2009 National e-Commerce Extension Initiative Grants Program

Building Quality e-Commerce Educational Resources to Support Extension Programming

Deadline Date: **Postmarked by July 20, 2009**
Or e-mailed by 5 PM CDT on July 20, 2009

KEY INFORMATION

PROGRAM TITLE:
Building Quality e-Commerce Educational Resources to Support Extension Programming

FUNDING AGENCY:
Southern Rural Development Center, in partnership with CSREES and the Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs)

GRANT AMOUNT AND TYPE OF PROJECTS:
Funding up to $25,000 provided to develop new educational products, or to significantly expand/improve existing resources, related to e-commerce educational outreach efforts in rural America.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE:
Land-Grant University Faculty/Educators (1862, 1890 or 1994) located anywhere in the U.S.

> *Note:* Non-land grant entities can be invited to partner with a state land-grant university in applying for these e-commerce grant funds. However, grants must be awarded to a land-grant institution that can, in turn, subcontract a portion of the grant to a non-land-grant entity.

DEADLINE:
Proposals must be postmarked no later than July 20, 2009 or received by e-mail to the SRDC by 5 p.m. Central Daylight Time on July 20.

AWARD NOTIFICATION: July 31, 2009

PROJECT TIMELINE: August 1, 2009 – May 31, 2010

PLEASE NOTE: Due to funding restrictions, all funded grants MUST be completed by May 31, 2010. No extension can be provided to grant recipients. As such, all work related to the projects receiving e-commerce grants must be completed and submitted to the SRDC by May 31, 2010.

Building Quality e-Commerce Educational Resources
to Support Extension Programming

INTRODUCTION:

The Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC), in partnership with CSREES/USDA and the Regional Rural Development Centers, is pleased to announce another round of funding for its e-commerce competitive grants program. The intent of this program is to support the development or expansion of innovative educational resources focusing on key e-commerce topics. This document is designed to provide specific guidelines for individuals wishing to submit a formal proposal.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC), located at Mississippi State University, is providing leadership to the National e-Commerce Extension Initiative 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 the delivery of Extension-based e-commerce educational outreach programs relevant to the needs of small businesses, governments or communities in rural America. The SRDC's National e-Commerce Extension Initiative is intended to respond to the increasingly important role that small businesses are playing in shaping the economic vitality of rural areas. E-commerce represents one important strategy that rural businesses can consider as they seek to expand their reach to broader markets, and/or seek to improve the efficiency of their operations through the use of appropriate e-business activities. The initiative is also intended to expand the capacity of rural local governments and communities to provide citizens with easier access to local information and services. This latest round of e-commerce competitive grants is designed to support activities that delve into a series of topics that complement the e-commerce products completed or currently being developed by past grantees. Approximately 3-4 grants will be awarded as part of the 2009 competitive grants program.

THIS YEAR'S PRIORITY TOPICS:

The SRDC will consider proposals of up to $25,000 to fund the development of new e-commerce curricula that are designed to help fill important gaps in the e-commerce educational programs that have been developed to date for use by Extension educators. The topics highlighted below represent the key educational resources that the National e-Commerce Extension Advisory Committee has identified as being of "high priority" in this year's round of competitive grants. Applicants are urged to submit proposals that relate to one or more of these topics.

Please note: all products developed by grantees will be copyrighted by the SRDC for use to support the educational mission of the National e-Commerce Extension Initiative. Therefore, they must be in a format that can be downloaded or shared electronically.

The following represent the priority topics for this year's competitive grants program:

1. Expanding Youth Engagement in Broadband and/or e-Commerce Activities: Today's youth have been active adopters of various technological innovations. As such, they can serve as key

resources to local organizations, businesses, schools, and other community-based groups that may wish to explore a variety of broadband or e-commerce applications. We are interested in the development of educational resources that will help train middle and/or high school aged students to serve as resources/coaches to local governments, businesses, and/or community-serving organizations that want to explore or adopt broadband and e-commerce strategies.

2   Social Networking Strategies for Small Businesses: A host of new social networking strategies (i.e., such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Widgets, blogs, etc.) are emerging that may be of value to small businesses. Helping small businesses and entrepreneurs understand the pluses and minuses associated with various Web 2.0 social networking applications is important. As such, we are interested in educational products that can assist small businesses and entrepreneurs in determining how social networking and other Web 2.0 strategies might expand their business and marketing efforts.

3. Expanding Adoption of Broadband in Underserved Rural Areas: The recent American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA 2009) is dedicating considerable resources to expanding broadband access to many of our nation's underserved rural areas. But, having broadband in place will not, in and of itself, accelerate the use of broadband by local businesses, farmers, governments, community institutions and local residents. As such, we are interested in the development of educational resources that can help introduce and expand the adoption of broadband by local individuals and groups. We are particularly interested in products that complement the *Connecting Rural Communities* curriculum previously developed as part of the National e-Commerce Extension initiative.

4. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Strategies: More businesses are using the Internet to help expand the market for their products and services. However, many businesses are not getting the type of traffic they are hoping to attract to their Web sites. As such, we are interested in educational products that offer businesses key tools and techniques for accelerating the number of Web site visits by their target audiences.   High priority will be given to proposals that focus on search engine optimization strategies by small, micro, and entrepreneurial businesses.

5. Small Communities and/or Local Governments: Having a Presence on the Web: We are interested in educational products that can help small communities and/or local governments explore the feasibility and value of having a Web presence. This includes a discussion of the various purposes/applications that the Internet could offer to small communities and/or local governments, the development of specific tools/procedures that can help create a Web presence, and insights into the positive benefits that e-government offers to local citizens. It is important to ensure that these products have general application to most small communities and governments (i.e. not to just one state or local government body).

6. Learn More about Your Visitors: How to Use Web site Analytic Tools: A variety of analytic tools are available to help small businesses, local governments, and others learn more about their Web site traffic. The National e-Commerce Extension Initiative is interested in the development of educational resources that help strengthen the awareness, understanding, and application of Web site analytical tools by small, micro and entrepreneurial businesses.

7. <u>Web site Development 101: Learning How to Create a Web site for My Business:</u> Small, micro, and entrepreneurial businesses in rural areas may not have a good understanding of the basics associated with building and maintaining a Web site. We are interested in a straightforward set of educational resources that businesses can use to help them create and maintain a Web presence.

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, with double spaces between paragraphs. The total length of this proposal should not exceed eight single-spaced, 12-point font pages (including budget information). However, the length limitation does not include the abbreviated CV of the Project Leader(s) that is required as an attachment to your proposal.

I.   *Title of the Proposal*

II.   *The Priority Area(s) (from the seven listed above) that the Proposal Addresses*

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 past activities that the applicant(s) has been engaged in that are relevant to the proposed project. This could include information about curriculum resources, relevant publications, reports and contributed papers that the applicant(s) has helped author. An abbreviated curriculum vita (of approximately three pages or less) of the Project Leader(s) should be included as an attachment to 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.
      All proposals must include the following sections:

      1. *Introduction and Statement of Need*: Provide an overview of the need that exists for the type of educational resources that you are proposing to develop. Offer documentation from research publications, trade reports and/or other sources to help support your argument. The key is to offer evidence of the importance and value of investing funds in the type of e-commerce resources that you wish to develop.

      2. *Proposed Content*: Provide a detailed description of the proposed content of your new curriculum product(s), including the specific educational curricula/resources that you intend to develop. These could include a list and description of educational modules, PowerPoint documents, worksheets, Instructor's guide, Web site, etc. that you intend to produce as part of the grant.

      3. *Contributions by Collaborators*: If more than one person is working on the project,

provide information on the specific contributions that each individual will be providing to the successful completion of this project (for example, what aspects of the proposed content noted in number 2 above will they be assisting in?).

4. *Target Audience(s)/Delivery Methods*: Identify the target audience(s) for your e-commerce program and indicate the approaches you are proposing be used for delivering your educational program/resources to this audience(s) (i.e., Webinars, self-pace learning, face-to-face training, etc.).

5. *Training of Extension Educators*: What approach(es) do you propose be used to train Extension educators in the use of your educational products/resources? (For example, should it be face-to-face, Blackboard or Moodle, Webinars, a combination of approaches, etc.?)

6. *Program Evaluation Instrument(s):* Outline the evaluation plan that you propose to recommend for use by Extension educators to help them measure the impact of your e-commerce educational program/resources on the audience(s) being targeted.

7. *Timeline* for completion of the various components being proposed in your project (NOTE: project must be completed by May 31, 2010).

8. *Budget Request*: List your proposed budget expenditures and prepare a good budget justification statement for all budget categories included in the request. Please note that no indirect costs are allowed nor can computer hardware be purchased with these grant funds.

> **NOTE**: The total length of this proposal should not exceed eight single-spaced, 12-point font pages (including budget information). However, the length limitation does not include the abbreviated CV of the Project Leader(s) that is required as an attachment to your proposal.

PROJECT DURATION:

All awardees will have **10 months** to complete the proposed project. Projects will begin on August 1, 2009, and will terminate on May 31, 2010. "No Cost Extension" on funded projects will not be provided by the SRDC. Thus, it is critical that projects be completed on time.

REVIEW PROCESS:

The *National e-Commerce Extension Advisory Committee* will be involved in reviewing all grant proposals. All proposals will be judged using the following criteria:
- The overall merit of the proposed project (25 percent)
- Its relevance to the e-commerce priority topics (20 percent)
- The quality of the curriculum/educational resources being proposed (25 percent)
- The potential contribution of the project in strengthening the adoption of e-commerce strategies by small businesses, governments or rural communities (20 percent)

- The qualifications of the individual or team who will provide leadership to this Extension effort (10 percent).

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

For questions about the e-commerce grant program, or any aspect of your proposal, please contact Shannon Lane Turner at shannont@srdc.msstate.edu or 662-325-5960 / 662-325-3207.

MAILING OF COMPLETED PROPOSALS:

If you plan to mail your proposal by regular mail, please use the following address:	**If you plan to send your proposal by overnight delivery, please use the following mailing address:**
Southern Rural Development Center ATTN: Coordinator, National e-Commerce Extension Initiative Box 9656 Mississippi State University Mississippi State, MS 39762-9656	Southern Rural Development Center ATTN: Coordinator, National e-Commerce Extension Initiative 190 Bost North Mississippi State University Mississippi State, MS 39762 Telephone: 662-325-3207

E-MAILING OF COMPLETED PROPOSALS:

If you wish to mail your completed proposal by e-mail, please note the following:
1. Your proposal must be sent no later than 5 p.m. Central Daylight Time on July 20, 2009. 2. Send a PDF version of your document that includes the necessary cover sheets from your university's sponsored programs office or other appropriate entity to whom official award letters should be sent or with whom any official communication should be undertaken. 3. E-mail the completed proposal to Shannon Lane Turner at shannont@srdc.msstate.edu. Please request verification that your proposal has been received. SRDC will make every effort to notify you by Monday July 27th that your proposal has been received. If you do not receive such notification, please contact the SRDC immediately.

PLEASE NOTE THAT YOUR DOCUMENT MUST BE POSTMARKED NO LATER THAN JULY 20, 2009
OR
E-MAILED NO LATER THAN 5 P.M. CDT ON JULY 20, 2009