



# Pacific Newsbytes

Pacific Partners News Briefs

## Telecom News from the Pacific Islands



Funding awards a good beginning for future telecom development

### The E-Rate Awards of Guam and CNMI

By Allison Tai

In late September, E-Rate teams from the Guam Education Network (GENET) and the Public School System (PSS) of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) received delightful news. Both GDOE and PSS officially received E-rate grants for their E-Rate projects from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). This encouraging award is a result of the dedicated hard work from the GENET and PSS teams, and their partners.

#### GENET

The Guam Education Network (GENET) Consortium is composed of the University of Guam (UOG), Guam Department of Education (GDOE), Guam Community College (GCC), Guam Memorial Hospital Authority (GMHA), Pan-Pacific Education and Communication Experiments by Satellite (PEACESAT) Program, and the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL).

Through a series of planning and needs assessment, many needs and opportunities were identified in Guam. General findings include:

- Needs in education and health care could be served through distance learning on Guam and within the region.
- Basic infrastructure was needed, not only in the jurisdictions, but also within the region.
- Distance learning programs and resources (e.g. courses, training, workshops, and support material) were available and ready to go but could not be delivered without an infrastructure, including video conferencing capabilities.
- Success in distance learning infrastructure and programs required collaboration and cooperation among the organizations. It was clear to all organizations that it was not possible to achieve the goals of distance learning alone and that sharing of resources, collaboration, and cooperation was essential to success.

As a result, the GENET Partners worked to estab-

lish a common infrastructure, one that is multi-use and shared. Three major networks that formed the basis of the GENET project consisted of interconnection among the GDOE E-Rate Network; the PEACESAT Hub Site at the UOG PEACESAT; and the UOG Campus Networks.

The newly funded E-Rate Network plans to provide interconnectivity among all public schools and district offices, as well as interconnection with the PEACESAT Program at the University of Hawaii. Through the PEACESAT/PREL Partnership, GENET will now be able to cross connect Internet access and video conferencing programs through the proposed multipoint conference unit. This will enable all sites in GENET to interconnect with all other PEACESAT sites, including the University of Hawaii, University of Guam, and Guam Department of Education. At the same time, non-E-Rate agencies will be allowed to use the UOG PEACESAT Hub Site earth station.

This will permit connectivity among the organizations to share resources for distance learning, teacher training, continuing medical education and the like.

The proposal specifically requested funding for:

- Multipoint conference bridges and gateway network interconnection equipment located at, and operated by the UOG PEACESAT Program under the Center of Continuing Education and Outreach Programs.
- Video conferencing systems at the Guam Department of Education (DOE) intermediate and high schools.
- Video conferencing systems at the University Affiliated Programs for Developmentally Disabled.
- Network interconnection equipment for Guam Memorial Hospital Authority.
- Network interconnection equipment and video conferencing origination equipment at the Guam Community College.

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# The E-Rate Awards of Guam and CNMI

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The NTIA grant will further enable education and health care organizations and agencies in Guam and other Pacific Island jurisdictions to participate in and assess distance learning needs and implementation alternatives.

## **PSS of CNMI**

The Public School System (PSS) of the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands (CNMI) proposed a new distance learning network. This network would enable an underserved population to deliver, receive, and share distance learning programs within the CNMI, the Pacific Region and the U.S.

The awarded proposal was submitted by the Partners in Distance Learning Network (PDLN) consortium of the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands (CNMI). The partners the CNMI PDLN included the Office of the Governor, North Marianas College (NMC), the Commonwealth Health Center (CHC), the Pan-Pacific Education and Communication Experiments by Satellite (PEACESAT) and the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL).

In a letter to the Board of Education, Dr. Rita Inos, Commissioner of the Public School System said, "I am very pleased to announce that the matching funds for the E-Rate Project have been released by the Office of the Governor. I am also very pleased to announce that the PSS received notification the Partners in Distance Learning Network has been awarded a competitive grant from the Public Telecommunications Facilities Program (PTFP) of the U.S. National Telecommunications and Information Administration. These two actions are very critical steps in the development of an information and telecommunications infrastructure that will enable the Public School Systems and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands to provide distance learning, education, training, and other applications on all islands.

"This grant of about \$300,000 will provide video teleconferencing capabilities to all of our schools, the Office of Human Resources in the Office Administration building, and will provide equipment so that the video teleconferencing systems of the Northern Marianas College and the Commonwealth Health Center will also be connected." What this means, explained Dr. Inos, is "all of the schools will have video teleconferencing systems as well as access to the Internet, including those schools on Tinian and Rota."

The fund will be used to acquire interconnection and origination equipment that would use the network infrastructure of the PDLN for a video teleconferencing-based distance learning network. The proposal specifically requested funding for:

- End-user video teleconferencing origination systems for all schools and the district office and a multipoint conference bridge to be located at and operated by the Public School System on behalf of the PDLN.
- Network interconnection equipment and an end-user video teleconferencing origination system for the Commonwealth Health Center.
- Network interconnection equipment and an end-user video teleconferencing origination system for the CNMI government Office of Human Resources.
- A multipoint conference bridge at the Pan-Pacific Education and Communication Experiments by Satellite (PEACESAT) Program at the University of Hawaii.
- Network interconnection equipment for the Northern Marianas College.

The project will:

- Implement video teleconference-based distance learning capabilities in all public schools within the CNMI and establish a multipoint conference bridging capability.
- Interconnect video teleconferencing capabilities in the CHC.
- Interconnect these schools to the existing video teleconferencing systems of the NMC.
- Enable these sites to interconnect with the existing distance learning networks, including those of the University of Hawaii, the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, the American Samoa Distance Education, Learning, and Telehealth Applications (DELTA) Consortium, and the Guam GENET.
- The network will also enable these sites to receive satellite programs through the PEACESAT and State of Hawaii Telehealth Access Network (that currently do not reach the region) and will also enable U.S. and world-wide, interactive connectivity through ISDN gateways of the PEACESAT/ PREL network.

Funding awards of GENET and PSS proposals initiate a good beginning of the future telecommunications development in the Pacific jurisdictions. Collaboration between partners is the key to success. While working cooperatively as a team to plan and build networks, partners together are also anticipating exciting and pleasing outcomes that will appear along the way. Hopefully this will lessen the disparities between the States and the Pacific insular areas and within the region.