

Texas Department of Agriculture Stakeholder Roundtable Sessions - Summer 2019

As part of the Consolidated Plan process (5-year plan), TDA is assessing the existing Texas CDBG program. Between June and September 2019, TDA engaged in a series of public meetings to discuss the program and solicit feedback from stakeholders. This primary purpose of the meetings was to identify areas where program changes were needed to ensure that the program was able to assist best assist rural communities, or to ensure the sustainability of the program long term.



Public Participation Opportunity	Date	Number of Attendees
Disaster Impact Task Force (appointed by Commissioner Miller)	June 20, 2019	11
Texas Rural Health and Economic Development Advisory Council	July 16, 2019	23
Roundtable – Austin	July 17, 2019	50
Roundtable – Kilgore	August 1, 2019	30
Roundtable – Austin	August 7, 2019	25
Roundtable – Austin	August 14, 2019	39
Roundtable – Laredo	August 20, 2019	15
Roundtable – Beaumont	August 21, 2019	21
Roundtable – Amarillo	August 22, 2019	21
Roundtable – El Paso	August 29, 2019	5
Roundtable – Webinar	September 5, 2019	43

TDA provided a working outline of a revised program structure for the Community Development Fund, as well as sample program designs that could be implemented for planning and disaster-related programs (see attached) to begin the discussions. In addition to the Stakeholder Feedback Sessions described above, TDA received informal or verbal feedback from numerous stakeholders and written feedback from ten individuals and organizations. Feedback included:

Community Development Fund

- Unified scoring committee:
 - Many communities prefer to retain the current Regional Review Committee structure or similar regional committee format to maintain local control of the scoring process
 - concern for loss of access to the decision-making committee
 - Suggestion for TARC to coordinate regional scoring process in lieu of unified committee
 - Stakeholders acknowledged that participation in the RRC process has been “light”
 - Support for simplified process of unified scoring committee
 - General concern regarding committee makeup:
 - Strong preference for one representative from each of the 24 COG regions
 - Elected officials and local staff – differing views which role best represents local needs
 - Concern that members represent both non-entitlement cities and non-entitlement counties
 - Familiarity with CDBG program
 - Concern regarding the selection process for members – COG nominations, public application opportunity – and the perception of fairness or legitimate representation
- Regional Project Priorities:
 - Preference for significant scoring weight for project priorities
 - Preference for not having project priorities at all – let the applicant decide what’s most important
 - Preference for committee appointed by COG executive committee to decide, especially in more urban regions
 - Concern that the unified committee could over-ride regional priorities
- Scoring criteria:
 - Specific factors recommended:
 - previous funding
 - local match
 - poverty rate, per capita income, unemployment rate
 - percent LMI beneficiaries
 - population (to benefit smaller communities)
 - Both support and concern for prioritizing projects based on formal community planning documents
 - Criteria that use tax rate structures and community dynamics are difficult to compare apples to apples
 - Support for matching funds is a scoring criterion that communities can use to score well
 - Consider reducing time period for past performance criteria to one funding cycle
- Award amounts
 - Support for including stakeholders in setting maximum grant amount – recommendations: \$300,000; \$350,000; \$500,000
 - Reconsider regional funding allocation to allow small regions the opportunity to fund multiple projects
 - Confirm the maximum grant amounts do not prohibit communities from applying for less funding (ex. less costly projects or gentlemen’s agreements)
- Other program requirements
 - Administering COGs’ role must be defined in order to avoid conflicts of interest
 - Additional COGs interested in administering grant contracts if a role in priority setting is not an option
 - Concern regarding the time required to obtain both unified committee and regional project priority information

Disaster-Impacted Areas

- Selection Process
 - Support for limiting program to non-federal disaster declarations; concern for how it would be handled if an event is later federally recognized
 - Support for First Come First Served selection process following each disaster event
 - If competitive program is used - scoring for need and impact, but not past performance criteria
 - COGs and/or Agri-Life can play a role in identifying eligible projects and resources
 - Urgent Need National Objective makes funding available to communities that cannot document the LMI National Objective
 - It is important that communities provide a small amount of matching funds (5-10%)
- Type of Projects:
 - Projects should be supported by disaster impact justification statement
 - Focus should be on essential infrastructure – water and wastewater facilities, followed by paved road reconstruction and other utilities
 - Projects should make permanent improvements, not simply restore the infrastructure to pre-disaster conditions, with emphasis on mitigation
 - Debris Removal is critical to recovery, but may not be an effective use of CDBG funds as TDEM already requires counties to have pre-procured debris removal services in place.
 - Consider Hazard Mitigation planning and projects with TDA providing 25% matching funds
 - Consider “niche” program vs. broad reach – focus funds on small events or small projects where other funds are not available
- Other Program requirements
 - Support for \$3-5 million made available for disaster-related projects;
 - Support for higher grant amounts – Recommendations: \$500,000; \$1 million for multijurisdiction projects
 - Support for low grant minimums – Recommendations: \$50,000; \$100,000
 - Consider documentation options other than FEMA/TDEM, such as project engineers; agency timelines do not align
 - Support for project timelines longer than 12 months to complete, especially drought-related projects

Planning Grants

- Support for traditional comprehensive plans, especially for smaller communities
- Support for economic development planning, either through Planning & Capacity Building Fund or the Texas Capital Fund
- Support for focused strategic plans – ex. parks planning or ED planning – that should be updated more frequently
- Support for planning grants to communities under 1,000 population, including the ability for small communities to receive full funding
- Support for updates to existing plans
- Scoring:
 - Use LMI as a scoring factor, not eligibility threshold
 - Revise elements to better support small communities
- Support for higher maximum award amounts - Recommendations: \$60,000; \$150,000

Other Programs

- Texas Capital Fund – Job Creation
 - Reconsider the quarterly vs monthly application rounds
 - Underutilized program
 - eligibility and programmatic requirements are cumbersome to communities
 - small communities not able to take advantage of EDA grants, leaving gap that TDA could fill
 - economic development projects are important, but recommend allowing EDA to focus on this and not diverting CDBG focus from basic infrastructure grants
 - Consider program for infrastructure/building rehab targeted for small businesses with less than 10 jobs
 - Consider programmatic changes
 - Environmental Review required with application but under pre-agreement stratagem
 - Preliminary application for feasibility
 - Increased flexibility for retained jobs
 - Increased flexibility to recruit new businesses
- Texas Capital Fund – Main Street & Downtown Revitalization Programs
 - Consider non-sidewalk projects
 - decrease the percent of funds required for ADA/sidewalk projects to score full points
 - water, streets, drainage, broadband, etc. are also critical to downtown revitalization
- Colonia Fund
 - Consider allowing cities to apply, other than those included in the current colonia definition
- FAST Fund
 - Support to continue FAST Fund
 - Primary need is for vehicles
 - For some departments, equipment is primary need – eliminate cap on number of pieces that can be requested
- New Program Ideas
 - Support for internet or broadband grants as separate program
 - Support for funding for program to address active shooter situations, either as disaster or other program