Maryland
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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OFFICE OF STATEWIDE BROADBAND

Questions received by the Office of Statewide Broadband (OSB)

As of November 21, 2023

QUESTION: **Given that the definition of a "low-income community" is a "publicly supported housing development or housing community, as defined herein" -- is it possible for "publicly supported" housing to be eligible to receive connectivity under this program?**

ANSWER: Eligible HSPH program properties must be publicly owned. If the development/community is not publicly owned but publicly supported, they are ineligible for the round of funding.

QUESTION: **Does the program require certain activities, such as community engagement events and ACP registration assistance, as part of the grant application but the applicant must limit those activities to reflect 1% or less of the total project cost?**

ANSWER: The program requires engagement activities to ensure that properties are not just receiving the ability to have service but to be able to better afford and utilize the service as well. The 1% cap applies to all non-capital overhead administrative costs. All engagement related costs are capped at 3% of the total project cost not to exceed $15,000.

QUESTION: **How is The Office defining "Open Access Use"?**

ANSWER: For the HSPH program open access use is defined within the building specifically from the cabinet to the individual unit.

QUESTION: **Can you verify that matching funds are not capped at only having 1% of expenses on non-capital activities (this is our interpretation, but we would like confirmation from you)?**

ANSWER: Matching funds are of capital construction cost and are not reflective of that of administrative cost.

QUESTION: **Can you verify that December 22nd is the due date (and that the reference to December 15th was just an artifact of an earlier drafted due date)?**

ANSWER: Yes, applications are due on or before December 22, 2023.

QUESTION: **Eligibility Regarding the 5% Match Requirement: In the RFP, it is mentioned that a 5% match is required as part of the application process. Could you kindly clarify whether Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) that cannot commit to this 5% match requirement are ineligible to apply for the funding opportunity?**

ANSWER: Not being able to commit to the 5% match does not deem an applicant ineligible, however not reflecting a 5% match will disqualify the application from receiving funding in the current round. Other funds (local, state, federal) can be used for the match requirement.

QUESTION: ***If another organization applied on behalf of a RAD deal property that would it be considered if there was remaining funding?***

ANSWER: In the current round RAD properties not publicly owned are not eligible. Should the office have remaining funding available there may be a second round that opens up for non-profit owned affordable housing.

QUESTION: ***The grant application requests information from the ISP provider. We are in the process of working with the city who will be launching an RFP for infrastructure and ISP provider services. Do we have to answer this question or can we answer this when the RFP proposals and evaluations are completed?***

ANSWER: If you are in the process of launching an RFP you must provide the information (copy of RFP and scope of work etc.), expectations, and timeline of the proposals within your application. Once proposals and evaluations are completed then you should provide the necessary information to OSB.

QUESTION: ***Are we able to submit more than one PROPOSED ISP provider as part of the application?***

ANSWER: Yes, multiple proposed ISP's can be submitted. To strengthen the commitment of the ISP's it would be beneficial to obtain letters of intent or readiness.

QUESTION: ***The application states HS-PH project grantees are required to maintain the broadband network for a minimal period of five years after the network is installed and internet services turned on for residential use. Can such requirement be transferred to the developer/managing entity?***

ANSWER: The 5-year maintenance and operations period can be transferred to new ownership should the property switch hands, however the property must remain affordable housing. If the property becomes unoccupied the period pauses and will resume upon occupancy. If there are expectations of ownership transfer or redevelopment this should be identified in the application.

QUESTION: ***An authority is looking to connect 7-9 distinct family developments. Should each one be submitted as a separate project? Or can all developments be submitted under one application?***

ANSWER: Multiple projects can be grouped within one application or you can submit them in separate applications. It's important to remember that the minimum grant amount per application is $500,000 and the maximum per application is $9,000,000.

QUESTION: ***Please clarify whether "Engineering design services whether in-house or consultant based" are deemed ineligible or eligible.***

ANSWER: Yes, engineering design services whether in-house or consultant-based are **eligible** expenses.

QUESTION: ***Are the matching funds considered to offset the award amount? Or will it be in addition to the award amount?***

ANSWER: Matching funds are in addition to the award amount. Grant funds plus match funds equal the total project cost.

QUESTION: ***Are there currently any plans or expectations to support affordable housing units that are not publicly owned?***

ANSWER: With the current funding we are obligated to first prioritize public owned housing units which are most at need. In the case that we have additional funding after applications are reviewed, scored, and awarded we may open a second round to support non-profit owned affordable housing units.

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