

HUD Exchange - National Briefing on Community Development Block Grant Support for Infectious Disease Response, 3/16/20

Janet Golrick: -- on community development block grant support for infectious disease response.

I would like to first welcome everyone, thank everyone for participating on this call, especially for late notice. We do appreciate you participating.

And with that, I'd like to introduce John Gibbs. He is the acting assistant secretary for Community Planning and Development for opening remarks.

John Gibbs: Thank you, Janet. My name is John Gibbs. I'm the acting assistant secretary of Community Planning and Development here at HUD. Thank you all for taking the time to join us on this call. And thank you all for the work you're doing in your communities to combat this crisis. We really want to work together with you to do that.

I also want to thank our HUD staff who've been working really hard day and night, even over the weekends on this. And we want to continue to work hard to serve you and make sure you have what you need to serve your communities as well.

We want to make sure our services to you go uninterrupted. We want to make sure that you have everything it takes and we want to make sure that we are providing information to you on a timely manner so that you can really be ready to do what you need to do in your communities. And we want to keep the lines of communication open during this time of crisis and we want to keep providing you with that information that you're going to be using there.

So just thank you again for joining this call. Thank you to everyone that's working hard to meet the needs that are out there in your communities.

And with that, I want to give the floor back to my colleagues.

Janet Golrick: Thank you very much, John. I would like to now introduce Jessie Handforth Kome. She is the director of the Office of Block Grant Assistance. And she will be talking to you about the program and the flexibilities and the eligible activities for this program, especially for this infectious disease response. With that, Jesse.

Jessie Handforth Kome: Hi, everybody. Jessie Handforth Kome. I'm going to talk to you about what we have so far and how we're going to go forward to try to help you, give you places where you can get your questions answered.

The first thing I'd like to point out is that we posted a two-pager on eligible activities for infectious disease response on the HUD exchange, HUDexchange.info on the main CDBG page. And it includes examples that I'm going to go over briefly today of possible eligible activities. The link is in this PDF, which we'll make available so you can just click through if you don't want to sort through the HUD exchange.

There are four categories of the eligible activities that we identified based on questions and comments and brain storming here. And information from grantees are buildings and improvement, including public facilities. Assistance to businesses, including special economic development, public services, and planning to pass [inaudible] and technical assistance.

So, for example, under -- and we want to emphasize that grantees should coordinate with local health authorities before you undertake any activity to support state or local infectious disease response. There is a range of CDBG activities that you can reprogram or program your funds for.

So, on buildings and improvement, some examples might be to rehabilitate a community facility to establish an infectious disease treatment clinic, to acquire and rehab or construct a group living facility that can be used to centralize patients undergoing treatment. And under rehab, acquire and quickly rehabilitate, if necessary, a motel or hotel building to expand capacity of hospitals to accommodate isolation of patients during recovery.

In the assistance to businesses, including academic development assistance, there's two main categories. One is grants and loans to support new businesses or business expansion to create jobs in manufactured medical supplies necessary to respond to infectious diseases. The other is avoiding job loss caused by business closures related to social distancing by providing short-term working capital assistance in the form of loans or grants to small business to enable retention of jobs held by low- and moderate-income persons. And there's similar things [inaudible] micro enterprise that can be done to help provide food delivery, for example, and cleaning, and other support for home health or quarantine if it comes to that.

For public services, which is the category we're getting asked about the most, I think. This is capped at 15 percent of most grantees' grants. This refers to provision of new or quantifiably increased public services. It can be things like carryout job training to expand the pool of healthcare workers and technicians that are available to treat disease, provide testing diagnosis or other services at fixed or mobile locations.

Possibly deliver meals on wheels to quarantined individuals or individuals who need to maintain social distancing due to medical vulnerabilities.

Now, in this category on public services, there are other grant programs working in this space. So again, CDBG would have to fund gaps.

In planning, capacity, and technical assistance, for states, states have -- do planning grants and planning only grants and those are grants meant to be given to units of general local government for planning activities. In conjunction of an -- with an activity that's going to be carried out or they can be used with planning only as an activity.

The state program -- the activities must meet or planning activities have to meet or demonstrate they would meet a national objective. And they are subject to the state's 20 percent cap on admin planning and technical assistance.

States can also grant [inaudible] or local government to hire TA providers to deliver CDBG training to new subrecipients and local government departments that are administering CDBG funds for the first time to assist with infectious disease response. And this activity, capability building is subject to the state's 3 percent admin planning and TA cap.

For entitlements only for planning, they -- you can use CDBG funds to gather data and develop non-project specific emergency infectious response plans. Planning considerations involve remember that conditions are going to rapidly evolve. So when you are setting up your activity if you decide to program or reprogram to these uses and they're not in your plan or consolidated plan -- and we'll talk a little bit more about mechanics in a minute -- you will have to amend your annual action plan when there's a change to the allocation priorities and a method of distribution of funds in addition of an activity not described in the plans or a changed purpose, scope, location, or beneficiaries of an activity.

And if it meets the criteria for a substantial amendment, you're going to have to follow your citizen participation process for amendment. And those are both regulatory and statutory. We're looking now at where we can provide relief. But right now, those are pretty well moved together.

Though the department does have TA, the two-page [inaudible] that we have TA providers and you can request them by going to your field office to get technical assistance. Oh. Somebody advanced my slide. That's right. Okay.

So, this is the -- somebody advanced it to the amendment. So, you can see that.

We've been getting a lot of questions about potential for virtual hearings. And we did a real hard scrub on the lot and the guidance that we're giving is that if you have concerns about significant public health risks that could result from holding in-person hearings, you can undertake a virtual public hearing alone or in concert with an in-person hearing if you'll allow questions in real-time with answers coming directly from elected representatives all attendees.

You can use conference calls, web crossing like we are now. We have at least grantee that I think is a CDBG grantee that's using a sub[inaudible]. There are a lot of social media casts for this. And so, I mean, we're open to working with you and finding something that works. The qualifiers -- of course, you have to figure out a virtual hearing method or platform or platforms to provide for accessibility for persons with disabilities and limited English proficiency to participate.

And just document your efforts and the reason that you had to do them briefly. And update your citizen participation plan as soon as you can.

HUD does understand the exigencies of a public health challenge and will not penalize a grantee who does its best to comply with citizen participation requirements and documents its efforts.

I'm timing this. A lot of grantees have contacted us because they are going to have to suspend or delay program operations because staff are being pulled away for other things or becoming ill. And so, HUD just wants to let you know that when we do see untimeliness, we consult with the grantee to determine the causes.

And if the cause is beyond the grantees control, which clearly the virus and its effects are, HUD is not going to take corrective action, but we will work with you to ensure that you get timely in your next annual checkpoint. So, don't let this one keep you up at night.

We're getting in a lot of questions and a lot of requests to raise the public service limit, but it's statutory and we don't have that authority to -- it's 15 percent for almost all grantees. And public services and capacity building aren't going to include general conduct of government or general operating for subrecipients as categories.

There's nothing we can do right now on lifting public service cap. We just don't have that authority.

I don't want to take too much of your time because I know it's precious right now. And I thank you for your time.

The email address that you're seeing here has changed. We've updated it so that you can send in all of your CPD questions for all the programs. So, it would be CPDquestionsanswered@hud.gov. And we'll be sending out a follow up email with that email, CPDquestionsanswered@hud.gov on it so that you can get your questions answered.

There are a few questions coming in on the side. The slides will be provided for reference after the briefing. Yes. The deadline for the consolidated plan can be extended at the field office level. They're able to extend it, but it cannot go past August 16th. That's a statutory deadline for submitting your consolidated plan for your 2020 funds.

I'm going to have to -- some of these questions I don't know the answer right off the top. And we'll take a look at those after this presentation and take a look. There are questions about documentation and urgent [inaudible] national objective. And we're working up Q&As on that for you.

So, I'm going to turn this over right now to Janet for closing remarks. And we will get moving on answering these questions.

Janet Golrick: Thank you, Jessie. So, we will be taking the questions and also the questions that you submit to CPD questions answered. And we will be providing and compiling what we call a Q&A that we will be putting up on HUD Exchange. And we will be updating that perhaps as much as every day, depending on how many questions we're getting.

We do know that this is urgent. We do know you're in the process right now right your public health department in your community trying to work through all this and know the available resources that you can dedicate to this. So, we understand the urgency.

So, we will be doing on the HUD Exchange. We also are looking to also send out -- blast out these Q&As to everyone on a regular basis. We will keep that regularity to the extent of the

number of questions we get. We will try to get that, as I said, on a daily basis, but we'll attempt to do that on a weekly basis at a minimum. So, we will be doing that.

And we'll also, through our field office directors and your local field office representatives, they also are readily available and willing and able to take your questions, hopefully give you answers and also offered up that they will send anything they can answer up to here -- up to headquarters so that we can immediately expedite a response back to you.

So ,with that, any closing comments, John?

John Gibbs: No closing comments other than what you just covered just now, Janet, as well as Jessie. Thank you for the information you shared.

Again, please do look at HUD Exchange and we will be posting many updates there over the coming days and weeks. So please do keep in touch with us there as well as the email address that was just shared. Thank you very much.

Janet Golrick: Thank you, John. Thank you, again, for your participation. We will be, perhaps, having another one of these calls in the near future. So stay tuned. We obviously know you're very busy, but we also want to make sure that we're giving you as up to date information as possible to assist you and your communities.

Thank you. Have a good afternoon.

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