

Appendix II – detailed statement of TIF Grant/Loan Program

Note: This Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund information, available online at: <http://www.tifb.state.tx.us/masterplan/masterpln-grntloan2.htm> is reprinted in this appendix for the convenience of TPRC attendees and to expand the author's paper so it's bulk will compare visually with more erudite submissions.

For more information about the Texas Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund (TIF) and TIF grant programs: <http://www.tifb.state.tx.us>

Gene Crick

Director, TeleCommunity Resource Center

PO Box 328, Bastrop TX 78602-0328

gcrick@main.org <http://www.tcrc.ne>

TIF GRANT AND LOAN PROGRAMS

One of the ways in which TIF promotes universal service in Texas is through its Grant and Loan Program. Responsive to data and information gathered through TIF's Needs Assessment and Evaluation Program, the Grant and Loan Program administers grant and loan offerings that directly respond to clearly established needs.

Although TIF is mandated to fund several specific entities, its constituents of public libraries, public schools, not-for-profit healthcare facilities, and institutions of higher education should be seen as "points of presence" for future collaboration with other community organizations working to solve problems using advanced telecommunications technologies at the local level. For example, a TIF-funded school district may elect to allow an adult literacy organization use their telecommunications technologies as a learning tool during the evening. Similarly,

a TIF-funded library might work with a local hospital to provide local citizens with telehealth services. Communities, then, should regard TIF projects as seeds from which future collaborations can grow.

1. A Brief History

In the summer of 1996, TIF released its first Request for Proposals (RFP) totaling \$25 million for an Internet Connectivity grant offering that was directed toward secondary public schools. To be eligible, applicants had to meet one of the following threshold criteria: 1) 70% or higher level of economically disadvantaged students in the school as reported by TEA, and 2) schools not receiving requested telecommunications services, especially those schools in rural and remote areas.

The response to the first RFP indicated a high level of interest in integrating the Internet into the classroom, even to the extent that a fair number of ineligible applicants applied. A total of 416 applications were submitted that represented 669 schools applying for funds. Applicants requested a total of approximately \$136 million.

After an extensive peer evaluation process, TIF awarded 111 applicants in January 1997. Rural school districts represented one third of the grantees, while two-thirds of the awards funded were from disadvantaged school districts. Many applicants qualified as both disadvantaged and rural and remote. Unfortunately, the first RFP was perceived as not being "collaborative friendly," and the number of eligible collaborative proposals was disappointingly low.

In February 1997, TIF released its second RFP totaling \$28 million for rural and remote school districts having no (or limited) Internet access. Rural and remote school districts were defined as those school districts having enrollments of 1,000 students or less. Incidentally, schools in this category represent more than half of the school districts in Texas. Eighty-three percent (83%) of the eligible applicants applied for the second RFP, a total of approximately 440 school districts. Twenty-seven (27) collaborative projects submitted proposals for TIF funds, with a total

of 262 school districts participating in a collaborative. One hundred and seventy-nine (179) school districts submitted single district applications. Two hundred and five (205) school districts were funded: sixty-nine (69) school districts and 13 collaboratives of districts (representing 136 districts). Grant awards ranged from \$47,000 to \$5.5 million

2. TIF's Grantmaking Strategy

TIF perceives connectivity to be its primary focus for at least the next three to five years. After that time, grant priorities will shift from expanding basic access to funding innovative telecommunications projects. TIF's vision is to increase Texans' access to advanced telecommunications technologies while also funding progressive applications of technology projects.

Although the first three years will focus on connectivity, demonstration grants will also be available for existing projects to implement additional and/or sustain planned telecommunications programs. Once basic connectivity has been established, the majority of the grant programs will concentrate on funding innovative projects that fully leverage telecommunications resources.

TIF conceptualizes its constituents as being in one of three broad stages: 1) entities lacking telecommunications technologies; 2) entities using telecommunications technologies in a limited way to solve basic communications needs; and 3) entities using a broad range of telecommunications technologies as a part of everyday life to solve a variety of problems.

TIF's goal is for the majority of its constituents to work, learn, and communicate in a self-sustaining technological environment. In other words, TIF intends for its constituents to achieve stage three -- to think of telecommunications technologies not as "extras" but as essential communication and learning tools.

Telecommunications technologies should become an integral part of the structure and culture of all TIF-funded entities.

The following illustration represents where TIF perceives its funding priority to be today. At present, Stage 1 entities represent the majority of applicants. In the future, TIF intends for Stage 3 entities to represent the majority of applicants:

3. Grant Focus

As stated previously, one of TIF's goals is to reward technologically progressive constituents who have taken creative and monetary risks by allowing them to compete for funds to further enhance and implement their projects while also allowing constituents needing infrastructure the opportunity to have access. For this reason, the Grant and Loan Program will provide grant opportunities that are both competitive and non-competitive.

TIF recognizes both the value of competition and the importance of increasing equity in access. Creativity, innovation, collaboration, leveraging existing resources, sustainability, and grass-roots decision-making are all outcomes of good competitive programs. Non-competitive grant programs address issues such as universal access, stimulating local decision-making and planning, increasing information sharing, stimulating professional development, and ensuring sustainability.

TIF considers telecommunications technologies to be essential learning and information sharing tools. Just as a business supplies each of its departments with the resources necessary to operate and, once those resources are in place, encourages those departments to compete with each other, TIF believes that non-competitive grants are a means by which TIF can increase access to telecommunications resources while also preparing applicants to compete for future grants.

By increasing equitable access while also requiring non-competitive grantees to meet established accountability guidelines, TIF will assist in preparing Texas citizens both for the technological future and the competitive workplace they are sure to inherit.

a. Non-Competitive Grants

Grants that are non-competitive will primarily focus on connectivity. Established by a formula and based on specific criteria, non-competitive grants fund the basic infrastructure necessary for dedicated Internet connectivity. In order to receive a non-competitive grant, applicants are required to meet established TIF-defined benchmarks and participate in various in-service programs. The purpose of the in-service programs is to require grant recipients to cover issues such as basic Internet training, integrating the Internet into the curriculum, strategies for maintaining and updating equipment, and finding resources and mentors. Once the required benchmarks are completed, non-competitive grant recipients should have the basic tools they need to compete for demonstration grants.

b. Competitive Grants

Based upon defined criteria and scored by subject-area experts, grant offerings which are competitive fund the applications receiving the highest scores. Competitive grants will emphasize innovation, collaboration, most efficient use of existing resources, sustainability, and the project's potential of being a model. Larger in scope and based upon solving existing education, information sharing, and healthcare needs, competitive grants fund projects that demonstrate a high level of commitment from participants, exhibit strong evidence of sustainability, and include detailed and rigorous evaluation plans.

4. Grant Categories

TIF recognizes that its constituents have different levels of access and knowledge and are at different stages of planning. For this reason, TIF offers three types of grants which are offered on both a competitive and a non-competitive basis: planning, demonstration, and connectivity grants.

It is intended that demonstration and connectivity grants will be given greater financial emphasis.

- Planning grants fund the support of planning processes in which organizations or groups of organizations eligible for TIF funds can develop strategies that solve educational, information sharing, healthcare, and connectivity problems by using advanced telecommunications technologies. The outcome of a planning project should be a plan for improved delivery of services and increased citizen access to information resources. Planning grants will then be eligible for connectivity with demonstration sites.
- Demonstration grants fund exemplary projects that solve educational, information sharing, health care, and connectivity problems by using advanced telecommunications technologies. Projects must have a high potential to serve as models for other communities to follow.
- Connectivity grants fund projects that increase equitable access statewide by providing greater access to advanced telecommunications technologies. The emphasis is on connectivity and sustainability.

By means of various in-service programs, the TIFBase, and the TIFTech Programs, grantees will be exposed to topics such as integrating technology into the curriculum, strategies for maintaining equipment, and developing collaboratives.

5. The Importance of Collaborative Projects

Providing collaborative grant opportunities is the most efficient strategy for advancing telecommunications access among public schools, libraries, entities of public higher education, and not-for-profit healthcare facilities as well as leveraging TIF funds. Increased sustainability, local planning and decision making, efficient use of existing resources, and regional connectivity are all outcomes of good collaborative projects and serve to meet TIF goals. Additionally, local and regional collaborative grant offerings will allow TIF constituents to find community and/or regional based solutions that best meet their needs. TIF expects that increased community connectivity will be a by-

product of such regional and local collaboratives among the four TIF constituencies thereby enhancing community-wide communication and support.

6. Anticipated Project-Specific Outcomes

Both competitive and non-competitive TIF grant applications are structured in such a way as to increase accountability, encourage local commitment to the project and potential for collaboration, facilitate local knowledge of telecommunications, and ensure feasibility. Competitive applicants are required to address specifically the following issues:

1. Identify the needs to be solved by advanced telecommunications technologies;
2. State project objectives which are directly related to identified needs;
3. Define the project activities such as training and curriculum development that will take place to meet the defined objectives;
4. Detail the configuration, type, use, and the location of hardware and software involved in the project; and
5. Evaluate whether the project activities contribute to improved availability and quality of service.
6. If a project is related to education technology, evaluate whether and how project activities contribute to improved student academic performance as measured by local and statewide outcomes.

Non-competitive applicants are also required to identify needs, state objectives, design activities, and evaluate results; however, non-competitive applicants will be assisted in developing their projects by participating in TIF-approved training activities, creating technology task forces consisting of individuals such as parents, students, teachers, librarians, community members, and healthcare professionals, attending project development workshops, and participating in TIFTalk, TIF's electronic forum for grantees.

7. Yearly Grant Program

TIF staff currently manages the development, review, selection, budgeting, and monitoring of all TIF grants. A toll-free help desk, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), and sample RFPs are available to help constituents complete a grant application. Regional grant workshops, technical assistance program, statewide models, a grantee electronic forum (TIFTalk), and the TIFBase are planned to better assist applicants and grantees with their projects. Once awarded a TIF grant, grantees are required to submit quarterly financial reports and biannual progress reports. On-site audits will be conducted by the TIF staff or their authorized representatives.

Because TIF has an extremely limited staff, grants will be offered in stages within a yearly grant cycle. The following table illustrates TIF's major grant categories (priorities do not necessarily reflect actual grant sequence):

Yearly Grant Program

Program Name	Grant Focus	Applicant Category
Higher Education Connectivity Grants (January)	Increasing information access: Non- competitive single- campus applications: focus on basic connectivity to level the "playing field" for	Public institutions of higher learning.

	Internet connectivity.	
Collaborative Planning Grant Projects (February)		<p>A. Competitive planning grants for local collaboratives of K-12 schools and districts and public libraries, not-for-profit healthcare providers, and public institutions of higher education.</p> <p>B. Competitive planning grants for regional collaboratives of K-12 schools and districts and public libraries, not-for-profit healthcare providers, and/or public institutions of higher education.</p>
Collaborative Demonstration Projects (April)	The development of information-sharing collaboratives: demonstration and planning grants that show collaboration to develop networks that connect geographic	<p>A. Competitive demonstration grants for local collaboratives of K-12 schools and districts and public libraries, not-for-profit healthcare providers, and public institutions of higher education.</p> <p>B. Competitive demonstration grants for regional collaboratives of K-12 schools and districts and public libraries, not-for-profit healthcare providers, and public higher ed institutions</p>

	areas.	
Public School Distance Learning Grants (April)	Resource sharing: "Level the playing field" with regard to use of or access to distance learning technologies by increasing equity and access.	Any campus, district, or collaborative of campuses/districts with priority given to rural and economically underprivileged locations that have limited or no distance learning capabilities. Competitive grants.
Telemedicine & Telehealth Program Grants (June)	[In development - needs assessment being conducted to determine focus of grants]	Any public, not-for-profit hospital or public not-for-profit health care facility to include academic health centers and associated teaching hospitals.

Public School Internet Connectivity Grants (September)	"Level the playing field" with regard to Internet connectivity by increasing equity and access	<p>Applicant Category A: Single districts (rural and remote) with 1,000 or less students and limited or no Internet access (and that have not received a prior grant from TIF). Non-competitive grants.</p> <p>Applicant Category B: Single districts with 1,000-5,000 students and limited or no Internet access (and that have not received a prior grant</p>
--	--	---

		<p>from TIF). Non-competitive grants.</p> <p>Applicant Category C: Single campuses in districts with 5,000-10,000 students and limited or no Internet access (and that have not received a prior grant from TIF). Non-competitive grants.</p> <p>Applicant Category D: Single campuses in districts with > 10,000 students and limited or no Internet access (and that have not received a prior grant from TIF). Non-competitive grants.</p>
<p>Library Connectivity Grants (September)</p>	<p>Increasing Internet connectivity: non-competitive, single-site applications focusing on basic Internet connectivity.</p>	<p>Any public library or group of libraries without Internet connectivity.</p>
<p>Discovery projects (November)</p>	<p>The development project models: competitive grants that show innovation and</p>	<p>Model grants of K-12 schools and districts and/or public libraries, not-for-profit healthcare providers, and public institutions of higher education or</p>

	have a high potential for other communities to follow.	collaboratives of K-12 schools and districts and/or, public libraries, not-for-profit healthcare providers, and public institutions of higher education.
--	--	--

A. I. Outreach & Communications Program

When building a statewide telecommunications infrastructure that is designed to meet the diverse needs of public education, public health, and public libraries, it is beneficial to develop information gathering methods and techniques that provide a good understanding of community needs and interests. TIF's Outreach and Communications Program is the means by which TIF will learn about and communicate with Texans' about their expectations of and hopes for TIF's programs and activities. At present, TIF supports a publicly accessible website and electronic forum, open records requests, broadcast workshops that focus on how to submit a TIF grant proposal, and TIFTeams which are composed of corporate representatives who volunteer their time to assist TIF.

Although most TIF staff currently support the organization's grantmaking activities, the agency plans to explore the viability of several new programs that are designed to place TIF staff and TIF's designated spokespersons in direct contact with the press and the public. As evidence of this direction, TIF will investigate implementing the following activities within the next fiscal year:

- A quarterly newsletter called "TIFBits;"
- A public relations program that includes regular press releases about agency awards and activities and an official Speakers' Bureau of qualified experts who can visit community and professional groups across the state;
- A publications program that highlights best practices and models from around the state;

- A program, called TIFTech, that focuses on increasing knowledge of telecommunications and information technologies by providing training opportunities to interested TIF constituents. Once trained, TIFTechs become a vital local information resource; and
- A potential annual conference.
- [The "TIFBase" Program](#)

TIF hopes to become a statewide repository and clearinghouse for expertise and information related to the planning and assessment of telecommunications infrastructure. TIF constituents face enormous challenges in planning telecommunications projects due to a lack of resources and information about technology funding resources, grantwriting practices, and existing networks and technology projects around the state. Understanding telecommunications services, communicating needs with vendors, designing projects that integrate into existing technology plans, planning for sustainability, grant writing, project evaluation, and many other issues make developing and implementing TIF projects a daunting and time-consuming task for many of TIF's constituents. The TIFBase is an on-line and interactive inventory of dynamic information, and one of the ways TIF provides its constituents with the opportunity to access information and resources to plan and implement TIF projects.

Designed to organize the data and information gathered through TIF's Needs Assessment and Evaluation Program, the Grant and Loan Program, and the Outreach and Communications Program, the TIFBase Program serves as the principal repository for information related to technology penetration and needs in Texas. It is a data warehouse available on-line through the Internet; however, constituents lacking Internet may use TIFBase by calling TIF's toll-free Help Desk at 1-800-440-0080.

1. [What's In the TIFBase?](#)

The TIFBase fills an existing "information gap" with high-quality, standards-based information that dynamically evolves as Texas' technological environment changes. Constituents can access and input information such as descriptions of TIF-funded projects, network boilerplates, profiles of institutions participating in the creation and implementation of physical and logical networks, model grants, model methods of self-evaluation, and training programs.

TIF recognizes that one of the problems with using the Internet as a research tool today is the enormous amount of extraneous and unorganized information that can be found on-line. For this reason, the TIFBase is being designed not only to serve as a repository for information related to technology penetration and needs in Texas but also as a means of directing users via certain keywords and queries to other appropriate and reliable resources. TIFBase users will be assured that the information they find on the TIFBase is high-quality, standards-based information that can best help them build their projects.

2. [How Does It Work?](#)

Current information contained within the TIFBase includes telecommunications services by public and private sector providers, TIF grant applicants and grantees, and public and private data sources. Other services include the following:

- Toll-free Help Desk (1-800-440-0080)
- Internal Grant Tracking
- TIF Grantee Discussion Databases

- Web site access to TIFBase (<http://www.tifb.state.tx.us>)
- Search capabilities
- Geographic Information System (GIS) system

In addition, the following information is currently being updated in the TIFBase:

- Model programs
- School data and connectivity information
- Federal, state, and private grant sources
- Statewide telemedicine resources, network, etc.
- Existing collaboratives and consortia
- Volunteer data

Additional information will be added as needed. For example, by the end of 1997, the TIFBase will be accessible on-line and will be project specific. Constituents will be able to conduct searches on TIF grantees and applicants. Technology boilerplates, grant writing resources and training syllabi will be implemented in 1998. By 1999, the TIFBase will be interactive and constituents will be able to add information to the TIFBase.

As a "living" inventory of telecommunications projects and related information, the TIFBase will provide Texans with access to lessons learned, project successes, infrastructure and application models, and potential funders, mentors, and collaborators. By allowing constituents to learn from existing projects and access standards-based learning materials, the TIFBase will help TIF leverage its funding dollars as well as provide a legacy of information for Texas citizens to access and inherit in the future.

