

Technology Purchases

Applicants should be thoughtful and deliberate in the planning phase of the application process when budgeting grant funds to purchase technology equipment, in particular items such as tablet computers and laptops. Because different types of technology equipment are used in different ways, they offer different benefits to the intended beneficiaries of the grant. The grant application must specify what type of technology is planned to be purchased and must demonstrate how the planned purchase aligns with the purpose and goals of the grant.

After grant funds are awarded, they must be expended in accordance with the approved budget. For instance, if the grantee budgeted for laptops and decides that tablet computers would be a more cost-effective means of serving the same need, the grantee must submit an amendment to the application, which must be approved before tablet computers may be purchased using grant funds.

The following sections define various technology items.

Smartphone

A smartphone is a cellular telephone that incorporates the function of a mobile operating system (OS). A cellular telephone that does not incorporate the function of an OS is known as a feature phone. Feature phones are generally operated from the keypad, and functionality is limited to placing phone calls, sending text messages, and performance of basic computing functions such as calculator, alarm, or calendar.

A smartphone is generally operated via a touchscreen, and the OS permits a much wider range of computing functions, including full Internet connectivity. Smartphones are capable of running software applications (known as “apps”) developed specifically for use with the smartphone’s OS.

Tablet Computer

A tablet computer, or tablet, is a very light, relatively small, easily portable computer that consists of a touchscreen and, optionally, a keyboard that connects to the screen via a wireless link or a USB cable. The main differences between tablets and laptops are screen size (with tablets being smaller) and the tablet’s lack of an integrated keyboard. A secondary difference has to do with the functionality of the devices in terms of the software applications they are designed to run.

Although tablets are capable of running software applications, the applications tend to be limited in functionality (similar to the “apps” developed for smartphones). Most tablets run operating systems that were originally developed for smartphones, rather than operating systems designed for actual computers. Tablets are ideal for Internet browsing, email, creation and editing of digital photos and videos, E-book access, and very basic document creation and editing. They are designed with limited processing power and less memory than most laptops.

It should be noted that with every new generation, tablet computer functionality is increased, and the gap between the tablet and the laptop is closing quickly. At present, however, the tablet computer is not designed to run software applications with complex functionality.

Netbook

Netbooks were developed as a smaller, lighter, less expensive alternative to laptop computers. Netbooks generally lack advanced functions, such as a CD-ROM or DVD drive, of full-featured

laptop computers. Over the period of their development, netbooks began to incorporate more and more features generally associated with laptop computers. The primary distinction, finally, came to be price, with netbooks being less expensive than laptops.

With the evolution of the tablet computer, and as smaller, lighter, less expensive laptops begin to be produced, the term “netbook” has ceased to be used to describe a category of technology items. Today, a grantee interested in what used to be called a netbook might choose either to purchase a full-featured tablet computer or one of the cheaper laptops.

Laptop Computer

A laptop computer is portable computer running a computer operating system and consisting of an integrated keyboard, trackpad (with the option of adding a mouse, either via wireless link or USB cable), and screen. The computer is operated via the keyboard, trackpad, and/or mouse, and the screen is for display only. Laptop computers do not incorporate touchscreen functionality.

A laptop computer is built using the same components found in a full-sized desktop computer, except that the components are smaller and sometimes less powerful to make the computer portable. As a result, laptops can run software designed to perform complex functions, something tablets in general are not yet able to do.

Desktop Computer

A desktop computer is a computer that is not designed to be portable and that must be connected to an external power source (rather than running on an internal battery). Desktop computers may be designed so that the central processing unit, monitor, and keyboard are all separate components (as in a tower unit, often associated with PCs) or in a unit that incorporates the monitor and processor (as with many Apple desktops, such as the iMac).

Because size and weight are not as important considerations in desktop computers as they are in laptops, desktops are often more powerful, with more installed memory and bigger monitors with higher resolution than what is found on a laptop.