Introduction

Communication is essential for staying healthy, holding a job, managing a household and participating in the community. Modern technology has vastly expanded the way most people communicate through voice, data and video services. But for people who have combined vision and hearing loss, special equipment may be necessary to make a phone call, send an email or access the Internet.

The National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program will ensure that low-income individuals who have combined hearing and vision loss can access telephone, advanced communications and information services.
This program was mandated by the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 and established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Frequently Asked Questions

How does this equipment distribution program work?

This program provides communications technology free of charge to low-income people of all ages who have combined vision and hearing loss. The FCC has set aside funding to support one program in each state, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These participating programs will distribute this communications equipment to qualified individuals and provide equipment installation, training and support to help recipients make the most of this technology.

What kind of equipment will be distributed?

This program provides a wide range of hardware, software and applications to suit the varying communications technology needs of people who have hearing and vision loss. Examples include products that are available to the general public and may be accessible to people with hearing and vision loss or products that are adaptable through the use of specialized equipment, such as screen enlargement software, screen readers or braille displays.

Is this program for me?

If you are a person who has combined vision and hearing loss, and you cannot afford communications technology that enable you to use a telephone, send an email, access the Internet, or use other communications technology, you may be eligible for this program.

How do I choose the best equipment to suit my needs?

A qualified program specialist can help you identify equipment that will meet your needs.

How do I learn how to use the equipment?

Program specialists are also available to train you to use the equipment.

To qualify for this program, you must:

Have combined vision and hearing loss to be considered “deaf-blind” as that term is defined by the Helen Keller National Center Act. A practicing professional who has direct knowledge of your vision and hearing loss, such as vision- or hearing-related professionals, educators, medical professionals or community-based service providers, must verify that you are “deaf-blind.”

Have an income that does not exceed 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG). Applicants who are enrolled in federal subsidy programs with income thresholds lower than 400 percent of the FPG are automatically deemed income eligible for this program. Applicants who are not enrolled in a qualifying federal low-income program must be deemed eligible by review of a recent income tax return or other means.

To learn more:

Visit iCanConnect.org or call 1-800-825-4595.

To apply, contact your state’s program.

For more information visit:

[www.fcc.gov/NDBEDP](http://www.fcc.gov/NDBEDP)

Background

The Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 (CVAA) authorizes the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to provide funding for local programs to distribute equipment to low-income individuals who are “deaf-blind” (see definition below). The FCC may use up to $10 million annually from the interstate Telecommunications Relay Service fund for this purpose.

Pilot Program

In 2011, the FCC established the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP) as a pilot program. The three-year pilot program began July 1, 2012, and will end June 30, 2015. The pilot program provides valuable information that the FCC will use to help develop and implement an effective and efficient permanent deaf-blind equipment distribution program.

How does the pilot program operate?

The FCC selected and certified one entity in each of the 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, to receive FCC support to distribute equipment to low-income individuals who are deaf-blind.

The FCC allocated a minimum of $50,000 to each of the 53 certified programs, plus additional funding based on the size of each state's population. As a result, states with large populations were allocated larger amounts of funding than states with small populations.

The FCC also set aside $500,000 each year for the Perkins School for the Blind to coordinate outreach to promote this new equipment distribution program nationwide.

Who is eligible to receive equipment?

Under the CVAA, only low-income individuals who are deaf-blind are eligible to receive equipment. Applicants must provide verification of their status as low-income and deaf-blind.

The CVAA requires that the term "deaf-blind" has the same meaning given in the Helen Keller National Center Act. In general, the individual must have a certain vision loss and a hearing loss that, combined, cause extreme difficulty in attaining independence in daily life activities, achieving psychosocial adjustment, or obtaining a vocation (working).

The FCC defines "low income" to mean not more than 400% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

What kind of equipment can be distributed?

The equipment distributed must be designed to make telecommunications (such as wireline and wireless telephone communication), advanced communications (such as Internet-based voice communication, e-mail, instant messaging and interoperable video conferencing services), and access to the Internet (including information services) accessible. The equipment distributed may be hardware, software or applications, separate or in combination, mainstream or specialized. The equipment must meet the needs of the deaf-blind individual to achieve access.

Certified programs may also provide equipment warranties, maintenance, and repairs for such equipment depending on available funding.

Besides distributing equipment, what will the NDBEDP certified programs do?

Certified programs will inform their communities about this new program to distribute equipment to low-income residents in their states who are deaf-blind. They will verify that applicants are eligible to receive equipment.

They will assess each applicant's communications equipment needs to select appropriate equipment to meet those needs. They may also help install and provide training for the equipment distributed.

How do I find the certified program that serves my state?

Information about how to find the NDBEDP certified program in your state is available on the FCC website, by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY, or by sending an email to dro@fcc.gov.

How can I help the NDBEDP be successful?

Tell people about the program.

Tell the FCC how the NDBEDP helped you or someone you know.

Tell the FCC how the program can be improved.

Tell the FCC about new types of technologies that should be included for distribution.

FAQs

What is iCanConnect?

It is the name of the public awareness campaign charged with spreading the word about the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP), a federal program designed to help the many thousands of Americans with combined hearing and vision loss connect with family, friends and community.

It was established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in an effort to comply with the 21st Century Video and Communications Accessibility Act, a federal law which requires people with disabilities to have access to modern communications technology that enables distance communication.

What does NDBEDP provide?

If you meet income requirements, you can receive free communications technology designed for people with combined vision and hearing loss. Installation, training and technical support are also available.

What is the goal?

The goal of iCanConnect is to educate people about the availability of communications technology through NDBEDP for people with combined hearing and vision disabilities, and to increase opportunities for independence for this underserved population to stay connected with family, friends, healthcare and service providers, schools and communities, and the workforce.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible, the individual must:

Have combined vision and hearing loss verified by a doctor or professional service provider

Be able to be trained to use adaptive technology that makes it possible to use telephone, computer or other communication equipment

Meet the program’s low income guidelines

What are the income guidelines?

In the continental U.S., a single person with an income of up to $44,680 is eligible. For a family of four the income threshold increases to $92,200. In Alaska, a single person with an income of up to $51,440 is eligible. For a family of four, the income threshold increases to $106,040. In Hawaii a single person with an income of up to $55,880 is eligible. For a family of four, the threshold increases to $115,280.

How is deaf-blind defined?

For this program, “deaf-blind” is defined as any individual with a combination of the disabilities described below for whom it is extremely difficult to attain independence in daily life activities, achieve psychosocial adjustment or obtain a vocation.

Must meet at least one of these sight guidelines:

Visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with corrective lenses

A field defect such that the peripheral diameter of visual field subtends an angular distance no greater than 20 degrees

Progressive visual loss with a prognosis leading to one or both of above conditions

Must meet at least one of these hearing guidelines:

Chronic hearing disabilities so severe that most speech cannot be understood with optimum amplification

Progressive hearing loss having a prognosis leading to above condition

What kind of equipment is available?

There is a wide range of equipment available depending on your needs. Some examples include:

Braille devices

Computers

Mobile devices

Phones

Signallers

How do I find out which equipment is the right fit?

The iCanConnect program provides a qualified specialist in your area to help identify and install equipment that will meet your/your family member’s needs.

How do I connect with a specialist in my area?

Call 1-800-825-4595 or visit the website [www.iCanConnect.org](http://www.iCanConnect.org).

I am/my family member is not tech savvy. Who will I contact for training?

Simply contact the partner program in your state, and they will put you in touch with someone who can help. A list of each state partners program is available on the State Partner page of icanconnect.org. You can also call us at 1-800-825-4595 for additional information.

How do I apply?

Contact iCanConnect at 1-800-825-4595 to learn more about the program, make a referral or to apply for eligibility or an assessment of your needs.

I can connect in West Virginia!

Perkins School for the Blind

175 North Beacon Street

Watertown Massachusetts 02472

Primary Phone Number: (617) 972-7724

Please Contact Us with Any Questions:

Marcia Brooks - marcia.brooks@perkins.org

iCanConnect Equipment

This page provides an overview of the types of distance communication tools the program can provide to help people with significant combined hearing and vision loss stay connected to friends and family. iCanConnect professionals in each state and local community will work with individual consumers to identify the equipment that addresses that person’s specific need.

Braille Devices

Braille equipment provided through the iCanConnect program includes a wide variety of refreshable displays and sophisticated multipurpose devices, which enhance access to distance communication. Some can be used as stand-alone devices connected via Wi-Fi, while others are paired with a mobile device to provide tactile access to e-mail, text messaging, and other modern communication resources enjoyed by the general public. To receive braille equipment, an eligible consumer must be proficient in braille and must have access to the internet or cellular service.

Computers

iCanConnect provides both Windows and Apple computers, including desktops and laptops to eligible consumers who have internet access. The program can also provide a large monitor if needed.

Mobile Devices

This category includes cell phones, smartphones, tablets, and associated accessories such as keyboards and protective cases. iCanConnect provides the equipment, but the consumer must pay for his or her own internet or cellular service.

Phones

Includes a variety of amplified speaker phones, cordless phones, and related devices that connect to the “landline” telephone service. An eligible consumer must have telephone service to be considered for this type of equipment.

Signalers

Includes audible, visual, and vibrating signalers that alert the user to a phone ringing, new e-mail, or other types of distance communications.

Software

This category includes screen readers and screen magnifier programs. A screen reader can serve as an interface between a computer and a braille display, and for those with usable hearing, it also provides synthesized speech output of what is on the computer screen. The user interacts with the screen reader and the computer via a complex set of keyboard commands. A screen magnifier selectively enlarges what is on the computer screen to enable access by individuals with very limited vision.

Application Section 1 of 3: Instructions and Guidelines

Overview

The National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP) supports local programs that distribute equipment to low-income individuals who are deaf-blind (have combined hearing and vision loss) to enable access to telephone, advanced communications, and information services. This support was mandated by the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 (CVAA) and is provided by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). For more information about the NDBEDP, please visit <http://icanconnect.org> or <http://www.fcc.gov/ndbedp>.

Who is eligible to receive equipment?

Under the CVAA, only low-income individuals who are deaf-blind are eligible to receive equipment provided through the NDBEDP. Applicants must provide verification of their status as low-income and deaf-blind.

Income eligibility

To be eligible, your family/household income must be below 400% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

For purposes of determining income eligibility for the NDBEDP, the FCC defines “income” and “household” as follows:

“Income” is all income actually received by all members of a household. This includes salary before deductions for taxes, public assistance benefits, social security payments, pensions, unemployment compensation, veteran's benefits, inheritances, alimony, child support payments, worker's compensation benefits, gifts, lottery winnings, and the like. The only exceptions are student financial aid, military housing and cost-of-living allowances, irregular income from occasional small jobs such as baby-sitting or lawn mowing, and the like.

A “household” is any individual or group of individuals who are living together at the same address as one economic unit. A household may include related and unrelated persons. An “economic unit” consists of all adult individuals contributing to and sharing in the income and expenses of a household. An adult is any person eighteen years or older. If an adult has no or minimal income, and lives with someone who provides financial support to him/her, both people shall be considered part of the same household. Children under the age of eighteen living with their parents or guardians are considered to be part of the same household as their parents or guardians.

See Section 2 for the family/household income information that must be provided with this application.

Disability eligibility

For this program, the CVAA requires that the term "deaf-blind" has the same meaning given by the Helen Keller National Center Act. In general, the individual must have a certain vision loss and a hearing loss that, combined, cause extreme difficulty in attaining independence in daily life activities, achieving psychosocial adjustment, or obtaining a vocation (working).

Specifically, the FCC’s NDBEDP rule 64.610(c)(2) states that an individual who is “deaf-blind” is:

1. Any person:

(A) Who has a central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with corrective lenses, or a field defect such that the peripheral diameter of visual field subtends an angular distance no greater than 20 degrees, or a progressive visual loss having a prognosis leading to one or both these conditions;

(B) Who has a chronic hearing impairment so severe that most speech cannot be understood with optimum amplification, or a progressive hearing loss having a prognosis leading to this condition; and

(C) For whom the combination of impairments described in . . . (A) and (B) of this section cause extreme difficulty in attaining independence in daily life activities, achieving psychosocial adjustment, or obtaining a vocation.

(ii) The definition in this paragraph also includes any individual who, despite the inability to be measured accurately for hearing and vision loss due to cognitive or behavioral constraints, or both, can be determined through functional and performance assessment to have severe hearing and visual disabilities that cause extreme difficulty in attaining independence in daily life activities, achieving psychosocial adjustment, or obtaining vocational objectives.

An applicant's functional abilities with respect to using telecommunications, Internet access, and advanced communications services in various environments shall be considered when determining whether the individual is deaf-blind under . . . (B) and (C) of this section.

Who can attest to a person’s disability eligibility?

A practicing professional who has direct knowledge of the person's vision and hearing loss, such as:

* Audiologist
* Community-based service provider
* Educator
* Hearing professional
* HKNC representative
* Medical/health professional
* School for the deaf and/or blind
* Specialist in Deaf-Blindness
* Speech pathologist
* State equipment/assistive technology program
* Vision professional
* Vocational rehabilitation counsellor

Such professionals may also include, in the attestation, information about the individual’s functional abilities to use telecommunications, Internet access, and advanced communications services in various settings.

Existing documentation that a person is deaf-blind, such as an individualized education program (IEP), or a statement from a public or private agency, such as a Social Security determination letter, may serve as verification of disability.

See Section 3 for the disability attestation information that must be provided with this application.

Confidentiality policy

iCanConnect is committed to ensuring that your privacy is protected. Information provided on this application form will only be used to determine eligibility for iCanConnect products and services. iCanConnect will not sell, distribute or lease your personal information to third parties unless you give permission, or if the iCanConnect program is required by law to do so. iCanConnect is committed to ensuring that personal information is secure. In order to prevent unauthorized access or disclosure, suitable physical, electronic and managerial procedures are in place to safeguard and secure the information iCanConnect collects.



Application Section 2 of 3: Applicant’s Personal Data

(Please fill in all fields)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Voice\_\_\_\_ TTY \_\_\_\_\_\_ VP \_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Communication Preference:

Distance Communication: \_\_\_ TTY \_\_\_ VP \_\_\_CapTel \_\_\_ Cell Phone \_\_\_TRS

\_\_\_ VRS \_\_\_ Email \_\_\_Fax

Face-to-Face Communication:

Receptive Communication (to include primary language) :\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Expressive Communication (to include primary language:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Sign Language User: ASL\_\_\_\_ PSE\_\_\_\_\_ SEE:\_\_\_\_\_ Other:\_\_\_\_\_\_

Alternate Contact (in case of emergency):\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Alternate Contact’s Communication Preference: \_\_\_ TTY \_\_\_ VP \_\_\_CapTel

\_\_\_ Cell Phone \_\_\_TRS \_\_\_ VRS \_\_\_ Email \_\_\_Fax

Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(If you are under age 18, your parent or legal guardian must sign the application.)

Language preference: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

State in which you are a permanent resident? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Feedback/suggestions (optional): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How did you hear about this program?

\_\_\_ iCanConnect.org website

\_\_\_ Disability advocacy group

\_\_\_ Education provider/school

\_\_\_ Family member

\_\_\_ Friend

\_\_\_ Healthcare provider

\_\_\_ Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) representative

\_\_\_ Independent Living Center

\_\_\_ Interpreter

\_\_\_ Media/news

\_\_\_ Senior Center

\_\_\_ Specialist in Deaf-Blind Services

\_\_\_ State Deaf-Blind Project

\_\_\_ Technology vendor

\_\_\_ Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

\_\_\_ Other –\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Income eligibility

To confirm your income eligibility, please mail or fax documentation that proves your eligibility for one of the following federal programs:

\_\_\_ Medicaid

\_\_\_ Low income home energy assistance

\_\_\_ Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

\_\_\_ Federal public housing assistance or Section 8

\_\_\_ Food Stamps or Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

\_\_\_ Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Welfare to Work (WTW)

\_\_\_ National School Lunch Program’s free lunch program

If none of the above apply, mail or fax a copy of last year’s Federal IRS 1040 tax form(s) filed by you and members of your family/household, or send other evidence of your family/household income, such as recent Social Security Administration retirement benefit statement(s) or other pension benefit statement(s).

With my signature below I hereby request services and certify that:

1. the information I have provided in this application is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge;
2. the document(s) submitted represent the entire income for my family/household; and
3. I authorize the confidential release of the disability and income information I have provided for use solely as required for the administration of my application.

I acknowledge that I am subject to audit and if it is found that I have provided inaccurate information on this form, I will be prosecuted to the fullest extent allowable by law. Should I become eligible for services, I agree to use these services solely for the purposes intended. I further understand that I may not sell, mortgage, lend or transfer interest in any equipment or services provided to me. Falsification of any records or failure to comply with these provisions will result in the immediate termination of service.

Print name of applicant or parent/guardian (if applicant is under age 18): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_



Application Section 3 of 3: Disability Verification

This disability verification section is to be completed by a practicing professional who has direct knowledge of the applicant's vision and hearing loss.

Please complete the following fields, and sign and date at the bottom.

Name and Address of Deaf-Blind Individual (Applicant):

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Street address: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_City/state/zip: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Attester:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Title: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Agency: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Street address: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_City/state/zip: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I certify under penalty of perjury that, to the best of my knowledge, this individual is deaf-blind as defined by the FCC in Section 1, above.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Fax, e-mail, or mail completed application (Sections 1, 2 and 3) to:

iCanConnect

Perkins School for the Blind

175 N. Beacon Street

Watertown, Massachusetts 02472

E-mail: jerry.berrier@perkins.org Fax: (617) 972-7668 Telephone inquiries: (800) 825-4595

If scanned documents are submitted, please use PDF format.

(This document is available upon request in hard copy print, braille, and electronic text.)

Perkins School for the Blind

175 North Beacon Street

Watertown Massachusetts 02472

Primary Phone Number: (617) 972-7724

Please Contact Us with Any Questions:

Marcia Brooks - marcia.brooks@perkins.org

Jerry Berrier

Manager RI & MA, National Deafblind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP)

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175 N. Beacon St.

Watertown, MA 02472

617.972.7826

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<http://www.perkins.org>

<http://www.icanconnect.org>

The I Can Connect Website has the applications for each state in PDF or WORD document form for download as well as other basic information about the program that might help you get started in developing a presentation.