



Rural E-Commerce Grants Program

Enhancing Educational Products for e-Commerce

Deadline Date: Postmarked by February 15, 2005

KEY INFORMATION

PROGRAM TITLE:	<i>Enhancing Educational Products for E-Commerce Grants Program</i>
FUNDING AGENCY:	Southern Rural Development Center
GRANT AMOUNT AND TYPE OF PROJECTS:	
(1) Connecting Rural Communities	Funding up to \$35,000 for a single state, or \$50,000 for a multi-state project. One grant will be awarded to assist in developing and piloting this project.
(2) Mini –Grants	Funding of up to \$5,000 to enhance existing e-commerce curricula.
(3) Grants for New Programs	Funding up to \$15,000 provided to develop new curricula related to e-commerce
WHO IS ELIGIBLE?	Land-Grant University Faculty/Educators (1862, 1890, or 1994)
DEADLINE:	Proposals must be postmarked no later than February 15, 2005
AWARD NOTIFICATION:	April 4, 2005
PROJECT TIMELINE:	May 1, 2005 – April 30, 2006

Enhancing Educational Products for e-Commerce

The Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) is pleased to announce its support for the development and refinement of innovative educational curricula focusing on e-commerce. This document provides specific guidelines for individuals wishing to submit a formal proposal to the SRDC. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the SRDC office at any time.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC), located at Mississippi State University, is providing leadership to a national e-commerce demonstration project funded by the U.S. Congress through the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES). The central goal of this important national effort is to introduce, strengthen and expand e-commerce educational outreach programs within the nation's Cooperative Extension Service system that are targeted to businesses and communities in rural America.

The SRDC's e-commerce demonstration project is intended to respond to the increasing importance that small businesses are playing in shaping the economic vitality of rural areas. The majority of rural businesses found in rural America today employ less than ten persons. Thus, an important economic development strategy for rural places is to strengthen the economic health and stability of these small firms. One critical avenue now available to small businesses for improving their market share and efficiency is e-commerce.

While the SRDC is working with various land-grant universities in the identification of quality educational curricula, and the delivery of training to Extension educators on e-commerce-related topics, it is clear that greater investments in the production and refinement of e-commerce curricula are needed. That is the reason why the Center's competitive grants program is being launched – to identify and invest in a new generation of e-commerce educational products that can support Extension e-commerce programs across the United States. Approximately \$100,000 is being set aside over the coming year to support this important initiative.

THREE CATEGORIES OF COMPETITIVE GRANTS AVAILABLE:

Three distinct types of proposals are being sought by the SRDC as part of its *Enhancing Educational Products for E-Commerce Grants Program*. The following outlines the three categories of funding available through the e-commerce competitive grants program.

1. Connecting Rural Communities

The SRDC will award **ONE** grant whose focus is to develop and pilot test a comprehensive educational curriculum that can guide local governments, business leaders, various organizations, and citizens in rural areas in the development of a coordinated strategic blueprint for becoming a "connected" digital community. The major investment by the SRDC in this type of educational product is a result of its belief that the adoption of e-commerce activities by rural small businesses is dependent, in no small way, on the strength of their community's connection to the digital world. Given the strong interest of the SRDC in strengthening e-commerce efforts of the Extension system in the U.S., it is critical that the grantee be able to:

- delineate the specific topics that will be addressed in their proposed program;
- showcase the various educational resources that will be produced for use by Extension educators;
- provide an evaluation plan that Extension educators will be able to employ for measuring the impact of this “Connecting Rural Communities” program in the sites in which they will deliver this program;
- pilot test the program and refine as necessary after securing evaluation inputs from program participants and trainers;
- produce an instructor’s guide that will facilitate the delivery of this educational program to rural communities by Extension educators.

Funding of up to \$35,000 is available for proposals submitted by a land-grant institution(s) located within a single state. Multi-state teams can request funding of up to \$50,000, but such proposals must show clear evidence that the activities and products to be developed will be the result of strong collaborative efforts by a multi-state team of land-grant faculty/educators. The final product will be copyrighted by the SRDC for use to support the educational mission of the National e-Commerce Demonstration Project.

2. Mini-Grants

Outstanding educational products related to e-commerce already exist within our land-grant university system. However, some may need to undergo revisions, updating, refinement, or expansion. Mini-grants of up to \$5,000 will be considered by the SRDC to strengthen and enhance such existing e-commerce curricula. To be considered for a mini-grant, applicants must submit a plan that details what revisions are needed and why, and the cost associated with these improvements (up to \$5,000). A copy of the current version of the curriculum must be submitted along with the completed mini-grant proposal. The SRDC will request approval to utilize this revised curricula for Extension training and educational purposes.

3. New E-Commerce Programs/Products

There are important e-commerce curriculum resources that simply do not exist at present that can be valuable to Extension educators in their efforts to deliver quality e-commerce programs to small businesses in rural America. The SRDC will consider proposals of up to \$15,000 to fund the development of new e-commerce curricula that are designed to help fill important gaps in the e-commerce educational programs of Extension. The final product will be copyrighted by the SRDC for use to support the educational mission of the National e-Commerce Demonstration Project.

APPLICATION GUIDELINES:

All proposals must be organized in the following manner. Please use a 12-point font to ensure easy readability and use a single spaced format for the text. **Note:** Length guidelines for section VI will vary depending upon the grant category for which you are applying.

I. *Title of the proposal*

II. *The grant category for which you are applying:* Indicate whether you are applying for a “Mini-Grant,” a “New E-Commerce Program/Products Grant,” or the

“Connecting Rural Communities” grant.

- III. ***Project Leader(s) and Collaborators.*** List the name and institutional affiliation of each team member/collaborator. Provide the telephone number, fax number, mailing address, and e-mail address of the Project Leader(s).
- IV. ***Relevant Experiences of Applicant(s) and Curriculum Vita:*** Briefly highlight the type of past activities that the applicant(s) has been engaged in that are relevant to the proposed project. This could include a listing of curriculum products, relevant publications, reports, and contributed papers. An abbreviated curriculum vita (of approximately 3 pages or less) of the Project Leader(s) should be included with the project proposal packet.
- V. ***Project Summary.*** Provide a summary of your proposal (approximately 250 words).
- VI. ***Project Description:*** This represents the most critical part of your proposal. The length of this section will vary depending upon the type of grant category you choose to pursue. Please use a 12-point font to ensure easy readability and use a single spaced format for the text. All proposals, regardless of category, must include the following sections:
 1. ***Introduction and Statement of Need:*** Provide an overview of what you see as the key need that exists for the type of educational resources you propose to develop and why such a need exists. Draw from research or other objective sources of information to support your statement of need. That is, why is there a need for this type of educational resources?
 2. ***Your Proposed Project:*** Provide an overview of what you propose to do to address the need or information gap(s) you have outlined in #1 above. If you are seeking a mini-grant, why is a revision of your e-commerce materials needed? Remember, keep this brief since you will have the opportunity to offer more detail in a latter section of your proposal.

NOW, ADD THE FOLLOWING COMPONENTS TO YOUR PROPOSAL, BASED UPON THE TYPE OF GRANT FOR WHICH YOU ARE APPLYING

Connecting Rural Communities:

Provide a detailed description of your plan for constructing and piloting a comprehensive curriculum addressing this topic. In particular:

- Specify the specific topics/modules you proposed to include in your comprehensive curriculum and why these topics/modules are important;
- Delineate the type of support materials you propose to develop to complement these educational modules (i.e., worksheets, PowerPoint materials, instructor’s guide, etc.);
- Identify the collaborators in this effort and what specific role each person will carry out in support of this effort;
- How you plan on pilot testing your curricula (using what methods?) and in what

- site (state, county, or community?);
- An evaluation strategy that Extension educators will be able to adopt for use in their delivery of this program in their target sites;
- Plans for sustaining your project (such as proposed plans for revising/refining the curricula, strategies that might be used to train Extension educators in the use of the curricula, how the curriculum might be delivered to small businesses, etc.).
- The proposed timeline for completion of key activities over the course of the project (NOTE: all projects must be completed by April 30, 2006).
- Proposed budget, including a budget justification statement. No indirect costs are allowed.

NOTE: Total length of the proposal should not exceed 10-12 double-spaced pages.

Mini-Grants:

Please add the following items to your mini-grant project:

- Provide a detailed overview of your current curriculum (i.e., the content, goals, and objectives of the curriculum, educational resources that have been developed to support this program, to whom the product has been targeted and using what methods, where your program has been launched, how effective it has been in supporting the needs of small businesses, and the approaches you have used to train Extension educators in the use of your curriculum).
- Delineate the specific changes you propose to make in your curriculum and why. If more than one individual will be working on the revisions/additions to the curricula, specify what roles each will carry out in this process.
- Provide a timeline of your activities. Note that all products must be completed by April 30, 2006.
- Proposed budget, including a budget justification statement. No indirect costs are allowed.
- **PLEASE** provide either an electronic link to your existing curriculum, or send a copy of your product along with your proposal. This will be important to facilitate decisions by the team that will be evaluating the proposals.

NOTE: The total length of your proposal should not exceed 5 double spaced pages (including budget information).

New e-Commerce Programs/Products:

Include the following additional items in your proposal:

- A detailed description of the proposed content of your new curriculum product, including the information or education gap that your curriculum is designed to address;
- The specific set of educational products that will be developed as part of this

project (i.e., modules, PowerPoint documents, worksheets, instructor's guide, etc.);

- If more than one person is working on the curriculum, indicate what each individual will do in the development of this project;
- The target audience for this educational effort; and the methods to be used to reach this audience;
- The approach(es) you proposed be used to train Extension educators in the use of the curriculum;
- An evaluation plan that Extension educators can use to measure the impact of this program on the target audience;
- Timeline for completion of your project (NOTE: project must be completed by April 30, 2006).
- Budget request, including a budget justification statement. No indirect costs are allowed.

NOTE: The total length of this proposal should not exceed 8 pages (including budget information).

PROJECT DURATION:

All awardees will have 12 months to complete the proposed project. Projects will begin no later than May 1, 2005, and will terminate on April 30, 2006. There will be no opportunity for any "no cost extension" to this project.

REVIEW PROCESS:

The SRDC's *E-Commerce Advisory Committee* will be involved in reviewing all grant proposals. All proposals will be judged using the following criteria:

1. The merit of the proposed project (30 percent);
2. Its relevance to e-commerce issues (20 percent);
3. The strength of the project description (20 percent);
4. The potential contribution of the project to enhance e-commerce efforts (20 percent); and,
5. The qualifications of the individual or team who will provide leadership to the research effort (10 percent).

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact Kathy Ibendahl or Bo Beaulieu at the SRDC, 662-325-3207, or by e-mail: kibendah@srdc.msstate.edu or ljb@srdc.msstate.edu.

MAILING OF COMPLETED PROPOSALS:

If you plan to mail your proposal by regular mail, please use the following address:

Southern Rural Development Center
Box 9656
Mississippi State University
Mississippi State, MS 39762-9656

If you will be sending your proposal by overnight delivery, please use the following mailing address:

Southern Rural Development Center
410 Bost Extension Building
Mississippi State University
Mississippi State, MS 39762
Telephone: 662-325-3207

**PLEASE NOTE THAT YOUR DOCUMENT MUST BE POSTMARKED NO LATER THAN
February 15, 2005**