Gov. Holcomb takes more actions to protect Hoosiers during public emergency

Governor Holcomb took additional actions last week to protect and support Hoosiers during the COVID-19 outbreak with Executive Order 20-05. This order directs multiple state agencies on the expectations of providing support and protection to Hoosiers across the State. The Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) has therefore been issued the following action item:

- Community Development Block Grant funds may be redirected to assist with COVID-19 needs based on guidance from the United States Housing and Urban Development.

Consequently, OCRA is in the process of developing a COVID-19 Response Program using the Community Block Development grant (CDBG) funds. Program details will be announced in the near future.

In coordination with this effort, the Office of Community and Rural Affairs will be temporarily suspending the Planning Grant and the Blight Clearance Programs. Applications that were received for both programs by March 15, 2020, will be scored; but the agency will not be accepting or scoring any future applications until further notice.

Additionally, OCRA is making the following changes for CDBG 2020 Round 1:

- The Main Street Revitalization and the Public Facilities programs are suspended;
- The Wastewater/ Drinking Water and Stormwater Improvements programs will continue to accept applications;
- The public hearing requirement is further extended to require the first public hearing be completed prior to release of funds for awarded grants. The second hearing must be completed at the time the grant draws 30 percent of grant funds;
- OCRA will accept public hearings and meetings that are conducted via non-in-person methods that meet guidance provided by the Public Access Counselor. Communities that have questions about public hearing and meeting options should contact the Public Access Counselor. (Note: Executive Order 20-04 provides communities with flexibility related to the Open Door Laws.);
- OCRA will continue to provide technical assistance to communities working on applications. Site visits will now be conducted via video conferencing; and
- Proposals for suspended programs that are currently in the system will be transferred to Round 2 of 2020.

The Stellar Communities program for 2020 will also be suspended for the year. It is critical that we uphold the integrity of the program’s planning processes and in this new environment, that could
prove difficult. Stellar funds will be re-allocated for response or other related programming. Regions intending to apply for the program will be contacted by OCRA to discuss next steps. For future years, we will continue to work with our State program partners on enhancements and updates.

Please know that OCRA continues to monitor this situation daily and will update our partners and stakeholders as frequent as necessary. Please reach out to your Community Liaison or the OCRA office with any questions moving forward.

Under the leadership of Lieutenant Governor Suzanne Crouch, who also serves as the Secretary of Rural Development, the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs’ (OCRA) mission is to work with local, state and national partners to provide resources and technical assistance to assist communities in shaping and achieving their vision for community and economic development. For more information, visit ocra.in.gov.