

Summary

The following is a summary of changes that are being proposed to the CDBG Grant Administrator program:

- Establishes end-of course assessments at the end of CDBG 201 and 301.
- Changes the CDBG 401 course a case assessment.
- Creates an Instructor Status for Grant Administrators.
- Reinstates Continuing Education hours for renewal
- Allows OCRA to approve other stakeholders to offer Continuing Education hours.
- Establishes the Code of Conduct for Grant Administrators.

CDBG Grant Administrator Program Certification Policy

Section 1

Definitions:

As used in this policy:

- 1) "HUD" is identified as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- 2) "OCRA" means the Office of Community and Rural Affairs
- 3) "CDBG" means the HUD State Small Cities Community Development Block Grant program administered through the Office of Community and Rural Affairs
- 4) "Executive Director" means the Executive Director of OCRA
- 5) "Grant Administrator" means any individual who is required by CDBG program to obtain and hold an administrator's certificate in order to administer CDBG grants
- 6) "Debarment" or "debarred" is a process by which an administrator's certificate is revoked or non-renewed.

Section 2

Policy:

The efficient and consistent administration of CDBG grants is important for the growth and vitality of economic and community development initiatives in Indiana. Well-trained grant administrators are critical to the proper functioning of CDBG grant programs, therefore OCRA establishes the following policy for certification, continuing education, and debarment of grant administrators. This policy insures the best possible stewardship of federal block grant funds used in CDBG grant programs administered by OCRA and in compliance with federal, state, and program regulations.

Section 3

Certification:

The Grant Administrator Certification curriculum consists of four (4) course levels (101, 201, 301, and 401), with each serving as a prerequisite for the next. The target audience to complete all four course levels are individual interested in obtaining certification to write and/or administer CDBG grants. CDBG

101 and 201 have an additional focus on elected/appointed local government officials, engineers, community planners and others interested in CDBG grant programs without the goal of certification. CDBG 301 and 401 are recommended only for those that seeking certification. All days each course must be attended to count as completed. If an individual does not complete the entire certification process within twenty-four (24) months, they will be required to start the certification process over.

CDBG 101 - CDBG Overview,

For all persons interested in learning about the CDBG program: This course will consist of a one-day overview of OCRA's programming and eligible projects, as well as a brief overview of relevant CDBG regulations and requirements, including important cross-cutting federal regulations and state policies.

- May be attended by City, Town or County elected officials, engineers, architects, or others who desire a basic knowledge of the CDBG program;
- Required by anyone who wants to become a certified grant administrator, as a prerequisite to additional required training;
- Completion of this course will NOT entitle the recipient to provide Grant Administration professional services.

CDBG 201 – GRANT WRITING AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

For candidates that have successfully passed the CDBG 101 training, a three-day 201 course will be offered covering all aspects of project development and grant writing. From the initial grant planning meeting with a community through to grant award.

- May be attended by City, Town or County elected officials, engineers, architects, or others; especially those involved in project development.
- Required by anyone who wants to become a certified grant administrator, as a prerequisite to additional required training;
- Candidates must pass the end-of-course assessment with a 75% or better to pass the course;
- Completion of this course will NOT entitle the recipient to provide Grant Administration professional services.

CDBG 301- GRANT ADMINISTRATION

Once the CDBG 201 course is successfully passed, candidates may attend a three-day 301 course devoted to explaining the steps necessary to administer a federally funded project. From award to closeout.

- May be attended by City, Town or County elected officials, engineers, architects, or others; primarily those that plan to pursue grant administration certification.
- Required by anyone who wants to become a certified grant administrator, as a prerequisite to additional required training;
- Candidates must pass the end-of-course assessment with a 75% or better to pass the course;
- Completion of this course will NOT entitle the recipient to provide Grant Administration professional services.

CDBG 401 – CERTIFICATION CASE ASSESSMENT

Candidates who have successfully completed CDBG 101-301 courses, the 401 Certification Case Assessment is the last step before certification. The course must be completed and passed within 2 years of beginning the certification process at CDBG 101.

This two (2) month case assessment will be offered towards the end of each calendar year. It consist of a number of assignments that test the candidates' knowledge and ability to complete the entire CDBG grant process; from grant writing to award to closeout. Candidates must pass 75% of the assignments to pass the course. The case may be attempted a maximum of two (2) times prior to being required to restart the certification process.

Passage of 101, 201, 301, and of the 401 certification case assessment, and acceptance of the Grant Administrator Code of Conduct certifies the candidate to provide grant writing and administration services on all CDBG grants program. New Grant Administrator certifications will be issued on December 31th of the year the CDBG 401 course is passed and be valid for two (2) full calendar years.

GRANT ADMINISTRATOR INSTRUCTOR STATUS

A Grant Administrator may apply for Instructor status after five (5) years as a certified Grant Administrator with active involvement in CDBG grant writing and/or administration and:

- Must have obtained timely close out on all CDBG grant projects administered, with no findings or findings resolved within a reasonable length of time.
- Must have no violations of the Grant Administrator Code of Conduct.
- Must have the support of communities, other Grant Administrators, etc.

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and reviewed monthly. To apply for Instructor status the Grant Administrator must submit the following to the CDBG Program Director:

- Application for Instructor Status;
- List of all CDBG grants the Grant Administrator administered or was involved in within the previous five (5) years; and
- Letters of Recommendation from communities, other Grant Administrators, etc.

Once all application materials are received the CDBG Program Director will chair a committee of three (3) OCRA staff member to review the application and approve or deny Instructor status.

Once approved, Instructor status allows a Grant Administrator to offer trainings to other Grant Administrators that count towards continuing education hours required for certification renewal. Note that each training that is offered must still be reviewed and approved by the CDBG Program Director to count for continuing education hours.

To maintain Instructor status, the Grant Administrator must attend the annual Grant Administrator Instructor meeting and offer at least one (1) training in the past two (2) calendar years.

Section 4

Recertification:

Recertification will be required if a Grant Administrator does not comply with all continuing education requirements. In such cases the Grant Administrator will be suspended from working on any CDBG projects and will be required to begin the entire certification process over again, beginning with the CDBG 101 course.

Section 5

Renewal and Continuing Education (CE):

Six (6) hours of continuing education (CE) are required every calendar year to renew the Grant Administrator certification. Two (2) of the six (6) hours must be from an official OCRA GA Update. A Grant Administrator that completed the required Continuing Education will be eligible to renew their certification. Renewals will be issued on December 31st the year the certification expires and be valid for two (2) full calendar years.

The CDBG Program Director, other OCRA staff, OCRA partner organizations, and Instructor status Grant Administrators will present at or offer continuing education training offerings each year. A list of approved trainings will be posted on a rolling basis on the OCRA website. The CDBG Program Director must approve any continuing education trainings in order for them to count toward this requirement. As part of the approval process, the CDBG Program Director will determine the number of Continuing Education hours a Grant Administrator can earn at each training.

Section 6

Administrator in Good Standing:

It is of utmost importance to OCRA, that Grant Administrators maintain the highest level of proficiency possible when serving Indiana Cities, Towns and Counties. To avoid probation or debarment, Certified Grant Administrators should make every effort to remain in good standing. An administrator is considered in good standing by having none or very few "Findings of Program Deficiency" on the grant projects administered, having no formal complaints from Grantees reported to OCRA for failure to perform, and having no violations of the Grant Administrator Code of Conduct.

Section 7

Monitoring and Administration Deficiencies:

OCRA is required to insure compliance with federal guidelines for all grants awarded through the agency. Any failures to meet the CDBG federal guidelines are noted as "Findings of Program Deficiency" when HUD conducts an annual monitoring of OCRA. Such "Findings" reflect adversely on the state CDBG program and may jeopardize allocation of CDBG funds to Indiana in the future.

In order to insure that Grantees perform the administration of federally assisted projects in accordance with the appropriate guidelines, OCRA requires Grantees to engage a certified Grant Administrator, who has completed required training and continuing education. Such administrators will be designated as the Grant Administrator of Record and will be responsible for the administration of the project from start to finish unless written notification from the Chief Elected Official of the Grantee that the Grant Administrator of Record has been changed. At project closeout, the Grantee's performance is monitored and failures to meet the federal, state or program regulation of the CDBG program are noted as "Findings".

As the Grant Administrator of Record is responsible for advising and consulting the Grantee throughout the grant process, "Findings" that occur due to lack of administration oversight reflect on the Grant Administrator. Such "Findings" will be recorded in the Grant Administrator's record when issued and deleted from the Administrator's record five (5) years later.

Excessive "Findings" may serve as justifiable cause for probation or debarment of the Grant Administrator of Record. Excessive "Findings" will be determined based upon the number of projects administered vs. the number of "Findings" issued during the twelve-month rolling period. More severe deficiencies may

prompt corrective action regardless of the number of “Findings” issued during the twelve-month period. Grant Administrators will be advised of any “Findings” accrued to them by OCRA.

Anytime a Grant Administrator abandons a project without completing the contract agreement will result in an automatic probation of that Grant Administrator.

Findings of Program Deficiency

All requirements for the administration of a federally assisted project through the CDBG program are available on OCRA’s website. “Findings” will be issued when any regulatory requirement is not found to be in compliance. The CDBG Monitoring Manual is also available on OCRA’s website and should be referred to when the Grant Administrator of Record is preparing documents for project monitoring.

Section 8

Leaving the Certification Program, either by Choice, Failure, or by Debarment:

Should a Grant Administrator leave the certification program and be that Grant Administrator of Record for project that is not complete, the contract with the current administrator must be terminated and the services of a another certified administrator obtained. If a grantee plans to terminate any contract due to loss of an administrative certification, the project will be subject to an interim monitoring by the state staff. The interim monitoring will include a review of activities to date will include the resolution of all monitoring findings made during the time that administrator was under contract. An organization under contract with a grantee may not be subject to this requirement if the project can be assigned to another certified administrator on staff at the time of loss of the certification by the first individual.

Section 9

Administrative Probation:

The Executive Director, in consultation with the CDBG Program Director, may place a certified administrator on administrative probationary status for a period of up to one year if the certified administrator has accumulated excessive violations listed in Sections 7 and 8. OCRA staff shall document reasons for the probationary status. Probationary notification will be made by certified mail and shall be effective from date of receipt of such certified mail. No appeal of probationary status shall be allowed. During the probationary period, OCRA will dictate which the continuing education that must be taken by the Grant Administrator and any restrictions from working on CDBG grants. After the probationary period, the Grant Administrator may be fully reinstated if there are no further documented violations within that period. If other violations are documented, the probationary period ends and the debarment process will proceed. The Grant Administrator will be allowed to participate in Continuing Education classes to maintain their certification during the probationary period.

Section 10

Causes for Debarment:

A Grant Administrator may be debarred if any of the following have occurred within a reasonable period of time before institution of debarment proceedings:

- (1) Serious or repetitive violation of any federal or state law or program regulation or instruction.
- (2) Serious or repetitive failure to perform contractual obligations or carry out representations or warranties to OCRA or to any grantee under any program administered by OCRA.

- (3) Acts of misconduct indicating a lack of business integrity directly affecting responsibility to participate in OCRA programs, including but not limited to, the following: (A) False representation; (B) Embezzlement; (C) Theft; (D) Forgery; (E) Fraud; (F) Negligent service; (G) Bribery; (H) Falsification of record; (I) Receiving stolen property.
- (4) Serious or repetitive violations of any nondiscrimination or equal opportunity requirements in connection with any program.
- (5) Debarment from any agency of the federal government or of any state government.

(Office of Community and Rural Affairs; 17 IAC 1-2-1)

Section 11

Procedure for Debarment:

Initial Determination:

The initial determination by OCRA, entitled Notice of Recommended Debarment, shall be mailed to the grant administrator against whom debarment is recommended, in writing and signed by the Executive Director, or his or her designee, and shall include the following:

- (1) A statement indicating that as a result of an investigation made by OCRA, debarment is recommended and would consist of exclusion from participation in all Office programs.
- (2) One (1) or more of the grounds stated in 17 IAC 1-2-1.
- (3) A short, plain statement of the reasons for the recommended debarment.
- (4) A statement that the person has the right to file a written objection within fifteen (15) days with the Executive Director, and, if no written objection is timely filed, the determination of debarment shall be made.

(Office of Community and Rural Affairs; 17 IAC 1-3-1)

Prehearing Conference:

Any Grant Administrator who has received an initial determination recommending debarment is entitled to a prehearing conference to discuss all charges, provided that the conference is requested in the objection filed under this title.

The prehearing conference shall be an informal proceeding, scheduled by and involving the Executive Director, or his or her designee.

If, after the prehearing conference, the initial determination is settled or adjusted, a written synopsis shall be prepared by OCRA and submitted to the person for approval. The person's failure to file a response to the synopsis within fifteen (15) days after the date of mailing will be deemed approval by the person.

If any person, after being duly notified, fails to appear at a prehearing conference, that person shall be deemed to have waived his or her request for a prehearing conference.

(Office of Community and Rural Affairs; 17 IAC 1-3-2)

Hearing Recommendations:

A hearing officer, appointed by the Executive Director, shall conduct the debarment hearing.

Upon conclusion of the hearing, the hearing officer shall issue recommendations to the Executive Director as to the determination of debarment, which shall not exceed three (3) years.

Any interested and affected person may file with the office his or her objections to the entry of such determination in writing within fifteen (15) days thereafter.

(Office of Community and Rural Affairs; 17 IAC 1-3-3)

Final Order:

The Executive Director, or his or her designee, shall issue a final order under IC 4-21.5.

(Office of Community and Rural Affairs; 17 IAC 1-3-4)

Judicial Review:

For any procedure not specifically provided in this article, the provisions of the Administrative Orders and Procedure Act (IC 4-21.5) shall be followed. Any person aggrieved by the final order or determination made by OCRA shall be entitled to judicial review thereof in accordance with said provisions.

(Office of Community and Rural Affairs; 17 IAC 1-3-5)

Section 12
Code of Conduct

As Grant Administrators are considered professionals that have an impact on communities and citizens in their role of advisors and consultants, OCRA has established the following Code of Conduct for all certified Grant Administrators.

Certified Grant Administrators conduct themselves as professionals by:

1. Following all federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidance in the course of administering grants;
2. Avoiding any conflicts of interest, and disclose any conflicts of interest when they exist;
3. Holding the interests of the community above their own interests;
4. Advising communities openly and honestly;
5. Interacting in a professional manner with community members, OCRA staff, and other stakeholders at all times;
6. Fostering new and innovative ideas by sharing best practices and other resources; and
7. Holding other Grant Administrator accountable to the Code of Conduct.

Effective Date

This policy is effective as of March 1, 2018 and will remain in effect until amended, superseded, or rescinded.