

Determining Allocations

Consolidated Plan Priorities

In the PY2003-2007 Consolidated Plan, HCCEDD developed priorities for funding based upon the analysis of data and community participation in development of the plan. Needs throughout the County were extensive and, as a result, a number of areas were designated "high-priority".

In total, HCCEDD proposes to assist 44 qualifying projects for \$9,941,860. Planning and administration costs for HCCEDD have been allocated \$2,358,710.

Proposal Review and Project Selection

Overview

Selection of the community development, homeless and housing projects for funding is one of the most crucial activities HCCEDD performs. Each year, the CDBG, HOME, and ESG entitlement funds are distributed through a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process to local public and private organizations that serve low-income residents from unincorporated Harris County and fifteen cooperative cities within the County.

All proposals were reviewed and evaluated by HCCEDD staff. The staff members reviewed the projects for initial eligibility, evaluated and scored the entire proposals. The staff was comprised of professional, managerial and executive staff from the Planning & Development section with assistance from Grants Management and Finance sections.

PY2007 RFP Process

Overview

In May 2006, the department initiated the allocation of funds through its RFP process. This activity serves as an organized method to evaluate and select projects that will deliver services in Harris County's HUD service area.

Planning Activities

During the early days of planning, staff developed a timeline to target dates for the completion of critical activities. Staff utilized ideas, suggestions and comments from prior years' RFP processes to make recommended changes to the PY2007 Application and Guidebook.

In addition, Development staff sought input from Grants Management and Finance staff to ensure a streamlined process from the award to the contract development phase.

Issuance of RFP.

On May 1, 2006, the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) was mailed to over 700 individuals and organizations on the RFP mailing list and posted on HCCEDD's website. Organizations were asked to respond to HCCEDD to request the PY2007 RFP. In addition to the notification by mail, a public notice was placed in the Houston Chronicle on May 1, 2006 to announce the availability of funds. Organizations not on the RFP mailing list were asked to contact HCCEDD to be added to the mailing list for future notifications. Also, for the public's convenience, the RFP was placed on the County Purchasing Agent's website, which could also be accessed through HCCEDD's website.

Applicants Conferences.

HCCEDD hosted five Applicants Conferences on May 23-25, 2006, for organizations interested in applying for HUD entitlement funds through Harris County. These conferences were held in the Auditorium at HCCEDD's office, 8410 Lantern Point. The conferences were specific to each program area: CDBG general, CDBG public services (two conferences), HOME and ESG.

During these conferences, HCCEDD staff presented information on program guidelines and instructions on completing the applications. Staff from Planning & Development, Grants Management, and Finance were available to provide instruction on the completion and submission of the application and answer questions about grant program guidelines, including eligible and ineligible program activities.

Submission of Proposals. On Monday, June 12, 2006, 59 proposals were submitted to the Harris County Purchasing Office at 1001 Preston Avenue by the 2:00 P.M. deadline. Despite the outreach efforts of HCCEDD staff, not enough proposals were received to target HCCEDD goals and objectives for PY 2007; therefore, a supplemental RFP was issued for CDBG Public Service, ESG and HOME funds. By July 17, 2006, an additional 24 proposals were submitted, bringing the total number of submitted proposals to 83. Upon receipt, each was assigned a file number and logged into the RFP database. Upon completion of data entry, applications were assigned and distributed to the proposal review team members for an initial eligibility or threshold review.

Proposal Evaluation Process

Overview

The proposal evaluation process included the assistance of professional, managerial and executive staff from Planning & Development and Finance. The review process was divided into two phases, the initial threshold review (Phase I) and the proposal review (Phase II).

The purpose of Phase I is to determine initial eligibility based on HUD regulations for the CDBG, HOME and ESG programs and adherence to RFP requirements. Phase II provides a forum for staff with expertise in different areas to provide an objective review of all proposals and discuss their findings in a cooperative setting. It is through these two phases of review that staff is best suited to make funding recommendations.

Evaluation Activities

During Phase I of the threshold review process, Planning & Development staff determined eligibility of the projects based on the CDBG/HOME/ESG Threshold Evaluation Worksheets. Seventeen projects were found to be ineligible.

Phase II was conducted by Planning & Development and Finance staff. Planning & Development staff reviewed projects for programmatic feasibility, while Finance staff reviewed the budgets for cost reasonableness. This phase of the review process concluded with a discussion of the review findings and recommendations from the Finance and Grants Management sections. Executive, management and professional staff members participated in this meeting.

Evaluation Factors

While evaluating the proposals for initial eligibility, the proposal review team used the following established threshold factors and criteria. These criteria were included in the RFP and incorporated into the evaluation worksheets.

- Does the project meet at least one National Objective or applicable program objective?
- Does this project address a Measurable Objective outlined in the PY2003-2007 Harris County Consolidated Plan?
- Is this project located within the Harris County service area and/or serve Harris County service area residents?
- Does this project require matching funds, and, if so, are the funds eligible and secured?
- Does the organization have prior history with Harris County entitlement funds? Are there any outstanding monitoring findings?

- Did the proposed project fall within the category of explicitly ineligible activities?

Staff evaluated each proposal based upon these criteria, made recommendations accordingly and justified these recommendations during the discussions.

Findings

While evaluating the proposals, staff used established evaluation criteria. These criteria were included in the RFP and incorporated into the evaluation worksheets. Each question on the objective review worksheets were assigned a point value. Scores were based on the following criteria:

- Priorities of the Consolidated Plan
- Completeness of proposal
- Diversity of funding base
- Availability of working capital
- Need and community impact
- Measurable goals and objectives
- Program administration and operational expenses
- Organizational capacity
- Financial capacity
- Duplication of services
- Geographic distribution of projects
- Past and current performance

If applicable:

- Construction - work descriptions, plans, schedules and cost estimates
- Relocation policy
- Marketing plans
- Other program required information (Davis-Bacon policy, Affirmative Marketing Plan, participation of a homeless or previously homeless person in policy and decision making, and Minority Outreach Plan.)

Staff evaluated and scored each proposal based upon these criteria, made recommendations accordingly and justified these recommendations in the roundtable discussions.

Selection of Projects

Following the completion of Phase II in August, Development staff developed the *Allocation Manager* and *Proposal Review Report* for presentation to the Director for review and approval. Upon his final recommendations, the proposed projects were assembled into the PY2007 AAP. The development of the AAP was managed by HCCEDD Development staff and includes all proposed projects.

The public review period for the PY2007 AAP was held from September 23-October 23, 2006, with a public hearing taking place on Thursday, October 5th. A public notice was placed in the Houston Chronicle on September 23rd and 28th, including a list of recommended projects and proposed expenditures. The general public was notified of the availability of the draft document for review at the HCCEDD office.

The Harris County PY2007 Annual Action Plan was presented to the Harris County Commissioners Court for approval on Tuesday, November 7th, 2006.

Contract Development Activities

Once the recommended projects are included in the AAP, conditionally awarded recipients begin the contract negotiation process. At that time revised budgets and statements of work are submitted and processed for contract drafting by Planning & Development and Grants Management sections.

PY2007 RFP Process Evaluation

Following the submission of the PY2007 AAP, Development staff will conduct the following activities to properly evaluate the HCCEDD RFP process and plan for the PY2008 process. Tentative evaluation tools include:

(1) Staff Evaluation - An RFP Feedback committee will be assembled to analyze the PY2007 RFP process. This committee will be comprised of professional staff from Administration, Planning & Development, Grants Management, and Finance sections. The goal of the committee is to identify positive and negative aspects of the previous process and recommend suggestions for improvement.

(2) Applicant Evaluation - Development staff will survey applicants to gain their perspective on the PY2007 RFP process. The survey will gather information on the complexity of the application(s), the time provided to complete the application(s), and the technical assistance provided throughout the RFP process.

(3) Technical Assistance Workshops - Staff will provide five workshops prior to issuing the PY2008 RFP, including CDBG General Activities, CDBG Public Service, HOME, ESG and Grant Writing. These workshops will educate prior or potential applicants on program areas and regulatory requirements. The Grant Writing workshop will provide practical tips on grant writing, which will help applicants in applying for HUD funds as well as any others that will benefit their agency. These activities will facilitate improvements to the annual RFP process and make it more efficient and accessible for the applicants.