

TANDBERG CUSTOMER PROFILE

Southeastern
Regional Education
Service Center



SERESC FACILITY - BEDFORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Successful Grant Combinations:

- **Rural Utility Services (RUS) Grant** - Distance learning equipment
- **Foreign Language Grant** - Connectivity (high speed lines), assisting resources
- **Teaching American History Grant (USDOE)** - Funding for visual communication

"If you could eliminate time, and you could eliminate distance, what could you do? You could tap the wisdom, expertise, innovation and knowledge of anyone, at anytime, anywhere - now that's the promise of distance education. First, you must be able to see the possibilities."

DR. ANTONIO PARADIS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SERESC

NEW HAMPSHIRE CREATES INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS TO GAIN GRANT FUNDING FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

THE CHALLENGE

In New Hampshire, self-sufficiency and independence are highly valued and fiercely guarded virtues. So when it came to exploring Federal grant funding for the state's distance learning initiatives, there were some significant obstacles to overcome.

"The people here in New Hampshire have a mindset regarding outside assistance," explains George Wiley, President of View Communications, a dedicated provider of technology solutions to the State of New Hampshire and a TANDBERG products integrator. "We are independent, prefer to do things ourselves, and are hesitant to spend tax money, even federal funds, unless it's for a very, very good reason. You have to have a pretty compelling argument to convince us."

But a compelling argument they had - visual communication-based distance learning. It promised an exciting solution to many of New Hampshire's pressing issues, offering benefits not only to the schools but also to the wider communities. The Southeastern Regional Education Service Center (SERESC) is a testimonial to that idea. SERESC has utilized more than a million dollars worth of state-of-the-art visual communication technology to deliver all manner of distance seminars, workshops, and meetings to hundreds of faculty, administrators, parents and health professionals across the state.

But hubs like SERESC and the corresponding receiving locations were few and far between in this state characterized by extremes in socio-economic levels, terrain and weather. New Hampshire would benefit greatly from an infusion of funding to enhance their communications technology resources and infrastructure. Pursuing grant funding seemed to be the answer.

Overcoming the ingrained suspicion regarding outside monies was just the beginning of the challenges. The state would also need sophisticated guidance in the grants process, to help identify which grants were the best fit for their needs. What's more, the state's school districts would also have to be highly creative and cooperative to qualify for the funds - and would have to work together with private and public

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A typical challenge for rural school districts is providing quality education to all their schools. Shared resource arrangements mean teachers must travel long distances from school to school in all kinds of weather, leaving little substantive time with students, and causing high levels of fatigue, burnout and turnover. Distance learning using visual communication technologies solves these problems.

organizations if they were to be successful in their bid for these grant monies. Thanks to exceptional vision, energetic persistence and a remarkable team of committed professionals, New Hampshire was able to overcome the obstacles.

THE SOLUTION

"View Communications arranged a meeting with our TANDBERG representative," explains Dr. Antonio Paradis - Executive Director of SERESC. "She in turn introduced us, via the TANDBERG Grants Services Team, to an independent grant writer with extensive experience. It was an instant match.

"We began working together from that point," continued Dr. Paradis, "designing a plan to identify the right grants for our needs, selecting the school districts that would qualify for these grants, and engaging those highly motivated superintendents who we felt would share the enthusiasm for enhancing their students' educational experience. In fact, without the exceptional leadership, commitment and hard work of Sherwood Fleury and Dr. Douglas MacDonald, the superintendents of the school districts SAU 58 and SAU 55, we could not have accomplished our goal."

The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) grant was identified as an ideal fit for New Hampshire's requirements. Many of the school districts were isolated, with depressed economies and difficult winters coupled with small budgets and the necessity of shared resources. Budgets were so constrained these school districts could not afford the "matching funds" requirement. So, they were creatively teamed with more affluent school districts that could fund this requirement.

While the RUS grant funded the purchase of visual communication equipment, the rural school districts could not afford the high speed telecommunications lines required to connect the equipment. RUS grants did not provide funding for connectivity. However, New Hampshire was also applying for the Foreign Language grant, which would provide the opportunity for an integrated foreign language program in select school districts. Among the funding it provided, including stipends for teachers and their aides, the Foreign Language grant also provided funding for high speed telecommunications lines, thereby supplying many complimentary components in the distance learning initiative.

"Our final challenge was to overcome our school districts' resistance and concerns regarding the grant funding itself. The direct route proved to be the key," said Dr. Paradis.

"We were clear with them from the start that there were indeed strings attached," explains Wiley, "that to get these resources, they would have to use them to solve some of their problems - like providing more hours of quality education to more students, guaranteeing access to both basic and exceptional educational resources, and lowering teacher travel costs.

"What's more, we told them they would increase the graduation rates of their kids, lower the incidence of teen pregnancy and dropout, increase safety and health levels, and even ensure their kids will speak at least two foreign languages when they graduate. By putting these resources in terms of the problems these school systems faced, they took ownership and became fully committed to the endeavor."

THE RESULTS

New Hampshire has received RUS and Foreign Language grant funding that allows video-based distance learning solutions to be deployed throughout two school districts. Spring boarding from that success, this year the state is pursuing and has received RUS grants for four areas within New Hampshire, as well as Foreign Language grants, Teaching American History grants, and Science and Technology grants.

These funds will dramatically enhance the educational and communications

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capacity of the schools and the community at large. Hubs and receiving locations enjoy fully interactive sessions, delivering state-of-the-art information from nationally-known speakers. The locations provide not only training and collaboration for the schools but also training for fire safety, forestry, animal husbandry and medical professionals. Businesses and organizations in the community will be able to utilize the visual communication resources for meetings, interviews, training and more.

"Our vision is to move the content, not the students or the teachers," says Dr. Paradis. "The grants we have won, and are pursuing, are helping us realize that vision. Collaboration is the key. Through SERESC's partnerships with business, education and government, we are achieving our goals. TANDBERG, View Communications and our grant writer have worked with great enthusiasm to assist us. We would not have been able to do it alone."

Keys to Success in Pursuing Grant Funding

Understand the culture you are working with and start where they are.

If everything must be driven from the local level on up, work with that process. Explain in detail how pursuing the grant funding will help the schools solve budget and teacher resource problems, fill state and Federal mandates, and increase the quality of the curriculum, teacher satisfaction, and time spent with each student.

Create strategic partnerships.

Most school districts are not big enough to have rich areas and poorer areas - they are either one or the other. That's where partnerships between school districts become so important. Match relatively rich school systems and hubs with content to poorer schools for the RUS grant.

Understand - and demonstrate - the possibilities.

"One of our Groveton High School students was graduating," explains Dr. Paradis. "Her father had been called to service in Iraq - so we arranged a surprise. Through videoconferencing, we were able to bring the soldier in so he could watch his daughter graduate. The reception from Iraq to Groton was crystal clear. After the graduation ceremony, we wheeled the videoconferencing system into another room so the mother and daughter could have a private conversation with the father in Iraq. That was a priceless moment - and it's only a taste of what this technology can do for people."

Get good at getting the grants.

Start with an experienced grant writer, one who knows the process and the players inside and out, who has learned from failure and can create success. Next, be brutal with your school districts. Do not allow political issues to sway the wisdom of what criteria will win. Finally, score the grant yourself before you submit it. If you don't score 100%, don't submit it.

Find a team that will work as your advocate.

Make sure your team's representatives (your solution reseller, product and service provider representatives, and school administrators) actually visit the schools that are applying for the grants. Walk each room, see and take pictures of where they want to deploy the equipment, to ensure you are designing solutions that will work for them.

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