Rural Workforce Housing Fund (RWHF)
2020 Draft Application Guidelines
Public Comments

Rural workforce housing is one of the top challenges facing community leaders as they work to expand skilled labor in order to meet the needs of Nebraska's growing businesses. The 2020 Draft Application Guidelines were posted on the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (NDED) website on 10/6/2020 seeking public comment. The public comment period ended on 10/22/2020.

The Department thanks everyone who submitted comments in response to the 2020 Draft Application Guidelines. NDED received public comments from 3 individuals/organizations and carefully evaluated each comment. The public comments received are listed below.

Sheryl:

Thanks to you and the DED team for your continued work on the Rural Workforce Housing Fund. The first round of this program proved invaluable to our Nebraska communities in need of new workforce housing stock. Clearly, applicant communities used a great deal of creativity and local investment to help drive housing growth and success!

The NBA continues to support efforts to keep this program application and compliance process both efficient and effective. Based upon our brief review of the 2020 Draft Application Guidelines, the NBA does not have any concerns about the proposed program changes.

If there are things our industry can do to help promote the next level of funding for the RWHF, please feel free to reach out to me or any member of our NBA team.

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October 7, 2020

Sheryl Hiatt  
301 Centennial Mall South  
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Re: Rural Workforce Housing Public Comments  

I appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback for the 2020 Rural Workforce Housing Fund application guidelines.  

The timing of the project can make it difficult to have a housing study complete if a community or organization does not have a study updated in the last five years. A housing study and update can be expensive and there are times organizations may choose to spend limited funds on projects when they see a need as opposed to updating a housing study. The ability for applicants to conduct a self-assessment for an update is beneficial.  

One of the challenges I have seen in using state programs to improve housing is local and regional organizational capacity. Communities that have more wealth and history in working with housing can frequently be awarded funds through the state trust fund and the Rural Workforce Housing Fund. Many parts of the state do not have the experience or wealth to successfully apply for these programs. The level of involvement by development districts in rural housing also varies widely from region to region.  

This can make it difficult for a new community or region to apply as areas including capacity and readiness make up for 40% of scoring, while New Applicant and New Region only make up 10% of scoring.  

Longer term, I would encourage the state to look at how local capacity could be improved in parts of the state that have not seen success in applying or being awarded funds to improve housing. For the Rural Workforce Housing Fund, I would also encourage the amount of points for New Applicant and New Region to be increased. With the short turnaround for this project, communities who have not participated in the past can find writing the investment plan and preparing the application challenging and may lose points in the application, due to lack of experience.  

Other suggestions to improve the project for communities and regions that don’t have as much experience would be a FAQ page, a workshop for potential candidates, and moving the deadline back a week or two.  

It is exciting to see the developments taking place throughout the state from the first round of Rural Workforce Housing Funds and I appreciate the work of the Department of Economic Development to move quickly after the legislature appropriated funds to get program guidelines out for public comment.  

Sincerely,  

[Signature]  

Andy Long  
Executive Director
Sheryl:

I would like to provide a couple of comments on the 2020 Rural Workforce Housing Fund.

Overall, I support the Draft Application Guidelines with the exception of the scoring relative to past awards received.

I believe the additional 25 points available for New Applicant/No previous award and the additional 25 points for New Region/Community or County not previously awarded are too drastic.

My recommendation is to either reduce the 25 points to 10 each or just 25 points for no previous award. A total of having 50 points not available to a previous recipient is 10% of the total points. I feel that is too high of a percentage. I understand what the Department is trying to do but, handicapping previous applicants who have been successful in the past seems counterproductive.

I also feel that additional points should be awarded to previous recipients that have used the funds within the timelines and take into consideration the number of housing units impacted with the previous award.

Thank you,

Roger

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