

Community First.



Office of
COMMUNITY &
RURAL AFFAIRS

Community Always.

Planning 2026 Cycle 1 *Application Instructions*

Available Plan Types:

Broadband Readiness Plan
Comprehensive Plan
COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan
Downtown Revitalization Plan
Economic Development Plan
Environmental Assessment Plan
Feasibility Study Plan
Historic Preservation Plan
Utility Study Plans



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Office of
COMMUNITY &
RURAL AFFAIRS

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Key Dates & Updates

2026 Cycle 1

Important Dates

- Intent to Apply
 - February 13, 2026
- Pre-Approval
 - February 13, 2026
- Application Deadline
 - March 1, 2026
- Award Announcement
 - April 2026

Important Updates

- Policy Changes
 - CDBG Policy Notice 2025-005 In-Kind Contribution Policy
 - CDBG Policy Notice 2025-006 Housing Projects Programmatic Policy
 - CDBG Policy Notice 2025-007 Equal Participation Policy

Updated Documentation

- Program Specific Points
 - updated Form PL-001 CDBG Planning Program Specific Points Form
- In Kind Match Requests
 - <New>LS-001 In Kind Contribution Request Form
- Bonus Points-Disaster Designation
 - <New>DBP Form-001-Disaster Designation Bonus Points Form
 - updated MSR 2025-003 Disaster Designation Bonus Points Step by Step Guide
- Bonus Points-Resilience
 - updated MSR 2025-002 Resilience Bonus Points Form

OCRA CDBG Mission Statement

Indiana's state-administered Community Development Block Grant program fosters growth and resilience in rural cities and towns by investing in local initiatives that encourage communities to build, strengthen and thrive.

Introduction

This guidance has been developed specifically for OCRA-certified Grant Administrators to support the preparation and submission of a comprehensive and compliant CDBG application. Given the limited availability of funds and the high volume of submissions received for each grant cycle, Grant Administrators should understand that this program is highly competitive, and the quality of the application is taken into consideration. OCRA values the significant time, effort, and resources required to develop a full application and acknowledges the complexity of the process.

By following these instructions and using the provided tools and recommendations, Grant Administrators will be better prepared to clearly demonstrate the needs of applying communities and ensure each application meets all criteria required for a high-quality submission.

PART 1: BEFORE YOU APPLY

The Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) seeks applications from local units of government for programs funded through the State Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Eligible local units of government are counties, cities, or incorporated towns not located within an entitlement community. Unincorporated areas must apply through the county in which they are located.

A. Program Description

The goal of the State CDBG program is to encourage communities with eligible populations to focus on long-term community development. Competitive projects must demonstrate the following:

- They meet a National Objective of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended
- The project addresses the long-term planning and development efforts of the community
- The funds granted will have a significant impact on the overall project
- The community has demonstrated a strong commitment to the project and its sustainability

B. Selection Criteria

General Selection Criteria

The Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) will assess applications and the proposed CDBG projects based on the general selection criteria outlined below. All submissions will be evaluated for threshold criteria, ensuring each submission demonstrates a sufficient level of readiness to proceed upon grant approval and will be completed within 12 months after grant award. Applications with significant deficiencies may be excluded from the scoring process.

1. The applicant must be a legally recognized non-entitlement local unit of government.
2. The applicant must have the legal capacity to implement the proposed project.
3. If the applicant partners with a non-profit to conduct eligible project activities, that organization must be able to provide documentation of its non-profit status from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, the Indiana Department of Revenue, and the Indiana Secretary of State.
4. At the time of the application submission, the applicant must not have any overdue documents or outstanding semi-annual reports, closeout reports, State Board of Accounts audit findings, or

unresolved monitoring issues from OCRA/IHCDA. The determination of what constitutes “overdue” is entirely at the discretion of the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs.

- a. Applicants must verify their overdue status in the [CDBG Project Timeliness Report](#) on the CDBG webpage, which is updated monthly.
5. The applicant must clearly demonstrate how the proposed project will fulfill one of the three national CDBG objectives and meet the criteria outlined in 24 CFR 570.483.
6. The applicant must show that the proposed project is an eligible activity under Title 1 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974.
7. The applicant may only submit one application per round per program. Counties may submit either for their own project or an “on-behalf-of” application for projects of other eligible applicants within the county. However, no application will be invited from an applicant where the purpose is clearly to circumvent the “one application per round” requirement for other eligible applicants.
 - a. Applicants are responsible for verifying the number of applications submitted.
8. At the time of application submission, an applicant must not have more than three (3) open CDBG grants or pending awards (for cities and incorporated towns) or four (4) open CDBG grants or pending awards (for counties).
 - a. For those applicants who have open Planning grants, the community must have the final plan approved by the Office of Community and Rural Affairs prior to submission of MSRP, SIP, WDW, PFP, or BCP application for the project.
 - b. For applicants with an open Preserving, Stellar or any other capacity building program as stipulated by OCRA, must have closed out the grant successfully before the deadline set by OCRA for receiving funding applications.
 - c. For applicants with an open MSRP, WDW, PFP, SIP, or BCP, a “Notice of Release of Funds and Authorization to Incur Costs” must have been issued for the construction activities under the open MSRP, WDW, PFP, SIP or BCP contract, and a contract for construction of the principal (largest funding amount) construction line item (activity) must have been executed prior to the deadline established by OCRA for receipt of applications for funding.
9. An applicant must not have any unresolved complaints filed against the applying party with the [Indiana Civil Rights Commission](#) or any other local human relations commission with jurisdiction (collectively “Commissions”).
10. The cost per beneficiary ratio for all CDBG funds will be maintained at \$5,000.
11. Leveraging based on program must be proposed. OCRA may rule on the suitability and eligibility of such leveraging.
12. The application must be completed and submitted by the announced deadline; no exceptions apply.

Readiness to Proceed Criteria

1. The applicant must have an active SAM registration by the application deadline.
2. An applicant’s certified grant administrator must send an “Intent to Apply” notification within two weeks of application opening. This notification should be emailed to the regional Community Liaison and also copied to the CDBG mailbox at cdbg@ocra.in.gov This notification must be specific to the cycle in which the community is seeking funding in order for the application to be considered.
3. All CDBG submissions must be made through Indiana’s Grants Management System (GMS) by an OCRA certified Grant Administrator with active certification.
4. The applicant or an authorized third party must provide the required 8% local match using local, state, non-HUD federal funds, or in-kind contributions. The local match is calculated on the total

project cost, not on the grant amount requested. Minimum local match requirements vary by program, see [section E](#) of these instructions.

- a. To request an in-kind match, please submit your request by the pre-approval deadline via email at cdbg@ocra.in.gov.
- b. All in-kind contribution requests must include all pertinent information be submitted using [LS-001: In-Kind Contribution Request Form](#) in accordance with [CDBG Policy Notice 2025-005](#).

Resource: [Current Grant Administrators List](#).

5. The applicant must first encumber or expend all CDBG program income receipts before applying for additional grant funds from OCRA. OCRA may approve using CDBG program income toward the local match requirement.
 - a. To obtain approval, applicants must email cdbg@ocra.in.gov. The use of CDBG program income must be in compliance with [CDBG Policy Notice 2024-004](#).
6. In accordance with [OCRA's QBS Planning Procurement Policy](#), procurement of professional services for the planning study must be completed before submitting the planning grant application. Please be advised that the procurement process can take up to 45 days.
 - a. All documentation related to this process must be included with the application.
 - b. Procurements will remain valid for 12 months from the completion date. After 12 months, the procurement will be considered expired and must be conducted again to reapply for CDBG funding.

C. Eligible & Ineligible Activities

Eligible Activities

The following CDBG program activities are eligible for funding through the Planning Program. This list is not meant to include or to exclude any particular project.

Eligible planning activities consist of all costs associated with data gathering, study, analysis, and preparation of plans and the identification of actions to implement such plans.

| Planning Type | Purpose / What the plan is used for |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Comprehensive Plan | A community-driven planning process that assesses assets and sets coordinated strategies for land use, services, economy, housing, infrastructure, environment, broadband, and historic resources. |
| Broadband Readiness Plan | Assesses broadband infrastructure needs and develops a roadmap to expand high-speed internet access at the municipal or regional level. |
| COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan | Identifies strategies to recover and bolster the local economy in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. |
| Downtown Revitalization Plan | Assess current conditions, establish a vision, and prioritize actionable projects and strategies to revitalize the downtown economy, public spaces, buildings, infrastructure, and community engagement |
| Economic Development Plan | Assesses local economic conditions, set a vision with measurable goals, and deliver a prioritized action plan including strategies to attract, retain, and grow businesses, workforce, and community infrastructure |
| Environmental Assessment Plan | Evaluates potential environmental impacts of proposed projects and identifies measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects on air and water quality, biodiversity, land use, and community well-being. |

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Feasibility Study Plan | Feasibility studies evaluate existing conditions, identify needs and a future vision for public facilities (e.g., fire stations, libraries, community centers), and assess viability, costs, benefits, and risks to guide implementation. |
| Historic Preservation Plan | A Historic Preservation Plan identifies and documents historic resources, sets a preservation vision, and prioritizes compliance driven rehabilitation, funding, and maintenance actions. |
| Single Utility Study | A single utility study evaluates the condition, needs, alternatives, costs, and implementation steps for one utility system to determine the most viable, fundable solutions and guide immediate planning and investment decisions. |
| Two Utility Study | A Two Utility Study examines two water systems (typically drinking water plus wastewater or stormwater) together to identify conditions, needs, and service gaps and sustainability measures; and deliver prioritized, fundable action steps to operationalize and finance the recommended improvements. |
| Master or Three Utility Study | A Master Utility Study provides an integrated assessment of all community-controlled water systems (drinking water, wastewater, stormwater), identifies needs and service gaps, evaluates coordinated alternatives with lifecycle and environmental analyses, and delivers prioritized designs, cost estimates, operating budgets, permitting and financing options, and a implementation plan. |

Resource: For questions regarding specific eligible planning types, consult your [Community Liaison](#)

Note: The point reduction policy will apply to communities requesting additional funding for utility systems that were not previously studied under a recent utility planning award. We encourage communities not to apply for each utility system separately. A community can choose to address all utility systems—Wastewater, Stormwater, and Drinking Water—concurrently in a master utility plan or conduct a two-utility plan study depending on the utilities that are controlled by or of interest to/by the community. If an applicant is applying for a grant to fund a plan that they have already completed within the last five years, a letter of justification explaining why the plan needs to be redone must be included with the application.

D. Demonstrating Compliance with the Federal National Objective

To ensure alignment with the statutory requirements of Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended, all federally funded CDBG activities must demonstrate and fulfill one National Objective.

The National Objective Planning grants must are outlined in the chart below for each of the planning types.

| National Objective | Plan Type |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Benefit to Low- and Moderate-Income Persons – Area Basis | Comprehensive Plan |
| | Broadband Readiness Plan |
| | COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan |

| | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Benefit to Low- and Moderate-Income Persons – Area Basis | Economic Development Plan |
| | Environmental Assessment Plan |
| | Feasibility Study Plan |
| | Historic Preservation Plan |
| | All Utility Study Plans |
| Prevention or Elimination of Slums or Blight-Area Basis | Downtown Revitalization Plan |

Note: Downtown Revitalization Plans are only available for applicants with an active Indiana Main Street (IAMS) designation or a Nationally Accredited Main Street (NAMS)

Resource: For more information on each plan type, refer to the [CDBG Planning Grants](#) webpage.

Demonstrating a National Objective

Applicants must clearly establish that their proposed activity satisfies the designated National Objective as outlined above by providing all the required documentation and answering all relevant questions for that National Objective in Section 3 of the application in GMS.

Benefit to Low- and Moderate-Income Persons – Area Basis

1. What are the boundaries of the service area?
2. How do the boundaries correspond to the project's intended beneficiaries?
3. Using HUD Census data or an OCRA approved [income survey](#), what percentage of persons in the service area are of low-to-moderate income?
4. How were the income characteristics of the target population determined?
5. Is the proposed facility available to all service area residents?

Prevention or Elimination of Slums or Blight – Area Basis

1. What are the boundaries of the area?
2. What are the conditions that cause the area to be considered blighted?
3. What percentage of buildings in the area are deteriorated? How are they deteriorated?
4. What are the public facilities in the area that are deteriorated? Describe this deterioration.
5. How will the proposed project remedy one or more of the blighted conditions described above?
6. The following documentation must be attached to a slum and blight, area basis application:
 - o **Municipal Resolution:** A resolution adopted by the governing body prior to the application deadline
 - i. Clearly define the boundaries of the area exhibiting blighted conditions
 - ii. Officially designate the area as blighted or in need of redevelopment in accordance with **IC 36-7-1-3** and **IC 36-7-14**.
 - iii. Resolutions related to slum and blight designations must be no more than ten (10) years old, in accordance with **24 CFR 570.483(c)(1)(iv)**.
 - o Provide photographic documentation of the slum or blighted conditions that prompted the municipal resolution.
 - o Provide a street-level detailed map of the area showing the location of project activities.

- The approved Mainstreet district map must be provided.

E. Amount of Grant Request and Local Match

OCRA established a maximum grant award for each Planning type as outlined below.

| Plan Type | | Maximum Grant Award |
|---|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Utility Studies | One Utility Study | \$30,000 |
| | Two Utility Study | \$60,000 |
| | Master or Three Utility Study | \$90,000 |
| Comprehensive Plans | Population over 10,000 | \$60,000 |
| | Population under 10,000 | \$50,000 |
| Broadband Readiness Plans Single Community | Community | \$50,000 |
| | Region | \$70,000 |
| Downtown Revitalization Plans | Population over 2,000 | \$40,000 |
| | Population under 2,000 | \$30,000 |
| Economic Recovery Plan | | \$50,000 |
| Economic Development Plan | | \$40,000 |
| Historic Preservation Plan | | \$20,000 |
| Environmental Assessments | | \$20,000 |
| Feasibility Study Plan | | \$20,000 |

The maximum award is not intended to serve as a target figure for requests for grant assistance. OCRA will review the level of grant assistance requested and consider the project's scope, level of demonstrated need, and the financial resources of the applicant. If OCRA determines that a lesser amount is appropriate, it may be necessary to revise the application before it is considered for funding.

Local Match: 8% total project cost

To participate in the Planning grant program, communities must commit at least eight percent (8%) of the **total project cost** to matching funds toward the grant.

Note: No rounding will occur when calculating local match percentage.

Example: an applicant applying to fund a project that costs \$90,000 must commit at least \$7,200 (8%) of the project cost. The grant request would then be \$82,800.

Non-Example: an applicant is applying to fund a project that costs \$80,000 and has committed \$6,200 (7.75%) toward local match. The applicant is NOT eligible to proceed until local match is at least \$6,400 (8%).

F. Grant Administration Procurement & Fees

Grant Administrators must be selected in compliance with all relevant federal, state or local procurement laws. CDBG program requires professional services to be procured using the Request for Proposals (RFP) method if being paid with CDBG funds. CDBG funds may be used to pay for the professional service fees of grant administrators. Grant Administrators may charge the following:

| Type of Service | CDBG Maximum Amount |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Administrative Services | Up to \$7,000 |

If CDBG funds are used to pay for grant administration services, applicants must procure an OCRA Certified Grant Administrator to assist with both the submission and administration of the CDBG application in accordance with federal regulations. This procurement must be completed prior to the grant award. Be advised that:

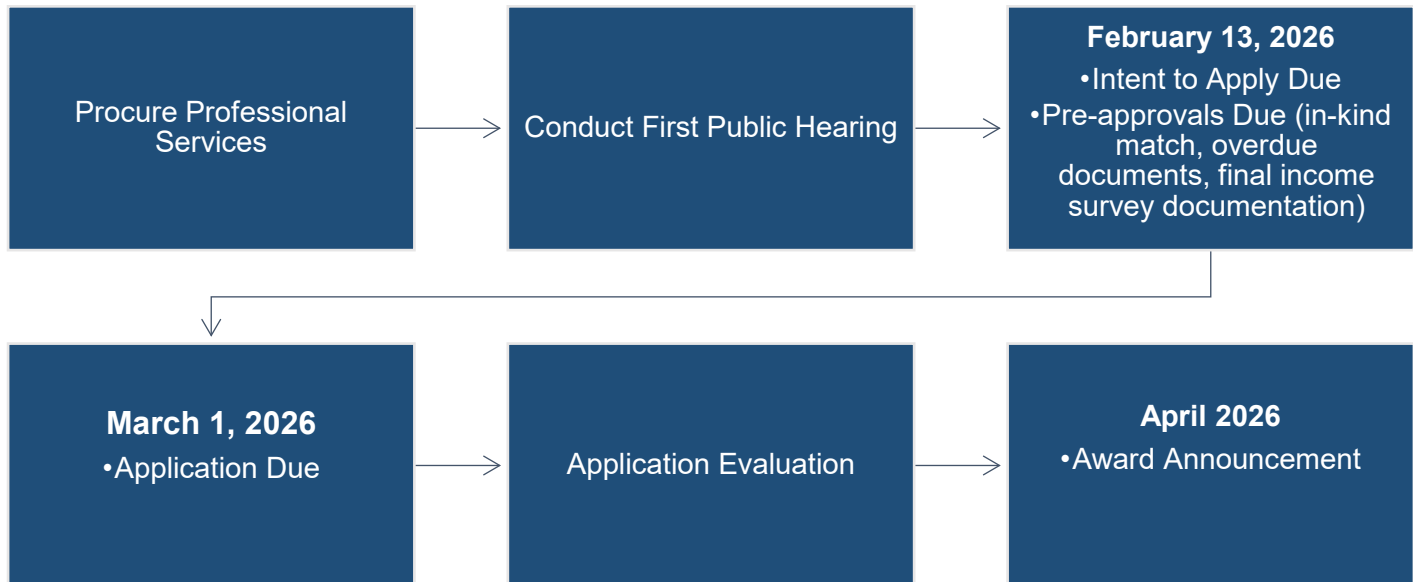
- a. All documentation related to this process must be included with the application.
- b. Procurements will remain valid for 12 months from the completion date. After 12 months, the procurement will be considered expired and must be conducted again to reapply for CDBG funding.

If local funds are used to pay for grant administration services, applicants must procure an OCRA Certified Grant Administrator to assist with both the submission and administration of the CDBG application in accordance with local procurement regulations

NOTE: Private firms or non-governmental entities that perform project development and administration activities for CDBG-assisted projects (project development, environmental review, grant application preparation, procurement assistance, grant administration) will NOT be allowed to perform architectural, engineering, planning, or other related services/activities for grantees or their non-profit sub-recipients on those projects.

PART 2: WHEN YOU APPLY

A. Timeline



B. One Stage Application Process

General Considerations:

1. Submission of an application requires detailed supporting materials and documentation. As such, materials and documents must be referenced in narratives using the file name and page number. For example, (Filename-00).
 - a. Do not include attachments that are not discussed and referenced in the narratives unless required by federal or state policy.
2. The application must be submitted via the Indiana Electronic Grants Management System (GMS) by a Certified Grant Administrator.
3. Applicants are strongly encouraged to take advantage of the technical assistance available from their Community Liaison to submit a competitive application.

Resource: [Indiana Electronic Grants Management System](#).

Application Process:

1. **Procure Professional Services** In accordance with [OCRA's QBS Planning Procurement Policy](#), procurement of professional services for the planning study must be completed before submitting the planning grant application. All documentation related to this process must be included with the application.
 - Procurements will remain valid for 12 months from the completion date. After 12 months, the procurement will be considered expired and must be conducted again to reapply for CDBG funding.
 - Please be advised that the procurement process can take up to 45 days.

Resource: For technical assistance consult your [Community Liaison](#) .

2. **Conduct the First Public Hearing:** A public hearing is required to collect community input on the proposed project. Public hearing notice must be posted at least 10 days prior to the hearing date. All public hearings must be accessible to people with disabilities. Public hearings should also be made convenient to the low- and moderate-income residents who will benefit from the project.
3. **Intent to Apply & Pre-approval** Intent to optional in-kind match, and any overdue documents **must be submitted by 11:59 PM ET on Friday, February 13, 2026.**
- **Intent to Apply** must be sent by the certified grant administrator helping a community prepare an application. The “Intent to Apply” notification must be submitted via email to the regional Community Liaison and to cdbg@ocra.in.gov by the pre-approval deadline.
 - i. This notification must be specific to the cycle in which the community is seeking funding for the application to be considered.
 - **Pre-approvals** may be submitted for in-kind match and overdue documentation.
 - i. Applicants requesting to use in-kind contribution as local match must submit the request in accordance with [CDBG Policy Notice 2025-005 In-Kind Contribution Policy](#).
 - ii. Applicants must submit any overdue documents that could render a community ineligible to submit a grant application by the pre-approval deadline.
 - iii. If using an income survey, all income survey documentation must be submitted for final approval in GMS by the pre-approval deadline. OCRA has 10 full days from the date received to complete its review. See [CDBG Policy Notice 2025-002: Income Survey Policy](#).
4. **Submit the Application: Complete and submit the final application by 11:59 PM ET on Sunday, March 1, 2026**, using Part 3 of these instructions. GMS technical assistance is not available after 3:00pm ET on February 27th. Failure to comply with submission requirements could render an application ineligible.

Applicants **MUST** include the following forms with their application: [CDBG Legal Section](#), [CDBG Signature Page](#), and [Duplication of Benefits Disclosure](#) (only applicable if local match is allocated from the American Rescue Plan Act).

5. **Submit Optional Program Specific Points and Bonus Points:** Complete the appropriate program specific points form and submit required bonus points documentation in GMS by the application deadline, **Sunday March 1, 2026 by 11:59 PM ET** to be considered for these additional points.

Bonus Points

- Applicants can earn up to 25 points for the submission of a community resilience vision plan, and their corresponding point awarded value from the Community Resilience improvement plan Index as provided by Stats Indiana.
- Communities designated as a Presidential Disaster area within the last three years from cycle opening and have been approved for individual assistance and public assistance categories A-G, are eligible to receive an additional 15 points.

All submissions must follow the Resilience Bonus Points Minimum Standard Requirements and use Disaster Designation Bonus Points Form (if applicable) found on the [CDBG Resources](#) page.

Program Specific Points

- Applicants can earn up to 50 additional points for submitting program specific points form [PL-001- Planning Program Specific Points](#)
- Each program specific points form must be unique to the cycle and tailored to the individual community applying. Previous submissions must be updated with accurate dates and current information to be considered for these points.
- All supplementary documents pertaining to the program-specific form must be attached to the completed forms and submitted as a single uploaded file in GMS.
 - i. The file must be titled “*PL Program Specific Form*”.

- ii. Additional files submitted as separate attachments in GMS will not be considered.

PART 3: SUBMITTING AN APPLICATION IN THE GRANT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

General Instructions

1. Go to the [Grant Management System](#)
2. Select the program to which you are applying.
3. Ensure all Federal I.D./EIN, SAMS UEI, CAGE, and DUNS are correct and up to date for the local unit of government.
4. Fill out the application using the [Grant Evaluation](#) and [Project Design Factors](#) in [Part 4](#) of these instructions as your guide.
5. Ensure all questions are answered and all relevant documents are attached.
6. Utilized the [GMS FAQs for submitting an application guidance](#) for any other questions related to the GMS application
7. Submit the appropriate document by the due date.

Resource: For additional questions about the Indiana Electronic Grants Management System (GMS) contact the GMS administrator at lggmsadmins@office365groups.in.gov.

PART 4: APPLICATION EVALUATION METRICS

A. GRANT EVALUATION CRITERIA

There are 700 in total points available for this application. To be eligible for award, applications must attain a minimum score of 450 out of 700 possible points. Applications that complete the Bonus Point section can receive up to an additional 40 points towards their application total. If the point reduction policy applies, 50 points will be deducted out of the total score achieved.

The scoring framework includes:

| Base Scoring Framework | Maximum Points |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| National Objective Score | 100 points |
| Community Distress factors | 175 points |
| Local Match Contribution | 75 points |
| Project Design Factors | 300 points |
| Program Specific Points | 50 points |
| TOTAL | 700 Points |
| Additional Scoring Factors | |
| Bonus Opportunity | +40 points |
| Point Reduction | - 50 points |

NATIONAL OBJECTIVE (100 Points)

Proposed projects submitted for funding must meet one of the two National Objectives. Depending on the National Objective to be met by the project, one of the following mechanisms will

be used to calculate the score for this category.

1. **National Objective = Benefit to Low- and Moderate-Income Persons:** 100 points maximum awarded according to the percentage of low- and moderate-income individuals to be served by the project. The total points given are computed as follows:

$$\text{National Objective Score} = \% \text{ Low/Mod Beneficiaries} \times 1$$

2. **National Objective = Prevention or Elimination of Slums or Blight:** 100 points maximum awarded based on the characteristics listed below. The total points given are computed as follows:

For Historical Preservation: National Objective Score = (Total of the points received in each category below)

- Applicant has a Slum/Blight Resolution for the project area that is no more than 10 years old. (50 pts.)
- The building is a historical building (10 pts.)
- The project site is a brownfield* (10 pts.)
- The building or district is listed on or is eligible for listing on the Indiana or National Register of Historic Places (10 pts.)
- The building is on the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana's "10 Most Endangered List" (20 pts.)

**The State of Indiana defines a brownfield as an industrial or commercial property that is abandoned, inactive, or underutilized, on which expansion or redevelopment is complicated due to actual or perceived environmental contamination. Points are awarded for sites listed on the IFA Brownfield registry which indicates prior involvement of the Indiana Brownfield Program or a letter is provided from the IFA Brownfield program that states the site is a brownfield.*

***Project may either be listed on or eligible for listing on the Indiana or National Register of Historic Places. Both cannot be checked.*

COMMUNITY DISTRESS FACTORS (175 POINTS)

Various factors are used to determine the distress of a community. OCRA has partnered with Stats Indiana, an Indiana University entity, to analyze and calculate the distress of Indiana's small cities, towns, counties, and townships. Factors used to calculate the [Community Distress points](#) used for CDBG scoring include:

- Poverty Rate
- Median Household Income
- Unemployment Rate
- Non-seasonal Housing Vacancy Rate
- Housing Cost Burden
- Population Change (10-year % Change)

Local government scores, which are updated and published annually, can be found at: <https://www.stats.indiana.edu/cdbg/distressgrid.asp>.

LOCAL MATCH CONTRIBUTION (75 POINTS)

A maximum of 75 points based on the percentage of local funds devoted to the project. This total is determined as follows:

Total Match Points = % Eligible Local Match X 1

The points total is capped at 75 points or 75% match, i.e., a project with 75% match or greater will receive 75 points. Below 75% match, the formula calculation will apply.

Eligible local match can be local cash, debt or in-kind sources. Federal, state, and local government grants are considered eligible match. In-kind sources may provide eligible local match for the project, but the amount that can be counted as local match is limited to 5% of the total project budget or a maximum of \$25,000. Use of in-kind donations as eligible match requires approval from the CDBG Program Staff by the deadline. Date of deadline will be announced each round.

PROJECT DESIGN FACTORS (300 POINTS)

A maximum of 300 points awarded according to the evaluation in three areas:

Project Description – Is the project clearly defined as to determine eligibility? – 50 points

Project Need - Is the community need for this project documented and compelling? – 125 points

Financial Impact - Why is grant assistance necessary to complete this project? – 125 points

The points in these categories are awarded by the OCRA Scoring Committee when evaluating the projects. Scoring questions for these categories are defined for each round and are provided to applicants that submit a proposal at the site visit. The questions are subject to change each round. Applicants should refer to the application instruction, scoring guide and other resources to address all questions present. Applicants are encouraged to work with their OCRA Community Liaison to identify ways to increase their project's competitiveness in these areas and of the application.

PROGRAM SPECIFIC POINTS (50 POINTS)

1) Supplemental Input and Community Engagement – A maximum of 25 points will be awarded to communities that exceed the basic requirements of submitting letters of support, surveys, and holding two public hearings to document public engagement and input. These additional points recognize those that demonstrate meaningful public engagement and collaboration, indicating they took additional steps to solicit feedback from the community. This can involve activities such as community workshops, promotion, meetings with key stakeholders, citizens participation in committees and other methods to ensure broad participation towards the community's application process.

- 0 points- no additional engagement methods
- 10 points- 1 to 2 additional engagement methods
- 25 points- 3 or more additional engagement methods

2) Connection to Previous Planning Efforts and Implementation – A maximum of 25 will be awarded to communities that effectively demonstrates their engagement with previous planning initiatives. This includes providing documentation indicating how the current plan relates to a previous planning effort of the community applying or documenting the successful execution of a previous planning grant.

- 0 points- no previous planning efforts or documentation of execution of previous planning grant
- 25 points- previous planning efforts or documentation of execution of previous planning grant

Program specific points must be submitted to the Office of Community and Rural Affairs in [Form PL-001 CDBG Planning Program Specific Points](#). The form must be uploaded to Indiana's Grants Management System and submitted by the application deadline.

BONUS POINTS (40 Points)

- 1) **Resilience Bonus Points (Maximum 25 Points):** Grant application will receive a maximum of 25 points for the submission of a community resilience vision plan, and their corresponding point awarded value from the Community Resilience improvement plan Index as provided by Stats Indiana.

The Chief Elected Official must:

- Schedule a meeting with the Community Liaison to discuss how the proposed CDBG plan will increase the community's resilience score.
- The Chief Elected Official must submit a community resilience vision plan clearly describing how the project benefits the community short term and increases the community resilience in the long term. The community resilience improvement plan must explain how the project will increase the community's resilience score in the next five years in the following metrics:
 - **Structure of the local economy / Industry diversity**
 - **Entrepreneurship**
 - **Human capital (Education attainment and Labor force participation)**
 - **Labor force participation**
 - **Social Network/Social Connectivity**
 - **Broadband**
 - **Wealth Gap**
 - **Homeownership (an indicator of community attachment)**

A formula will be used to convert the Community Resilience Score Index into a straightforward point awarded system. This system will assign a point value based on the Community Resilience Index calculated by Stats Indiana. Community Resilience Index scores, which are updated and published annually, can be found at: <https://www.stats.indiana.edu/topic/cdbg.asp>.

The community resilience vision plan as described above, must be submitted in GMS by the application deadline. All submissions must follow the [MSR-002 Resilience Bonus Points Minimum Standards](#) to complete this section.

- 2) **Designated Disaster Areas (15 Points):** Communities designated as disaster areas with a Presidential Disaster within the last three years from round opening, which have been approved for individual assistance and public assistance categories A-G, are eligible to receive an additional 15 points if documentation is provided.

Disaster designation bonus points as described above, must be submitted in GMS by the application deadline. All submissions must use [DBP Form-001-Disaster Designation Bonus Points Form](#).

Resource: For more information, visit [Bonus Points Resources](#).

POINTS REDUCTION POLICY:

It is the policy of OCRA not to fund more than one phase or component of the same plan in different funding cycles. This applies to all planning types although it is particularly relevant to utility study plans. If a community needs to phase a project in order to complete it, they should consider which phase would be most appropriate for CDBG assistance. Even if a community does not intend to phase its project, OCRA will consider previous awards for the same planning type. A Community that has previously been awarded a grant for the same planning type will likely not be competitive and will be subject to the follow point reduction.

0 – 5 years since previous funding – -50 points

Example: A community submits and is awarded a utility study grant in 2020 for a single utility study. When applying for another planning grant for a single, two, or master utility study in 2025, they would be subject to a point reduction of 50 pts. In 2026, they would have no point reduction for a single, two, or master system utility.

B. Project Design Scoring Criteria

General Instructions:

1. Review each section and make sure all information is accurate.
2. Use line breaks to separate paragraphs in the narratives.
3. Pictures should be in a single PDF file at the highest resolution possible with clear captions and dates.
4. Reference to the file name and page number of each piece of supporting documentation that has been uploaded.
5. Do not include uploads that are not discussed or referenced in the narrative or are not related to the project (unless federal or state policy requires).
6. Do not provide handwritten notes, dates, etc. within any upload — handwriting is not considered in scoring.

| GMS Section | Project Design Factors | 300 Total Points |
|-------------|---|------------------|
| Section 4 | PROJECT DESCRIPTION | 50 Points |
| 4.1 | Project Description | |
| 4.1.a | <p>Detailed Description</p> <p>Provide a detailed description of the program without the use of technical language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a high-level overview of the project's purpose and goals. • Include descriptions or definitions of terms or criteria to be used in the program (e.g. | |
| 4.1.b. | <p>Clear Outcomes</p> <p>Write at least three (3) clear, specific, and objectively measurable outcomes specifically for the proposed project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a baseline, a specific desired outcome, and how each of these are or will be measured. • Completing steps of the application process (e.g. public hearings) is not considered an outcome. • Completing the project is not considered an outcome. | |
| 4.1.c | <p>Summary of Work</p> <p>Write a short concise summary that explains the project and the positive changes it will bring if the project gets funded.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The summary should not exceed five (5) sentences. • Write the summary so that it is easily understood by the general public. It should be written just like it would appear in a media announcement. • Refrain from using technical language. | |
| 4.2 | SCOPE OF WORK | |
| 4.2.a | <p>Scope of Work</p> <p>Write a scope of work that is clear and logical for the type of project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify any ineligible items. | |
| 4.2.b | <p>Scope Matches Budget:</p> <p>Correlate the scope of work with the detailed budget.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include specific information about soft costs in the detailed budget. • Best Practice: Double check calculations before submitting detailed budget. • Best Practice: Detailed budget should be uploaded as an excel document. | |
| 4.3 | PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT | |
| 4.3.a | <p>Development Process Documented:</p> <p>Provide description and documentation of the project development process spanning at least three (3) to six (6) months. Project development includes evidence of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and identification of issues and solutions for this specific project • Evaluation of multiple alternatives • Multiple methods of public input • Provide timeline showing milestones of development process | |
| 4.3.b | <p>Quality Maps:</p> <p>Identify the project area on high-quality, colored, clearly labeled maps.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maps show project area in relation to 1. place, 2. county, and 3. state • Detailed project area maps include clear map markers, labels, legend, etc. for key locations and/or features. • Any boundaries marked within the map are clearly defined and labeled. | |

| Section 5 | PROJECT NEED 125 Points |
|-----------|--|
| 5.1 | Priority |
| 5.1.a | 3-5 Year History of Issues Provide a summary of the history of issues across the past 3-5 years. Support with documentation (e.g. local data, residential anecdotes, maintenance logs, newspaper articles related to the issue, etc.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A summary table or timeline presents a well-organized display of information. • Highlight information within uploads that is specifically cited in the narrative. |
| 5.1.b | Addresses Issue Frequency: Provide a compelling explanation of the frequency and prevalence of the issue(s) this plan aims to address. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include adequate documentation. • Photos will not be considered as documentation for this section. |
| 5.1.c | Community Priority: Demonstrate in the narrative specifically how this project is a priority to both residents and local units of government. Include adequate documentation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse documentation must demonstrate support from residents in the project area, residents of the whole community, local officials/leaders, residents of the community, etc. • Provide clarification should the project area and whole community be the same. |
| 5.1.d | Adequate Data Include at least three different types of data supporting the need for the plan and the issue(s) it aims to address. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptable data can include but is not limited to: survey results, public input, letters, social media posts, etc. • Include summary of survey results in uploads. • Photos are not considered data. • Public hearing documentation alone is not adequate public input. |
| 5.2 | Current Conditions |
| 5.2.a | Current Conditions Explained: Explain in detail and document the current system, facility, or community conditions. Documentation might include but is not limited to, a description of community characteristics, features, assets, demographics, and more, as it relates to the objective of the plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide analysis and summary of any data included. • Photos are an acceptable form of documentation for this section. However, photos as the only documentation of current conditions will not be considered sufficient documentation. |
| 5.2.b | Quality Pictures: Include high-quality color pictures showing conditions within the past five (5) years. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each picture must have a caption and date stamp. • Provide reason(s) if no pictures are provided. • Photos must be taken within the past five years. • Photos must be relevant to current issues and the proposed plan. |
| 5.3 | Residential Impact |
| 5.3.a | Residential Impacts and Issues Explained: Explain and document how the proposed plan would impact residents and address issues they are facing. Summarize the potential impacts on residents if the project is not funded. |

| | |
|------------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be specific when discussing resident needs and existing issues impacting residents. • Provide a summary of resident survey data. |
| 5.3.b | Residential Support Outlined: Outline and document the residential support and need for the program. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate resident support during project development. • Demonstrate resident support of desired plan outcomes. • Include evidence of resident support beyond the context of public hearings (e.g. filed complaints, letters of support, social media posts, etc.). |
| 5.4 | Quality Of Life |
| 5.4.a | Quality of Life: Describe and document the community's wellbeing and quality of life. This may include, but are not limited to workforce development, health and wellness, social environment, natural environment, community prosperity, economic prosperity., etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly state the current risk (if any) to resident wellbeing and quality of life. • Include local data and documentation, if available. • Photos with date stamp and caption can be used to support narrative. |

| Section 6 | FINANCIAL IMPACT | 125 Points |
|------------------|---|-------------------|
| 6.1 | Previous Efforts | |
| 6.1.a | Previous Efforts: Summarize the community's previous efforts within the past 3-5 years to address the issue(s) this project aims to remediate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts may include, but are not limited to, joint community endeavors, partnerships, LUGS financial resources, community outreach, etc., and not necessarily a tangible effort or solving the problem, but a commitment to the effort. • Provide a timeline or table demonstrating previous efforts. | |
| 6.1.b | Support Documentation: Provide supporting documentation explaining in detail past efforts, community endeavors, partnerships, expenditures, community outreach, labor hours, etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation clearly demonstrates the who, when, how much, and why of previous efforts. | |
| 6.2 | Sustainability | |
| 6.2.a | Sustainability Strategy: Outline and document an adequate sustainability strategy for this plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a timeline for updating the plan that includes the who, what, when, and how. • Sustainability strategy may be outlined in narrative or in an upload, so long as the document is referenced clearly in the narrative. • Recommendation: Conduct periodic reviews of the plan every 3-5 years to ensure it remains aligned with community goals and is responsive to any changes that arise. | |
| 6.3 | Financial Options | |
| 6.3.a | 3 Financial Options: Outline and document viable alternative financial options investigated for the project before CDBG funds were considered. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide alternative funding sources with amount and terms in the narrative or in a spreadsheet. • Viable financial options must have the capacity to fund some portion of the project. E.g. Listing organizations that do not provide funding for the type of project will not be considered to have capacity or be a viable option. • OCRA funds cannot be considered as an alternative option. | |

| | |
|--|---|
| 6.3.b | CDBG Best Option Explained: Explain why CDBG is the best option and why other financial options are not the best option for the project. |
| 6.4 | Local Match |
| 6.4.a | Local Match Explained: Explain and document the local match option. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local match documentation includes local match resolution, local match letter from the Chief Financial Officer, and any other applicable local letters committing funds for the project. |
| 6.5 | Fund Balances |
| 6.5.a | Fund Balances Explained: Explain the fund balances and include relevant documentation for the applicant and sub-recipient. Include explanation for any negative balances. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include most recent Gateway report in uploads. Letter from Clerk Treasurer or CEO is sufficient for documentation explaining negative balances. If applicable, include sub-recipient financials in discussion and support with documentation. |
| 6.5.b | Discretionary Balances Explained: Explain all discretionary fund balances and include supporting documentation. |
| PROJECT DESIGN TOTAL 300 Points | |

PART 5: FINAL REMINDERS

- Ensure all documents referenced in the application are uploaded.
 - Title uploaded documents as they pertain to the application section and what the upload contains:
e.g. Section 5-Health and Safety Documentation
- Make sure to recheck all your calculations. At minimum, decimals should be written to the nearest 100th. E.g. 7.39%, \$40,000.00
- Ensure alignment among the Narrative, Uploads, and Budget.

PART 6: APPLICATION EVALUATION

Eligible applications (see Part 1.B) will be reviewed by a scoring committee. The committee's primary responsibility is to evaluate all submissions consistently and impartially based on the criteria outlined in these instructions.

- To maintain a fair and anonymous scoring process, Grant Administrators and members of the general public, including community representatives, are not permitted to participate in or observe the evaluation.

Applications that meet the minimum scoring threshold will be considered for CDBG funding. Applications will be ranked in order of score from highest to lowest. Funding is awarded according to ranking and availability; not all fundable applications may receive an award.

- Final scores are calculated as a whole number and two decimal places (e.g. the one-hundredth place, 000.00). No rounding will occur.
- In the event of a tie where funding availability becomes the determining factor, priority will be given to the community with the higher LMI percentage. No rounding will occur.

PART 7: POST AWARD

A. Funded Communities

Grant awards will be publicly announced via press release approximately 9-10 weeks after application due date. Following the announcement, Grant Services will contact each awarded community to initiate the next steps in the grant process.

Note: For awarded communities that would like to obtain the application scoresheet, the submitting certified grant administrator must submit this request via cdbq@ocra.in.gov within 15 calendar days of the award announcement. If after this date, a request must be made via a [Public Record Request](#).

Resource: To receive information on awards [subscribe](#) to [OCRA's Press Releases](#).

Planning Project Completion

1) Complete Planning Study

If awarded, the consultant engaged to conduct the study must adhere to the minimum requirements specific to the planning type. It is the responsibility of the grantee to ensure that the consultant delivers a high-quality plan. The minimum planning requirements are available on the [Planning Program webpage](#).

2) Review of Draft Planning Study

Upon completion of the draft planning study, the community's certified grant administrator is expected to submit the first draft of the plan within nine (9) months of receiving the award via email to the respective Community Liaison and the [Director of Grants Services](#). Once the draft is submitted, the Community Liaison will review it and provide feedback within 60 days.

Following this feedback, the community is responsible to ensure that the revisions are incorporated into the plan. Once the draft is revised, the community's certified grant administrator must send a second draft, which the CL will review with a focus on addressing the requested revisions. After this review, the CL may either approve the draft or request additional corrections. Once the CL grants approval via email, the community can formally adopt the plan through a resolution during the second public hearing. The final steps require the grant administrator to submit the documentation for the second public hearing along with the finalized plan. Grant services will issue the approval letter, and the community will be eligible to submit their final claim and closeout the grant.

3) Planning Project Completion

After approval by OCRA Community Liaison of the draft document, a second public hearing must be held to solicit public comment on the draft document. The draft must be made available to the public at the time of the hearing notice publication. At this second hearing, the lead applicant must approve the plan by resolution. A sample resolution can be found on the OCRA website (see Sample Local Resolution Approving Plan). This hearing must follow all of the same guidelines discussed above in the Public Hearings and Citizen Participation section of this application packet.

A copy of the second public hearing notice, the publisher(s) affidavit, sign-in sheet, minutes, and the resolution approving the plan at the local level shall be forwarded to the [Director of Grants Services](#). Grant services will issue the approval letter, and the community will be eligible to submit their final claim and close out the grant. Receipt of these documents and approval of the document must occur prior to the submission of the request for final draw down of funds, or the draw request will be denied.

NOTE: If a third party, such as a grant administrator, takes the minutes of the meeting, the applicant must include a document stating that the third party is acting as its representative.

B. Unfunded Communities

Applicants that are not selected for funding may complete a feedback meeting with their assigned Community Liaison. This meeting is only mandatory for applicants intending to resubmit their application in a future grant cycle.

Part 8: Appendices

Appendix A: Duplication of Benefits

Many communities have received or will receive federal stimulus funds from the CARES Acts, American Rescue Plan (ARP), or other federal allocations that can be used for the same eligible activities as CDBG, as such OCRA must consider any duplication of benefit. Per the Stafford Act “Duplication occurs when an agency has provided assistance which was the primary responsibility of another agency, and the agency with primary responsibility later provide assistance.”

To determine if any duplication has or will occur, applicants who intend to use ARPA funds or other federal allocations as their local match must complete the [Duplication of Benefits form](#) and upload it with their application. On the form, applicants will provide details on any federal stimulus funds received and their status. Any of those funds that are not yet obligated could be considered duplicative of CDBG funds and could decrease an award from this round.

Appendix B: Income Surveys

Special Note: Under [Policy Notice 2025-005: Income Survey Policy](#) transition policy, the Office of Community and Rural Affairs will allow local units of government to continue using previously approved income surveys under OCRA’s Income Survey Policy- Validity Time (effective June 5, 2022) to qualify activities under the National Objective area benefit under the 51% LMI criterion so long as:

1. The boundary of the service area is the same as the boundary defined as the service area when the income survey was conducted.
2. The approved income survey may be used up until 5 years from the date the final income survey report was approved by the Office of Community and Rural Affairs, or until HUD issues LMISD base-data changes with the update to the American Community Survey 5-year estimate or any other data source, whichever occurs first.

The application must include the following documentation if the applicant is utilizing an income survey that was previously approved under OCRA’s 2018 former income survey policy and **was not processed in GMS:**

1. Detailed map(s) showing the location and boundaries of the service area, including street names.
2. HUD LMI Data Maps and Worksheet
3. The methodology of the income survey, the low-to-moderate income worksheet, and the sample survey instrument must be included.
4. Preapproval email to conduct an income survey from OCRA CDBG program staff (see submission and timeline section below).

If requesting approval to conduct an income survey & utilizing an income survey that was initiated under OCRA’s [Policy Notice 2024-003: Income Survey Policy](#) effective September 1, 2025:

1. Review the [Income Survey Booklet](#) and [income survey policy](#)
2. Applicants seeking approval to conduct an income survey must submit
 - a. Current LMISD for the service area (2016-2020 American Community Survey data must be used to calculate LMSID)
 - b. A map clearly demonstrating the boundaries of the service area
 - c. A letter of justification citing economic reason why the current Census data does not accurately reflect incomes in the area
3. OCRA has 10 full business days from the date the request was received to process and provide authorization.
4. Please note that conducting an income survey can take up to 120 days to be completed.

5. All income survey documentation for this round must be submitted for final approval in GMS by **the pre-approval deadline**. OCRA has 10 full business days from the date received to complete its review. See **Policy Notice 2025-002: Income Survey Policy**.
6. All income surveys for this round must be approved by OCRA in GMS ahead of the application due date as outlined in the instructions.

Appendix C: Public Hearings and Citizen Participation

Two public hearings must be held at different stages of project development. One public hearing must be held before submission of the application and the second must be after OCRA approves the planning study.

Note: New public hearings must be held for each grant cycle, regardless of prior applications.

Public hearing notice must be posted at least 10 days prior to the hearing date. **Therefore, the public hearing cannot occur until the 11th day or after.** Applicants should be aware of local newspaper deadlines for submitting advertisements. Some smaller newspapers are published weekly and will require that the advertisement is placed in advance of the public hearing. Other methods of advertising to the public are encouraged. All public hearings must be accessible to people with disabilities. Public hearings should also be made convenient to the low- and moderate-income residents who will benefit from the project.

The public hearing notice, the publisher's affidavit documenting publication dates, the dated sign-in sheet, and signed minutes from the first public hearing must be attached to the application. Documentation for the second public hearing will be required before project closeout. Public hearings are useful for collecting resident input during project development, and are also helpful for collecting testimony, feedback, and support at the end of a project for future funding applications.

Hearing minutes must be signed and dated by the party that recorded them. If a third party, such as a grant administrator, takes the minutes, the applicant must include a document stating that the third party is acting as the applicant's representative. It is recommended that an audio tape of the public hearing be recorded and kept until the grant is closed out. OCRA may request transcripts of the public hearings.

Place all documents from each public hearing together in the application. Do not separate by type of documentation.

All public hearing ads submitted with the application must be of sufficient size to be readable upon review.

Minutes should document the topics of discussion and not simply state "there was a discussion."

Minutes are a great source of quotes showing residential impact.

All questions regarding Limited English Proficiency must be answered on the Citizen Participation page. The Four Factor Analysis and Language Access Plan is required. For more information, please refer to the [CDBG Handbook](#).

Appendix D: Build America Buy America Act

On January 13, 2025, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issued revised guidance [CPD-25-01](#) on the applicability of the Buy America Preference determining that housing projects with one to four units are classified as private infrastructure and not subject to BABA.

To ensure record keeping compliance is fully maintained, awarded grantees must complete the [BABA-01 Determination Form](#). On the form, grantees must identify in Section 2, Step 1 that funds are not being used for an infrastructure project as defined in the Buy America Build America Act by checking NO. This form must be submitted to OCRA along with all other essential Readiness to Proceed documents including financial, engineering, permits, and site control (FEPS) for all OOR CDBG awards.

Appendix E: Resources

| Resource | Website Link |
|--|--|
| Grant Administrator Certification List | https://www.in.gov/ocra/cdbg/grant-administrator-certification/ |
| eGMS Portal | https://in-lg.my.site.com/Grants/s/ |
| CDBG Handbook | https://www.in.gov/ocra/cdbg/cdbg-resources/ |
| Sample Public Hearing Notices | https://www.in.gov/ocra/cdbg/cdbg-resources/ |
| Planning Grant Resources | https://www.in.gov/ocra/cdbg/cdbg-resources/#Owner_Occupied_Rehabilitation_Program https://www.in.gov/ocra/cdbg/planning-grants/ |