

Virtual Information Session Questions and Answers

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



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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.

Below is a summary of the answers to questions posed during the virtual information session.

Questions and answers

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Eligibility

What is the role of the team lead and who qualifies for that role?

The team lead serves as the primary point of contact for the challenge, and will be responsible for submitting the entrant's program proposal via [Luminary Lightbox](#). The team lead must be employed by the submitting school or local educational agency (LEA) and must be 18 or older; there are no additional requisites for the team lead. Refer to the [rules, terms, and conditions](#) section VII "Submission Information" for further details.

Who can participate as a team member on a submission? For example, can a community college, university, nonprofit organization, for-profit entity, faith-based organization, or private school join a team?

As long as the entrant is a school or LEA that meets the criteria stated in the [rules, terms, and conditions](#) section III "Eligibility," entrants may choose the organizations or entities that it believes would be most effective in advancing its proposed project. Team members can be named in the "Team" section of the submission form.

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Is this challenge just for CTE educators?

No. While we expect many CTE teachers and programs may play a central role in entrant teams, entrants may come from any high school or LEA receiving ESEA funds that meet the eligibility criteria stated in the [rules, terms, and conditions](#) section III. “Eligibility.”

Does the entrant need to be a participant in the plans, or can they simply serve as the entrant agent while program implementation occurs in other schools?

The degree to which the entrant plans to actively participate in the proposed project as well as the responsibilities it intends to delegate to team members is at the discretion of the entrant and should be specified in the “Team” section of the submission form. Refer to the [rules, terms, and conditions](#) section VII “Submission Information” for further details.

How do you define a local educational agency (LEA)?

The Rural Tech Project uses the definition of a local education agency (LEA) from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). In the law, an LEA is defined as a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a state for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a State, or for a combination of school districts or counties as are recognized in a State as an administrative agency for its public elementary schools or secondary schools. In addition to the definition in ESEA, entrants must serve students between grades 9-12 who are located in one or more rural communities, as indicated in the [rules, terms, and conditions](#) section III “Eligibility.”

May community colleges enter the challenge as a team lead?

No, unless the community college is recognized by its State as a secondary school, high school, or local education agency and meets the requirements indicated in the [rules, terms, and conditions](#) section III “Eligibility.” Community Colleges may be included as team member in an entry led by an eligible entrant.

May state departments of education enter the challenge as a team lead?

No. This challenge is limited to secondary schools, high schools, and local education agencies that meet the requirements indicated in the [rules, terms, and conditions](#) section III “Eligibility.” State departments of education and other state agencies may be included as team members in a submission led by an eligible entrant.

Can schools or LEAs partner on a single submission?

Yes, multiple schools or LEAs can partner on a single submission; however, one eligible entity must be designated and submit the entry as the lead school or agency. This entity would receive any prize funds if selected as finalist and would be responsible for allocating those funds to the team.

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Can a proposed program serve multiple rural communities?

Yes, a proposed program can serve multiple rural communities.

Can a school that serves students in addition to students in grades 9-12 be an eligible entrant?

Yes. While an entrant may serve any student population beyond the scope of the Rural Tech Project in its current operations, the proposed program outlined in the submission must deliver education to students between grades 9-12 to be eligible. Charter schools that meet the definition of an eligible entrant as indicated in the [rules, terms, and conditions](#) section III “Eligibility” may submit an entry to the Rural Tech Project.

Do existing programs qualify for this challenge, or do only new/developing programs qualify?

An eligible entrant may submit a program proposal that includes existing programs or expands upon current work. Expansion may include, but is not limited to, serving new students, refining program delivery, or other improvements that enhance technology education delivery to students in rural communities. As noted in the [rules, terms, and conditions](#) section VI “Award Selection Criteria,” entrants are expected to provide quality plans that allow for evidence-based iteration.

Can non-traditional programs serving students in grades 9-12 apply for this? For example, could GED or English as a second language programs apply for this?

No. This challenge is limited to secondary schools, high schools, and local education agencies that meet the requirements indicated in the [rules, terms, and conditions](#) section III “Eligibility.” Non-traditional programs may be included as team members in an entry led by an eligible entrant.

Are federally funded after-school programs like 21st-Century Community Learning Centers or youth and community development programs able to submit on behalf of a school?

No. This challenge is limited to secondary schools, high schools, and LEAs that meet the requirements indicated in the [rules, terms, and conditions](#) section III “Eligibility.” Other organizations and programs may be included as team members in an entry led by an eligible entrant.

Does my LEA need to be categorized as rural for me to enter? Or, can an LEA that serves both rural and non-rural high schools be an eligible entrant?

To be eligible, an LEA must be one that has “rural status,” as described the [rules, terms, and conditions](#) section III “Eligibility.” An LEA that is applying must indicate in its submission what makes its community “rural,” based on an existing Federal definition of the term. If an LEA that serves both rural and non-rural high schools meets an existing Federal definition of the term “rural,” and serves students between grades 9 and 12, it is eligible to apply.

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Submission requirements

How is the Rural Tech Project defining competency-based education?

For the purposes of this challenge, competency-based education (CBE; also called proficiency-based or mastery-based learning) is defined as a system of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic reporting in which students must demonstrate mastery of a subject or concept to move forward in their educational pathway; neither age nor seat time are factors for determining progression. Refer to the [rules, terms, and, conditions](#) “Definitions” section for further information.

What CTE pathways are applicable to this challenge?

A range of CTE pathways may be applicable to this challenge, provided the pathway includes technology-related career pathways and results in industry-recognized credentials as described in the [rules, terms, and, conditions](#) section VI “Award Selection Criteria.” Entrants are encouraged to consider local workforce needs when creating their submission.

Do submissions have to be centered around virtual instruction?

Distance learning should be a component in all submissions. Distance learning is defined by the Rural Tech Project as a system in which students are educated with minimal, if any, in-person interaction between the content instructors and students. Distance learning can be delivered through a range of different models, including online or virtual instruction. We encourage entrants to be creative in the models they use, in order to best suit students’ needs.

Are there specific state accreditation requirements for our proposed distance learning program?

There is nothing in the rules, terms, and conditions that requires specific state accreditation. However, participants in the challenge are still required to comply with all state and local policies and requirements, including those related to accreditation.

Are there requirements around the number of students served or the reach of the program?

No. We anticipate diversity in geographic and student reach among entrants and finalists.

Are you seeking racially and ethnically inclusive approaches to recruitment and enrollment in proposed Rural Tech Project programs?

The rules, terms, and conditions do not require specific approaches to recruitment and enrollment. However, ED supports and encourages diversity and inclusive approaches to recruitment and enrollment. Entrants are encouraged to submit their best approach for a program that meets the needs of the community it intends to serve and complies with applicable policies regarding diversity and inclusion.

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How should we determine what in-demand careers are? Are we focusing on our region?

“In-demand careers” can be determined relative to employment needs in the local, state, regional, or national economy.

Are there page limits to the proposal?

Yes, word count limits are specified within the [submission form](#).

Are there specific citation requirements?

There are no specific citation requirements. Please feel free to provide supporting evidence where relevant.

What are the expectations for how entries will be evaluated, considering some plans for reopening may be uncertain for the upcoming academic year?

Plans for your school or LEA might be uncertain and eligible entrants are encouraged to submit a proposal for 2021-2023 based on what you currently know. Programs will have to be flexible to adapt plans to meet the needs of the communities they serve, and ongoing refinement of programs is expected throughout the Rural Tech Project.

Entrant support

Where can I access the Rural Tech Project information session presentation?

A recording of the virtual information session and slides are available on the [Rural Tech Project website](#). [Sign up for our newsletter](#) for notification of when entrant resources become available.

If I would like to offer support to educators making submissions. How can I best do that? Will there be a mechanism for interested applicants to find collaborators or partners?

To seek or offer support in developing submissions, consider providing contact information to the Rural Tech Project [entrant teaming resource](#). By completing [this form](#), you will be listed in a database of parties interested in forming, joining, or supporting a team. To support collaboration, this information will be distributed to prospective entrants who share contact information via this form.

Note that sharing this information is voluntary and not required to enter the challenge, nor will opting into the database advantage or disadvantage any entrant or submission. Information will be shared as submitted without verification by the Rural Tech Project, and inclusion of information in the database does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) or Luminary Labs of any products or services offered or views expressed.

The database may contain hyperlinks and URLs created and maintained by outside organizations, which are provided for the reader’s convenience. ED and Luminary Labs are not responsible for the accuracy of the information contained therein.

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Will all entrants receive anything for completing a submission?

Eligible entrants to the Rural Tech Project will have access to free professional development resources. In addition, all eligible entrants will be recognized on the Rural Tech Project website for their efforts.

Prizes and finalist resources

What is a Community Engagement Manager, and how is the Community Engagement Manager selected?

Entrants selected as finalists will each receive implementation support from a Community Engagement Manager (CEM). CEMs will support needs identified by entrants to ensure that finalists are able to plan, run, refine, and report on their proposed programs. The CEM will serve their school(s) for the duration of the project. In the submission form, entrants will be asked to recommend one or more candidates for the role. The challenge will allocate up to \$100,000 per finalist (in addition to cash prizes) to cover costs associated with the CEM.

What is the breakdown of prizes and Community Engagement Manager budget? How is it distributed?

Up to five finalists will each receive an equal share of the \$500,000 Phase 1 cash prize pool and progress to Phase 2. Cash prizes will be sent directly, in their entirety, to the lead school or LEA listed in the entrants' submissions under "Entrant Profile"; that entity is responsible for any further distribution of prize funds to other team members. In Phase 2, finalists will receive personalized support from a Community Engagement Manager selected by the entrant and paid up to \$100,000 by the challenge; this paid support is in addition to the cash prize each finalist receives. At the end of Phase 2, one grand-prize winner will receive an additional \$100,000 cash prize, which will be distributed in the same manner as the Phase 1 cash prizes.

Miscellaneous

Not every rural community has strong broadband internet. How do we address this in our submission?

This challenge is asking solvers to assess the connectivity they currently have and plan accordingly. This means either creating programming within the connectivity available or planning to apply a portion of the cash prize to improve connectivity. The Rural Tech Project also encourages entrants to explore low-cost internet options available through government resources, such as the [E-rate Program](#), or organizations providing discounted hardware and services to support connectivity.

What type of reporting is required? Should reporting include evaluation of implementation efficacy?

In the [submission form](#), we ask entrants to consider what metrics to track. If selected as a finalist, entrants will be responsible for tracking their proposed metrics to inform the improvement of their program.

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Will the entrants own the rights to the IP of the product that they develop?

Entrants retain ownership of their concepts, including any software, research, or other intellectual property (“IP”) that they develop in connection with the Rural Tech Project, subject to a license granted to ED as described in the [rules, terms, and conditions](#) “Submission License” section.

Who can we contact with questions?

For questions regarding the Rural Tech Project, please contact hello@ruraltechproject.com. Anyone interested in involvement at a national level may contact OCTAE Program Specialist Albert Palacios albert.palacios@ed.gov.