the high school or the LEA, can administer their team however they see fit so it best suits their needs.

Next question, what pathways are applicable to this challenge? This is not limited to a single pathway. It doesn't have to be a CTE information technology career pathway. It could be a healthcare IT pathway. It could be an ag science IT pathway. It could be some other complementary pathways that have an IT component, but the critical part is that, going back to that intersection of programs, we want to see both the career pathway, the technology, the distance education, and the competency-based learning. We want to see that integral model, so that's what we'll be looking for, and that's the more important part of what we want to see in the entries.

Scott Stump: If I could jump in there just for a second on that one, because there's a question later, does the program need to focus on the in-demand careers, and can that be regional? Absolutely. It can even be within a wider state corridor. Data is showing right now that more students are living closer to home than you'd imagine. People end up about 18 miles from their mamas, so we do want to focus in on that rural area because some of this, in our minds, is economic development for rural areas. Because if we can get young people on a pathway to an IT career that, as we look into the future we absolutely see more virtual work being done, if they can tap into that and create a business out of this work or partner up with others in their area, absolutely, look to that regional area.

The last Perkins Act, which we're now in our first full year of non-transition, full implementation, called for a comprehensive local needs assessment that states and local providers have worked on for the past year. Out of those, we'll really define where those critical tech spaces are at and where the needs are, and then look to say how do we fill them and connect students virtually with businesses where they can put their talents to good use.

There's another question about whether or not there needed to be kind of a state-wide agreement on a place for accredited and accreditation of distance learning and competency-based learning programs. Note the state doesn't need to be that far along yet. Honestly, we're hoping that this will inspire some conversations to become successful at the local/rural level. Then it pushes those states to consider and say, "How do we factor in competency-based approaches, and how do we factor in this notion of distance-enabled learning in ways that our past policies and procedures might not fit?"

Albert Palacios: Thanks for jumping in, Scott. You reminded me of one of the reasons why challenges are so exciting. It's because you can assemble your team around what best fits your local area, but also come up with some new ideas. That's why we do these things, because we want to see some new and innovative things that haven't been done before. So whether it be getting your local car dealership involved in some way that they weren't before, or getting your local hospital to provide something that they hadn't before, there's a whole array of opportunities that are opened up because this is a challenge, and you have the opportunity to kind of assemble your team. We do want to see those new ideas and new models that will, hopefully, inspire not just expansion in your community, but service models for other communities to think outside the box. Pardon the cliché.

Along those lines, there's another question about can you serve multiple communities? Can it be several neighboring schools or districts? So the answer's yes. Now, there still has to be one lead high school or local education agency as the lead entrant. However, the solution you provide may include an array of LEAs or high schools, or it could be schools across districts. We hope to see as many involved as possible. That would help kind of make your program more robust, but also effective. We hope to see some new ideas entered into the challenge.

If your LEA spans rural and non-rural areas, we'd want to see kind of how you're focusing on rural areas and how is that rural area that you are serving being defined. If you go onto the website, there are a few models on there that you can use and also definitions, but we'd want to see how you're defining rural. We're not necessarily excluding anything. We're just trying to have a better understanding of how different communities view rural education and rural communities.

Scott Stump: Albert, some cool questions, and I note as you were talking about collaborations, we absolutely encourage rural communities to come together, because that's one of the strengths of those areas. I just want to very clearly say that the local education agency is the eligible entrant in the challenge, but that's not to exclude all of the wonderful nonprofit organizations and for-profit companies that are in this space, and want to do the great things and do good in the world with it. It could be a two or a four-year college or university. It could be a local consortium, an industry group of IT professionals that just want to step forward and really expand the IT knowledge and talent pool in their state or regional area.

All of those individuals absolutely need to come alongside the local education agency or high school, or, in this case, there's a question about a GED program or English as a second language program. If it's tied to a local education agency, absolutely. Bring that and get the widest use possible out of this resource. I will tell you, there's a program in Socorro, Texas, just outside of El Paso, where they use the CTE program during the day for high school students, but in the evenings, adults are being

trained in IT careers in computer repair and applications but then also the beginning essence of code stack. So absolutely, be creative. Be inclusive. Grab the widest group you can.

Isake Smith: Yeah, just want to follow-up on the collaboration. We expect that lots of different people will need to come together to make a team that will really functionally be able to provide a strong program. Like Scott and Albert said, the local educational agency and the district will need to be the lead entrant, but we know that, and we have tons of questions from for-profits, from different nonprofits, from local business consortiums, and we ask that if you one of those folks, if you're saying, "I want to help," we actually want you to do that. We want you to come together and work with organizations that want to propose a program.

This means that you will need to reach out to the high schools and local educational agencies that are in your network. Whether you're a for-profit, if you're a nonprofit, if you are an organization that wants to donate services or devices, that is something that you would be able to do through the local educational agency. So we ask that you really take the time to understand what are the high schools and local education agencies that serve high school students in your area, reach out to them, and then make sure that they are aware of the proposal process, what that will entail. And you can help them in terms of understanding what the next steps need to be.

Albert Palacios: I see one question that popped up about intellectual property. I have to go back and find a specific reference to that in the Rules, Terms, and Conditions, but I believe we do address that. So I want to make sure I'm giving you the right answer, so I'll have to go back and check with that. We'll make sure we're able to point to the specific clauses that refer to the intellectual property. If we can do it during this call, great. If not, then we will make sure that it's highlighted or on the website somewhere.

Isake Smith: Yeah, so what we will do is we're going to make sure that all of the questions that we have collected, we're going to write out and answer in long-form as a news post on our website. So if you don't hear us respond to your question here, the questions will be responded to on the website in a longer post.

I think that we have seen a couple questions come in about partnerships with community colleges. There's one question that says, "When you say local educational agency, does that include community colleges?" For our purposes, a local educational agency is a district leadership that is working with K through 12 students. So that would not include community colleges unless that community college is working with high school students.

There was another question about districts being rural. The district in and of itself as a whole does not need to be rural, but the students that are served need to be rural. If, let's say, the district encompasses both rural and suburban areas, the students that are served by this program need to be rural. Then to clarify on the prize pool, up to five finalists will be splitting the prize pool of $500,000. That means that if we select five finalists, then each of the finalist teams will receive $100,000 each.

Albert Palacios: In addition, their local community engagement manager will be funded at part-time. Correct?

Isake Smith: That is correct.

Albert Palacios: Okay, yeah. Just wanted to make sure I mention that or I was correct in that.

Isake Smith: Yeah. Albert, do you want to talk to folks who want to offer their products or services as partners to teams?

Albert Palacios: Sure. As we mentioned, we're looking for a lot of creative solutions, so if a partnership makes sense at a local level to where a local company or product you feel would be beneficial to serve that local community, by all means, we would hope that they could be part of your team. If there's anybody on this current session that has a national presence and is looking for kind of a more, well, national scope, please contact me, and we'll talk about if there are opportunities and what that might look like. We can give you examples of ways companies have gotten involved in the past. There's no real limitation on the types of companies that can be involved.

Keep in mind, the prize pool of $100,000 each for the finalists, if we do select the five finalists, which we anticipate we will be selecting five finalists. Once we select them, then how that money's distributed is up to that local team lead. So the team lead will decide how that $100,000 gets allocated.

The entrant is free to use that money however they see fit. One great thing about challenges as well is that those funds do not have the conditions of other federal grants that you've received through our department or from elementary or secondary education programs or CTE programs through Perkins. The only limitations on the funds are your local policies. However, your local LEA or high school or whatever your local financial management policies are, those are what govern here.

So if you feel that you need that $100,000 all to go to one thing, then great. If it's going to be distributed across multiple partners, it's all up to you. We expect that you're going to be using that money as you move

forward through the finalist process to incubate your programs, but there's no specific limitation or requirement on how you use those funds.

Isake Smith: We also have a question here on if the primary local educational agency can be a participant in the plans, or just an agent while the program occurs in the school?

Our hope is that you are working in tandem with your local educational agency. While maybe an educator or the principal at the school is the entrant, is the person who's driving the program forward, the local educational agency is in partnership and is working with you to make sure that you're all on the same page in terms of what will be happening, given that this program is pretty long-term and will likely need a pretty broad network of folks to make sure that you have all of the resources you need. Not just in terms of the funding, but also in terms of planning, in terms of professional development, and in terms of making sure that folks have time to build out a program that will be successful and engage all the stakeholders that need to be involved.

I think there have been a couple of questions about broadband. So, Albert, the question here is, "Not every rural community has strong broadband internet. Rural broadband is often a barrier to technology and technology education. Geographic equity in terms of access to technology is often difficult, so how does this project address that?"

Albert Palacios: Sure. This has been at the forefront of questions to be answered for more than 10 years. There have been some advancements made. We obviously know that there's not 100% coverage yet. A couple of things come to mind for approaches. One is, can you develop a design that isn't as reliant on broadband or internet connection? That's one way to think. That's one option.

The ideal option is to get everyone connected, and if you don't have that capability, maybe you can go to an outside organization. I think there's EveryoneOn, a nonprofit, and FreedomPop. Those are some of the ones that are out there that can provide low-cost devices. Now, that's kind of dependent in low-cost access to internet, and sometimes even free. But sometimes that's dependent on even having 4G coverage in your area. Sometimes that's not even an option.

We're looking for new solutions. Again, that's part of the challenge, to come up with solutions where broadband might not be available. Richard, did you want to add something?

Scott Stump: Well, this is Scott. Albert, I'm going to step in here for just a second and say one of the key priorities of this project when it was first put together was to put immediate financial and human capital resources into communities that do need it. That would be communities that are

struggling with high-speed access to the school but then also to the community at large.

I will tell you I know this because, well, I'm not in D.C. I'm in the northeast corner of Colorado, and those of you that are in school districts, this will put it in perspective. If we only had in-district kiddos, and our district is 45 miles tall by 35 miles wide, we'd have 86 children, preschool through 12th grade. You want to talk about population density and being out there in well below the rural qualifications of USDA's moniker. We're there. That's the vision is to hit some of those communities and really stand up models and create examples that can be replicated in other communities that will change that equation.

Absolutely, the $100,000 prize, if your biggest limiting factor, but you have a great plan, but you know that you're going to need immediate investment in broadband or access, then that can become an immediate use of that $100,000 to start that investment. And then working with your community engagement partner to then look at USDA grants, other federal opportunities for rural development in other places to invest in that space. It should create a great conversation to start bridging some of these digital divides for people.

Albert Palacios: We really want to push the envelope with innovation and new ideas on this. Just to give an example, Charlottesville, Albemarle County in Virginia, was facing significant connectivity issues for their area. What they did, and from what I understand in talking to them, it was a pretty arduous process to get a tower approved through FCC to cover their school. They actually have their own tower that they were able to set up in their school.

I've also heard of examples where schools have been partnering with communications and ISP, internet service providers, to put a tower on their campus, and the ISP ends up paying the school to have the tower on their property. It makes sense in some communities, not in others, but we hope that you're going to come to the table with your entries that have new ideas and really are looking to push the envelope and move the needle on this.

Scott Stump: Another question about whether all of the instruction needed to be virtual and whether or not that was a critical component. I will tell you, our vision for this project is yes, virtual will be a component. Now, there's the full realm from 100% virtual, which we all know probably in the current tech environment is not the best case, but great learning can happen, all the way to direct in-person instruction. There are blended models in between there with asynchronous models, synchronous models of connecting in instructors from a community college, or from a business that are connecting. There’re virtual apprenticeships that could happen.

Here's the issue. We don't have enough IT instructors to meet the needs of places they might go in an urban area, let alone getting an IT instructor to go out to a rural area with a school budget that can't afford, in some cases, a principal to be different for high school and middle school. We're just not going to get them hired, so even if you do have and are blessed to have an instructor, and you are that instructor, and you're wanting to apply, tell us about how you're going to expand your impact and expand your influence and expand to more students, in essence, your instructional capacity. That's what we'd love to see.

Isake Smith: We are sadly out of time. If we didn't get to your question, please make sure you check out the challenge blog where we're going to publish the responses to the questions we received. If you have additional questions, if things come up as you begin to fill out the submission form, please send those questions to hello@ruraltechproject.com.

Albert Palacios: Isake, really quickly, I've seen a few questions about, will the slides be shared with the attendees and is this event recorded, and will it be available. Can you respond to that, please?

Isake Smith: Sure. So both the slides and the recording of this webinar will be available on our website. Make sure that you sign up on the ruraltechproject.com website to receive the challenge newsletter where we will be announcing when the recording and the slides are available. Add hello@ruraltechproject.com to your address book, and make sure that when we send out those messages, they don't get sorted as spam and you miss them.

And you can also visit edprizes.com to learn more and sign up for the Ed Prizes newsletter to receive updates on this challenge, future challenges. And follow us on social media to talk to us and see what other folks are talking about for the Rural Tech Project.

Thank you all so much. I really appreciate you taking the time to tune in and ask us really thoughtful questions. I hope that this has been really helpful and that you are able to functionally begin your submission to the Rural Tech Project. Have a great afternoon, evening. I know a couple folks are out on the Left Coast, so good morning. All right, have a great one.

Albert Palacios: Thanks a lot. Bye, all.