



**PY 2021 Ohio Consolidated Plan
Residential Public Infrastructure Grant Program
Advisory Committee Meeting**

**Virtual WebEX Conference Call
November 3, 2020
1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.**

Advisory Committee Members in Attendance:

Pam Ewing, GLCAP
Michelle Hister, Poggemeyer Design Group
Michelle Hyer, Buckeye Hills
Alan Knapp, OMEGA
Rochelle Laipply, IBI Group
Dennis Miller, Maumee Valley Planning Organization
Katie Saba, W.E. Quicksall & Associates
Austin Serna, Maumee Valley Planning Organization
Nathan Simons, HAPCAP
Tracy Shoults, Stantec Inc.
Gary Silcott, Stantec Inc.
Karen Sprague, Gallia County
Jeannette Wierzbicki, OMEGA
Erin Wright, The Thrasher Group
Melissa Zoller, Buckeye Hills

Ohio Development Services Agency (ODSA) Employees:

Shana Garrett
Jared Jodrey
Ben Kepple
Tiffany Laffitte
Matthew Lamantia
Haley Lupton
Mary Oakley
Ian Thomas
Wesley Watkins

Residential Public Infrastructure Program

Wes Watkins shared historical data with the committee about Project Year 2019, including number and state-wide distribution of projects funded and the amount of funds awarded. All grant funds were awarded by the June 30, 2020 program year end. Thirteen grants totaling \$9 million were awarded. Most grants were issued to grantees in the Appalachian region.

Mr. Watkins shared information about the current Program Year 2020. There is high demand for the program with over twenty applications in the online application system OCEAN. The RPI program is allocated \$8 million dollars.

Mr. Watkins reviewed changes to the program instituted this year. This was the first year scoring was instituted to promote sustainability and focus on health orders. Additionally, lead line replacement is now included as a qualifying health hazard. The cap on the amount of an RPI grant that can be used for household connections was increased from \$100,000 to \$200,000. OCD will allow a one-time transfer of funds between connection costs and construction costs.

Meeting participants questioned how projects would be considered when funds begin to run low. Mr. Watkins explained OCD will consider readiness to proceed, timing requirements of leveraged funds, and documented health hazards to prioritize projects. One suggestion was unsewered areas should be prioritized as well.

A meeting participant suggested moving the grant ceiling down to allow for more RPI grants to be awarded in a program year. Feedback from the Program Year 2020 meeting indicated that grantees would be willing to wait for the larger grant as opposed to reducing the grant amount.

The committee discussed the timing of applications. Mr. Watkins suggested the RPI program could institute rounds to better allocate funding timing, but meeting participants noted that the open cycle allowed for better flexibility overall. It was noted that the RPI program wants to be the last money into a project and that causes some timing issues for projects. Another comment noted that the nature of open cycle allows for an easier time to line up funding from other sources.

A participant questioned why the sudden increase in RPI applications. Mr. Watkins explained that all of OCD's programs have up and down years. Some of the suggestions brought up today were in response to the cyclical nature of these programs.

A participant asked whether OCD would consider increasing the RPI budget. Mr. Watkins explained that the amount of federal funds OCD has received has decreased or been stagnant in the last few years so to increase the RPI budget would require reallocation of all programs. Another participant mentioned that OCD has too many programs and should focus its resources on fewer but more impactful programs.

Mr. Watkins suggested, in response to the majority of RPI grants being awarded to the Appalachian region, is to limit the number of RPI funds per region. A participant responded that it would not be fair to penalize one county's application because a neighboring county applied first. The RPI program operates largely on a first-come, first-serve basis and if the project is eligible and scores well, it should be funded regardless of its location.

A participant questioned whether there is a limit to the number of RPI grants a community can have. Mr. Watkins explained that a county is limited to four RPI applications per program year, two for the county itself and two on behalf of a village, city or other designated area. Cities and villages can apply for one application per program year. There is no limit to the number of open RPI grants but administrative capacity is considered.

A participant asked if planning has ever been considered an eligible activity for RPI grants. Mr. Watkins explained that it has not but other OCD programs, like the Target of Opportunity program, allow for planning.

Meeting participants asked OCD about health hazard criteria for scoring. In response to comments from last year's session, Mr. Watkins explained that more points were added to functional obsolescence. Findings and Order are still the highest health hazard, but points were added at every level to make funding more accessible. One comment was that communities are using the same Findings and Orders to receive multiple grants. RPI-funded projects are supposed to be designed to

eliminate Findings and Orders and make communities compliant. This is something OCD should continue to review carefully going forward.

A participant asked if changes to the amount of CDBG allowed for RPI grant administration will be considered. Mr. Watkins said it is not under consideration for PY 2021. The administration cap is \$20,000; if the project includes CDBG-funded household connections, the cap increases to \$30,000 due to the additional work of income qualifying households.

A participant suggested grants requesting less CDBG as compared to leveraged funds should be prioritized. Mr. Watkins explained communities receive more points for greater leverage and that smaller projects may have an advantage when funds run low near the end of the year. Mr. Watkins explained projects are typically so large that the points for leverage do not typically affect scoring drastically.

A participant asked how grantees have been achieving the pro-rata requirement set forth in the grant requirements. Detailed information was not available during the meeting, but Mr. Watkins explained that these projects typically end up costing more than the initial estimate, so it is rare if funds are returned due to a cost savings. However, in projects with household connections, money is sent back more often due to a fewer households submitting income qualification documentation than estimated at application. That may change with the ability to move funds between construction costs and household connections. A participant suggested only allowing a transfer from construction to connections and not the other way around. This would allow for more recaptured funds and alleviate a concern that communities are gaming the system to increase the amount of funds available for construction. Mr. Watkins stated that communities can now request the entire grant for construction if other funds are available for household connections and moving funds to construction is off set by a revised pro-rata requirement.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.