Rural Digital Advocacy Grants

One of rural America’s greatest strengths is its citizens’ ability to work together to overcome great challenges. Recognizing this, the Kellogg Foundation served as a catalyst in cultivating a national network of rural advocates who share knowledge and diverse perspectives, strategically focus resources, and access a wider group of stakeholders in order to shape public policy.

Technology and social media have become increasingly important to these types of advocacy campaigns. Rural organizations need resources to learn about, experiment with, and apply the latest digital tools to help advance their policy work.

The Rural Policy Action Partnership, a collaboration of rural advocates and public policy institutions (Center for Rural Strategies, Network Impact, the Institute for Emerging Issues, and MDC), received support from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to carry out a strategic and integrated policy initiative on behalf of vulnerable children and their families and communities in rural America.

Consisting of the National Rural Assembly and seven Rural Policy Networks, this initiative is built on the fundamental principal that advocates and organizations working in coordination can achieve greater results than through the sum of their individual efforts. The three-year grant seeks to establish an enduring, diverse, and effective voice for rural well being.

Rural Assembly  
[link to ruralassembly.org]

Rural Policy Networks  
Central Appalachia Regional Network  [link to carnnet.org]  
Great Plains Rural Policy Network  [link to greatplainsnetwork.org]  
Mid South Network  [link to midsouthnetwork.org]  
Michigan Rural Network  [link to michiganruralcouncil.org]  
National Alliance for Rural Policy  [link to thenarp.org]  
Networks United for Rural Voice  [link to southwestruralpolicynetwork.org]

The Rural Digital Advocacy Grant program seeks to increase rural advocates’ access to and use of digital tools to strengthen their policy-change campaigns and capacities.

This program provides grants of up to $10,000 for innovative, collaborative projects that employ digital tools to advance rural advocacy and policy change. Rural advocacy involves activities that influence public opinion to create social change that improves the lives of people living in rural communities. Rural advocacy includes activities such as:

- Conducting research and outreach to identify key policy issues and proposed solutions
- Educating the public about an issue
- Informing legislators about rural issues and policy options
- Organizing and mobilizing community stakeholders to develop strategies and take action to address a rural issue
- Taking collective action to ensure that existing laws and policies are implemented in ways that benefit rural communities
The award ceiling for Rural Digital Advocacy Grants is $10,000. Grant funds will support work for a period of one year or less, beginning August 15, 2012.

Applications will be evaluated according to the following seven measures:

- **Collaboration**: the project builds a network of or collaboration between many, diverse partners.
- **Diversity**: project partners include a mix of new partners (in addition to organizations that are part of the Rural Policy Networks and the National Rural Assembly) as well as those that reach diverse or hard to engage audiences (i.e. youth, senior citizens, low-income residents, and/or ethnic minorities).
- **Innovation**: the project experiments with new digital, Internet, or mobile technology.
- **Interactivity**: the project creates platforms or sites that encourage two-way communication, ongoing interactivity, integrates use of social media networks, or incorporates Web 3.0 features in which the Internet intelligently performs tasks.
- **Viability**: there is a compelling theory of change describing how the project will advance rural policy change and advocacy.
- **Replicability**: the project can be replicated for use by other networks or groups, and project planning and implementation demonstrates an open-source ethos.
- **Capacity Building**: the project develops a network’s long-term capacity for use of social media and digital tools and the project provides individuals with the capacity to take action on rural challenges.

**GRANT AWARD ELIGIBILITY**

Applicants for Rural Digital Advocacy Grants must be either a nonprofit, charitable organization, exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or a governmental organization. Programs receiving Rural Digital Advocacy Grants should be collaborative projects involving more than one organization. A single 501(c)(3) or government agency must be selected as the lead applicant/petitioning organization. The petitioning organization is the administrative unit that will be directly responsible for executing the project.

Rural Digital Advocacy Grants will fund projects such as those that:

- Implement Internet-based strategies (i.e. web tools or mobile technology) that advance policy action campaigns or build capacity
- Use online tools to enhance communication, personal connections, and information sharing for policy action
- Facilitate online policy action collaborations through the innovative use of technology
- Integrate, coordinate, and streamline the existing digital resources used by rural advocates
- Encourage interaction and collaboration between diverse groups of people and organizations
- Provide individuals with the capacity and encouragement to take action and make progress on rural challenges without being asked or organized by traditional community leaders

Rural Digital Advocacy Grants will not be awarded to projects that:

- Create static websites or platforms for one-way communication
- Engage one organization or a small number of organizations that reach limited numbers of people
- Involve any form of lobbying. Lobbying is defined as any activity that is focused on influencing a legislator’s vote on a bill or the public’s vote on a referendum.
GRANT AWARD PROCESS

Rural Digital Advocacy Grants will be selected through two processes:

1) **Crowd Sourcing:** A brief description of all eligible projects will be posted to a public website. One proposal will be awarded funding based on the results of a public vote. The Rural Digital Advocacy Grants online application provides a space for applicants to upload a 250-word project description as well as an optional multi-media (video or slideshow) project description; this information will be used in the crowd sourced vote.

2) **Committee Review:** The remaining proposals will be reviewed through a two-tiered process. In the first round, members of the Rural Policy Action Partnership (RPAP) will review each proposal for adherence to the minimum requirements. A selection committee, comprised of experts in digital advocacy and practitioners in rural advocacy, will review the applications and make final award decisions.

Organizations that are not part of the Rural Policy Networks and the National Rural Assembly are encouraged to apply. However, collaborations that include at least one member of the Rural Policy Networks or the National Rural Assembly will be given weighted preference in the review process.