**2024 Stellar Communities FAQ**

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**Eligibility Criteria**

1. **Which communities are eligible to apply for the program?**
	1. Any incorporated Indiana community of any size that is not entitled to direct Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding through U.S. HUD is eligible to apply. See list below:



* 1. A Region encompasses a 1.) County or County Leader **AND** 2.) at least one municipality within the county.
	2. County leaders such as community foundation, chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, redevelopment organizations, engineering firms, etc., can be the lead applicant.
	3. At the time of LOI submission, all participating communities within the region must be in good standing with the State.
	4. Communities NOT eligible to apply, due to participation in existing large-scale capacity building programs include:
		1. Auburn, Jay County, Kosciusko County, Mentone, Milford, Pierceton
		2. Vincennes, Dubois County, Jasper
		3. Franklin County, Brookville, Wayne County, Richmond, Dublin, Milton, Economy, East Germantown, Spring Grove, Cambridge City, Connersville
		4. Fortville, Shirley, Greenfield, Hancock County
		5. Allen County, Grabill, New Haven, Woodburn, Monroeville, Leo-Cedarville
		6. Plymouth, LaPaz, Culver, Bremen, Bourbon, Argos
		7. New Castle
1. **Are population divisions still a component of the program?**
	1. No, this requirement has been removed.
2. **Is population a consideration with the program?**
	1. No, regions may be comprised of communities of any population size.
	2. In order for a community to receive any federal funding, a community must be a HUD non-entitlement.
3. **If I am a previous Stellar Designee, am I still eligible to be a part of a region that is applying?**
	1. Yes, previous Stellar Designees are eligible to apply. However, Stellar Communities 2018 Health & Heritage Regions and New Allen Alliance Regions are ineligible to apply. Additionally, Stellar Communities 2019 Marshall County Crossroads is also ineligible to apply. This includes the following municipalities:
		1. Fortville, Shirley, Greenfield, Hancock County
		2. Allen County, Grabill, New Haven, Woodburn, Monroeville, Leo-Cedarville
		3. Plymouth, LaPaz, Culver, Bremen, Bourbon, Argos
4. **Which programs will a community, within a region, be ineligible to apply for funding during the Stellar Community period?**
	1. IHCDA-
		1. They will still be eligible for all other IHCDA resources.
	2. OCRA-
		1. Communities within a designated region, who receive OCRA Stellar CDBG funding for projects in the SIP, will not be eligible to apply for any additional CDBG grants during the 5-year period following designation; or until all their Stellar CDBG funded projects are in implementation.  This means that the project has at least achieved release of funds (ROF) and has executed contracts in place.
		2. Communities within the region, who DO NOT receive OCRA Stellar CDBG funding, are still eligible to apply for other CDBG program rounds.
		3. Once a community becomes eligible to apply for competitive CDBG funding again, OCRA’s standard points reduction policy will be in place for any projects of the same type as those funded with the Stellar CDBG funds.
		4. For any new programs launched by OCRA, a determination of eligibility for Stellar participants will be made at the time of that program’s creation and roll out.
	3. INDOT-
		1. Communities that fall inside of Regional Stellar Designations will not be eligible to apply to INDOT for the Rural Federal Aid Program during a 3-year period following designation.  However, if a community within the Regional Designation does not receive these funds, they may enter INDOTs competitive application rounds. Local Units of Governments within the urbanized boundary of a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is not eligible for rural federal aid funding.
	4. Other Stellar Partner Agencies-
		1. Designated communities will not be restricted from any other partner agencies’ programs.
5. **What are the requirements for establishing a region?**
	1. Must be comprised of at least two communities.
	2. Must be able to describe how and why the region was developed.
6. **Is a Community Foundation an eligible applicant?**
	1. Yes, a County-wide Community Foundation is an eligible applicant as a County leader if they represent the entirety of the County.
	2. County leader must partner with at least one municipality to create a region.

1. **Is an RDA an eligible applicant?**
	1. Yes, a Regional Development Authority (RDA) is an eligible applicant as a County leader if they represent the entirety of the County.
	2. County leaders must partner with at least one municipality to create a region.
2. **Is an EDO an eligible applicant?**
	1. Yes, a Economic Development Organization is an eligible applicant as a County leader if they represent the entirety of the County.
	2. County leaders must partner with at least one municipality to create a region.
3. **Is there a limit on how many partners can be in a region?**
	1. No. A minimum of two partners is required but there is no limit.  The number of partners is not a factor for selecting finalists or designees.
4. **If my community is participating in READI 2.0, can my community still apply as part of a region?**
	1. Yes, we encourage you to apply.

**Funding & Participating Agencies**

1. **What are the funding amounts available from each partner agency?**
2. Designated Stellar Communities may be eligible to apply up to the following amounts.
3. However, a designated Stellar Community is *not guaranteed* they will receive the maximum amount available.
4. Local match is required between 10-20% for total region depending on the funding set-asides.
5. The amounts shown below represent the total amounts available from each partner agency. Funding will be divided amongst Stellar designees.
6. Additional funding sources may be identified by Stellar Community partners that are not set-aside or identified in the following matrix:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Program** | **OCRA** | **INDOT** | **IHCDA** | **ISDH** | **DNR** | **ISDA** | **IDDC** |
| CDBGPlanning  | $8,000,000$200,000 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Rural Federal Aid Program  |  | 3,000,000 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Health & Wellness Program  |  |  |  | $75,000 |  |  |  |
| Home Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) Homebuyers vs. home renters |  |  | $1,500,000 Per Community HousingDevelopment Organization  |  |  |  |  |
| Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Historic Preservation Fund (HPF)  |  |  |  |  | Bonus Points; 5% to LWCFBonus Points; 20 to HPF  |  |  |
| Indiana Agricultural Grant Program  |  |  |  |  |  | $100,000 per community towards agricultural initiatives |  |
| Indiana Destination Marketing Package  |  |  |  |  |  |  | $50,000 - $100,000 of marketing in-kind services  |

1. **Are project limits in place for the available funding?**
	1. Except when required by federal regulation, typical per project limits used by the partner agencies will not apply for the Stellar Communities Program.
	2. The amount of OCRA Stellar CDBG funds granted will still be based on a $5,000 cost per project beneficiary.
2. **What is the time frame for project completion?**
	1. All projects, including complimentary projects, should be expected to be completed within five years after the Stellar Pathways designation. All applications should be submitted within three years of designation.
3. **If designated, how will funding be awarded?**
	1. Individual projects will be funded based on eligibility criteria. Projects will require an application, a review for eligibility, and approval by each funding agency.

**Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA)**

1. **What is the funding type offered by the Office of Community and Rural Affairs?**
	1. Stellar funding offered by the Office of Community and Rural Affairs is from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), federal funding.
	2. The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program provides annual grants on a formula basis to states, cities, and counties to develop viable urban communities by providing decent housing, a suitable living environment, and expanding economic opportunities principally for low- and moderate-income persons. The program is authorized under Title 1 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, Public Law 93-383, as amended 42. U.S.C. 5301 et seq.
2. **Who are eligible entities for the Community Development Block Grant?**
	1. Under the state CDBG program, only non-entitlement units of government (UGLG) are able to receive CDBG funds. Non-entitlement areas include small cities and towns with populations of less than 50,000 and counties with population of less than 200,000.
	2. Entitlement communities are not eligible to receive CDBG funds from the state program.

These include:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| City of Anderson  | City of Kokomo  |
| City of Bloomington  | City of Lafayette  |
| City of Columbus  | City of LaPorte  |
| City of East Chicago  | Hamilton County  |
| City of Elkhart  | City of Michigan City  |
| City of Evansville  | City of Mishawaka  |
| City of Jeffersonville  | City of Muncie  |
| City of Ft. Wayne  | City of New Albany  |
| City of Greenwood  | City of South Bend  |
| City of Gary  | City of Terre Haute  |
| City of Goshen  | City of West Lafayette  |
| City of Hammond  | Lake County  |
| City of Indianapolis  |   |

* 1. 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.
1. **What are the duties that local government units must fulfill under the State CDBG program?**
	1. Local units of government (UGLG) are responsible for:
		1. Prioritizing the types of activities, they apply for;
		2. Handling local citizen participation
		3. Carrying out eligible activities; and
		4. Complying with federal and state requirements
2. **What projects qualify for CDBG funding under the Stellar program?**
	1. For a project to qualify for CDBG funding, the project must meet the following three criteria:
		1. Meet a National Objective
		2. The project must be an eligible activity permissible under the State’s Community Development Block Grant Program
		3. The project must have eligible costs that can be covered with the Community Development Block Grant.
3. **What are the national objectives of the Community Development Block Grants?**
	1. The national objectives are:
		1. Benefit to Low- and Moderate Income (LMI) Persons
		2. Prevention or Elimination of Slums and Blighted Conditions
4. **What is the National Objective Benefit to Low- and Moderate Income (LMI) Persons?**
	1. The National Objective Benefit to low- and Moderate-Income (LMI) persons is divided into three categories:
		1. LMI Area Wide (LMA): A project may qualify if the activity is one that benefits all residents in a particular area, primarily a residential area, where at least 51 % of the residents are low to moderate income persons. The benefit to LMI area wide is met by documenting that 51% or more of the persons who live in the project area qualify as being low- and moderate-income.  This can be done using either HUD census data or by conducting an income survey.

Examples of projects under LMA include public facilities activities, such as fire stations, water, sewer, and storm water projects, which provide benefits to all residents in the service area in a primary residential area.

* + 1. Limited clientele criteria or presumed class is a second way to meet the LMI benefit national objective.  Limited clientele criteria require documentation on family size and income in order to show that at least 51 % of the project’s clientele are LMI;

Presumed class projects serve a specific group of individuals in a community, but not necessarily the entire community. HUD has designated eight presumed classes which are determined to be composed of low- and moderate-income persons.  These groups are:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Abused children   | Severely Disabled Adults  |
| Battered spouses  | People experiencing homeless   |
| Senior citizens (Age 62 or above)   | Persons with HIV-AIDS  |
| Illiterate Adults   | Migrant Farm Workers   |

Examples of limited clientele/presumed class projects include childcare facilities, senior citizens centers, acquisition of a building to be converted into a shelter for the homeless, or rehabilitation of a center for training severely disabled persons to enable them to live independently.

* + 1. LMI-Housing (LMH): A project may qualify if the activity that is undertake is for the purpose of providing or improving permanent residential structures, which upon completion, will be occupied by a low-moderate income household. To meet the housing LMI national objective, structures with one unit must be occupied by a LMI household. LMI Housing require documentation on the household income.
1. **What is the National Objective Prevention of Slum or Blighted Conditions?**
	1. Public and/or private facilities requiring improvements that aid in the prevention or elimination of slums or blighted conditions in a designated slum/blight area may qualify for OCRA funding under this National Objective.
	2. Example of projects include downtown sidewalk repairs or façade improvements to multiple downtown buildings or single downtown building.
2. **What are examples of types of eligible activities for the Community Development Block Grant?**
	1. Acquisition of real property
	2. Clearance & demolition of real property
	3. Rehabilitation of public owned building
	4. Rehabilitation of privately owned downtown commercial buildings
	5. Historic preservation
	6. Construction or rehabilitation of privately owned utilities
	7. Construction or rehabilitation of Public facilities
	8. Owner occupied rehabilitation
	9. Planning activities that are available for this program include: Water Infrastructure Plan, Broadband Readiness Plan, Environmental Assessment, Public Facilities Feasibility Study and Historic Preservation Plan.
3. **Which regulations apply to Stellar CDBG funded projects?**
	1. Projects utilizing CDBG funds must meet a national objective and be an eligible activity under the State’s CDBG program.
	2. All CDBG funded projects will continue to be required to meet with public participation requirements and all federal cross cutting requirements including: Environmental Review, Buy America Preference (BAP), Federal Labor Standards ( Davis Bacon Wages), Acquisition and Relocations  (URA) and Fair Housing and non- discrimination requirements.
4. **Do CDBG Stellar projects compete in the regular timed rounds throughout the year or do they come in on a rolling basis?**
	1. The designated regions will have set-aside funding, so they will not be required to compete in normal rounds. Application will be accepted on a rolling basis.
5. **Can funds be used for a county property within a non-entitlement community?**
	1. Yes.
6. **Can funds be designated for a sub-recipient for a CDBG eligible project?**
	1. Yes, non-profits are eligible to be sub-recipients on Stellar CDBG projects. The lead applicant may contract with a not-for-profit organization to carry out the activities of an eligible project, provided that the organization can document its nonprofit status with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, the Indiana Department of Revenue, and the Indiana Secretary of State
7. **Can CDBG funds be used for feasibility or planning studies?**
	1. Communities can only undertake the following planning activities with the Stellar CDBG program: Water Infrastructure Plan, Broadband Readiness Plan, Environmental Assessment, Public Facilities Feasibility Study, and Historic Preservation Plan. It is important to note that funding for COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plans, Economic Development Plan, Comprehensive Plan, and Downtown Revitalization Plan cannot be pursued through Stellar CDBG.
8. **Can communities within a Region who do not receive Stellar CDBG funding, still apply for CDBG funding in other rounds during the Stellar period?**
	1. Communities within the Region who DO NOT receive OCRA CDBG Stellar funding are still eligible to apply for other CDBG rounds. All communities must be in good standing with OCRA in order to apply for all CDBG funding.

**Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA)**

1. **What is the funding type offered by Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority?**
	1. The funding set-aside offered by the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority is the HOME Investment Partnerships Program.
	2. The purpose of the HOME program is to provide habitable and affordable housing for low and moderate-income persons. IHCDA is tasked with using its portion of HOME funds to improve the quality of existing housing stock in Indiana.
2. **What is the HOME Investment Partnership Program Homebuyer Program?**
	1. The purpose of the HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME) Homebuyer Program is to provide subsidies in the form of grants and loans to selected applicants for the acquisition, rehabilitation and/or new construction of housing for purchase to serve low-income beneficiaries.
	2. A property must either be a single-family unit, duplex, triplex, townhome, or a building with no more than 4 units.
3. **What are the funding priorities of the HOME Investment Partnership Program Homebuyer Program?**
	1. Projects must demonstrate they are meeting the needs of their specific community.
	2. Serve low-income households (at or below 80% of area median income);
	3. Demonstrate capacity and readiness to proceed.
	4. Link the project to the revitalization of existing neighborhoods, preferably through a comprehensive approach (i.e., as part of a published and approved community revitalization plan).
	5. Propose projects that are energy-efficient and are of the highest-quality design attainable within a reasonable cost structure; and
	6. Propose the use of state certified Minority Business Enterprise (MBE), Women Business Enterprise (WBE), Federal Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE), Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB), and/or Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) contractors, and development team members.
4. **Who are eligible applicants for the HOME Investment Partnership Program Homebuyer Program?**
	1. Eligible applicants include cities, towns, or counties that are located within Indiana but outside of the following participating jurisdictions. Applications from, or housing activities located within the following participating jurisdictions are NOT eligible for HOME funds:
		1. Bloomington
		2. Evansville
		3. Fort Wayne
		4. Gary
		5. Hammond
		6. Indianapolis / Marion County
		7. Lake County
		8. Lafayette Consortium
		9. Muncie
		10. South Bend Consortium
5. **What are eligible activities of the HOME Investment Partnerships Program Homebuyer Program?**

**a.** Only performing acquisition is not eligible; however acquisition in conjunction with another activity is permitted.

b. Rehabilitation, new construction, acquisition / rehabilitation or acquisition / new construction of single-family housing.

c. If HOME funds are used for acquisition of vacant land or demolition in conjunction with another activity, then construction must commence within nine months of the demolition or acquisition.

d. Manufactured homes are eligible if they meet IHCDA’s Manufactured Housing Policy or if rehabilitation will bring the unit up to these standards:

i. A single dwelling unit designed and built in a factory, installed as a permanent residence, which bears a seal certifying that it was built in compliance with the Federal Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Standards law and which also complies with the following specifications:

a. Shall have been constructed after January 1, 1981, and must exceed nine hundred fifty (950) square feet of occupied space per I.C. 36-7-4-1106(d);

b. Is attached to a permanent foundation of masonry construction and has a permanent perimeter enclosure constructed in accordance with he One- and Two-Family Dwelling Code;

c. Has wheels, axles and towing chasses removed;

d. Has a pitched roof;

e. Consists of two or more sections which, when joined, have a minimum dimension of 20’ X 47.5’ enclosing occupied space; and

f. is located on land held by the beneficiary fee-simple title or 99-year leasehold and is the principal residence of the beneficiary.

g. All other manufactured or mobile homes that do not meet the aforementioned criteria are ineligible to receive rehabilitation assistance funded by IHCDA.

1. **What is the HOME Investment Partnership Program Rental Construction Program?**

a. The purpose of the HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) rental construction program is to provide subsidies in the form of grants for the acquisition, rehabilitation, and/or new construction of rental housing for low-income households. Through this program, the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA) seeks to create or preserve affordable housing options for renter households.

1. **What are the funding priorities of the HOME Investment Partnership Program Rental Construction Program?**

a. Indiana Housing and Community’s Development Authority’s Goal is to fund development that:

 i. Demonstrate that the project is meeting the needs of their specific community;

 ii. Serve extremely low-income and very low-income households;

 iii. Demonstrate capacity and readiness to proceed;

 iv. Contribute to community revitalization;

v. Promote aging-in-place and accessibility strategies to provide independent living for seniors and persons with disabilities;

vi. Utilize energy-efficient high-quality design features, within a reasonable cost structure; and

vii. Include certified Minority Business Enterprise (MBE), Women Business Enterprise (WBE), Federal Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE), Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB), and/or Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) contractors and development team members.

1. **Who are eligible applicants for the HOME Investment Partnership Program Rental Construction Program?**

**a.** Eligible applicants are limited to the following:

i. Local units of government (cities, towns, or counties) located within Indiana, except in the excluded Participating Jurisdictions listed below

ii. Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs)

iii. 501(c)3 and 501(c)4 nonprofit organizations

iv. Public Housing Agencies (PHAs)

v. Joint Venture Partnerships

b. Applications from, or housing activities proposed to be located within, the following Participating Jurisdictions are NOT eligible to apply for IHCDA HOME funds:

 i. Bloomington

 ii. Evansville

 iii. Fort Wayne

 iv. Gary

 v. Hammond

 vi. Indianapolis / Marion County

 vii. Lafayette Consortium

 viii. Lake County

 ix. Muncie

 x. South Bend Consortium

1. **What is a Community Housing Development Organization? (CHDO)**

a. A Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) is a private, community-based nonprofit organization whose primary purpose is to develop affordable housing for the community it serves.

b. To be recognized as a CHDO, an organization must meet the requirements pertaining to the legal status, organizational structure, capacity, and experience as set forth in 24 CFR 92.2, and certified by IHCDA as a CHDO.

1. **What are eligible activities of the HOME Investment Partnerships Program Rental Construction Program?**

a. The program is intended for the rehabilitation and/or new construction of rental housing.

b. Acquisition only is not an eligible activity. However, acquisition in conjunction with another activity is permitted. If HOME funds are used for acquisition of vacant land or demolition in conjunction with another activity, then construction most commence within nine months of the acquisition or demolition.

c. Eligible activities include:

i. Rehabilitation, new construction, acquisition/rehabilitation, or acquisition/new construction of rental housing in the form of traditional apartments, single room occupancy units (SROs), or single-family housing.

a. SRO housing consists of single room dwelling units that are the primary residence of the occupant(s). Neither kitchen nor bathroom facilities are required to be in each unit. However, if individual units do not contain bathroom facilities, the building must contain bathroom facilities to be shared by tenants. SRO housing does not include facilities for students. Rent limits for SRO units are treated differently than rent limits for other HOME-assisted units.

ii. Rehabilitation of Rental Housing Tax Credit (RHTC) developments with compliance periods that have expired prior to the due date for application. RHTC developments still in the 30-year extended use period are eligible to apply for HOME funds, assuming the initial 15-year federal compliance period has expired.

iv. Rehabilitation of existing HOME developments with HOME affordability periods that expired prior to the due date for this application.

v. Manufactured / mobile homes are eligible only if they meet all of the following standards or if rehabilitation will bring the unit up to these standards:

a. A single dwelling unit designed and built in a factor, installed as a permanent residence, which bears a seal certifying that it was built in compliance with the Federal Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Standards Law.

b. A unit that was constructed after January 1, 1981

c. A unit that is attached to a permanent foundation of masonry construction and has a permanent perimeter enclosure constructed in accordance with the One- and Two-Family Dwelling Code.

d. A unit that has wheels, axles, and towing chassis removed

e. A unit that has a pitched roof

f. a unit that is located on land held by the beneficiary in fee-simple title or 99-year leasehold and is the principal residence of the beneficiary.

**Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT)**

1. **What type of transportation projects are eligible?**
	1. The funding can be used on any federally eligible projects such as trails, roads, sidewalks, safety and bridge projects. The asset must be owned by the LPA.
2. **Can INDOT funds be used for Engineering, Right of Way acquisition and construction inspection or construction only?**
	1. INDOT funds can only be used for the construction phase of a project. This includes utility and railroad construction as well as the actual construction and inspection.
3. **Can Stellar Funds be used as match for INDOT Community Crossing?**
	1. No, the Stellar program is separate from the Community Crossings program.
4. **Are there any special instructions for communities located in a metropolitan planning organization (MPO)?**
	1. MPO communities are not required to have a commitment for transportation funding from INDOT or their MPO to submit an LOI since the community may have other sources to address transportation issues that they have identified. Communities submitting LOIs must include transportation issues, but each community must define the issues and the method of addressing them. If your MPO would like to participate in the funding of a project within the urbanized area, they can. If not, you will have to use other sources of funding. INDOT funds cannot be used in an urbanized area.
5. **If my community falls within an MPO, what proposed projects must be approved by the MPO?**
	1. INDOT funds cannot be used in an MPO’s urbanized area.  Any transportation projects located in an urbanized area with gaps in financing could use MPO funding if approved by that MPO. INDOT cannot provide additional funding to the MPO due to program regulations. IHCDA and OCRA programming do not need to be discussed with the MPO.

**Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH)**

1. **What is the Rural Health and Wellness Grant?**
	1. A grant offered by the Indiana Department of Health focusing on the expansion of an existing program or adding a new, innovative approach to addressing an identified healthcare issue within the region.
2. **How much funding is allocated from ISDH?**
	1. $75,000 Total
3. **Does ISDH Funding have a matching requirement?**
	1. No
4. **What are the qualifications / Requirements for ISDH Funding?**
	1. Grant has an established Bidder Number, registered with the State of Indiana, and has a W-9 on file with the State of Indiana.
	2. Grantee qualifies as non-for profit or government entity.
	3. Grantee will be able to provide a fiscal agent who will be responsible for budget management and development of a sustainability plan to ensure the project continues.
	4. Grantee must submit invoicing for 100% of the awarded amount by September 30, 2026, to the State Department of Health
	5. Funding for allowable expenses must be incurred from date of the grant agreement through June 30, 2026.
	6. Processing of invoices cannot be initiated until an executed grant agreement is in place and a purchase order assigned.
	7. Executed grant agreement will be between the awardee and the Indiana Department of Health.
5. **What type of projects can we use the ISDH funding for?** Projects can address a challenge identified in their Community Health Assessment. Examples include, but are not limited to:
	1. A community garden
	2. Farmers’ markets
	3. Wellness programming
	4. Behavioral health services
	5. Support groups
	6. Community meal services
	7. Breast feeding support
6. **What is not allowable under ISDH Funding?**
	1. Direct health care services
	2. Indirect cost (reference document attached)
	3. Purchase of medical equipment, ambulances, and any other vehicles or major communications equipment.
	4. Purchase or improvements to real property
	5. Research
	6. Funding cannot be used to pay for existing programs, projects, staff, or administrative costs.

**Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)**

1. **What is the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)?**

a. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is a matching assistance program that provides grants for 50% of the cost of the acquisition and/or development of outdoor recreation sites and facilities.

b. New programmatic guidance from the National Parks Service has resulted in some key changes to the application processes. DNR has compiled all of these changes into the LWCF Changes Quick Guide.

1. **Who are eligible applicants for the LWCF Fund?**

**a.** Only park and recreation boards established under Indiana law are eligible. The park and recreation board must also have a current 5-year master plan for parks and recreation on file, approved by the Community Grants & Trails Section.

1. **What are examples of types of projects for the LWCF?**

a. Grant applications may consist of land acquisition and/or facility construction or renovation for local public parks for outdoor recreation. New parks or additions to existing parks may be funded.

b. All land developed must be controlled by the park board through direct ownership. Examples of types of projects include:

 i. acquiring a park or natural area;

 ii. picnic areas;

iii. sports and playfields, such as playgrounds, ballfields, court facilities, and golf courses;

iv. water-oriented facilities for boating, swimming, and access to lakes, rivers, and streams;

 v. natural areas and interpretive facilities;

 vi. campgrounds;

 vii. fishing and hunting areas;

 viii. winter sports facilities;

 ix. amphitheaters and bandstands;

 x. trails;

 xi. roads, restrooms, utilities, park maintenance buildings;

 xii. Nature centers

1. **How much is my community eligible to apply for?**

a. The Land and Water Conservation Fund local applicants may request amounts ranging from a minimum of $250,000 up to a maximum of $1,000,000.

1. **How is LWCF funding received?**

a. Because the LWCF is a reimbursement program, the project sponsor does not receive the grant funds once the application has been approved. Rather, the sponsor is reimbursed 50% of the actual costs of the project. The sponsor must have the local matching 50% of the project costs available when the application is submitted. In order to receive the money reserved for the project, a reimbursement request must be submitted to your grant coordinator.

1. **What bonus points will I be eligible for as a community in the Stellar Pathways Process?**
	1. Stellar designees will be awarded additional points toward a Land and Water Conservation Fund Application. The amount will be 5% of the total points available.
2. **For the Land and Water Conservation Fund, do all participating communities have to have an active parks board to be eligible? For instance, if Region A consists of County A, Town B, and Town C, do all three of the municipalities have to have an active parks board to be eligible to apply?**
	1. An active parks board would be necessary for the municipality taking on the project.
3. **For the Land and Water Conservation Fund, if the community is actively creating a 5-year Master Parks Plan, are they eligible for the set-aside funding?**
	1. Each community applying for Land and Water Conservation Fund funding must have an approved 5-year Master Parks Plan. If a community has a plan in the process, DNR can try their best to help complete the plan and get it approved. Unfortunately, if a community does not have a plan started, it’s unlikely the community will complete it in time.
4. **What is the Historic Preservation Fund?**

a. The Historic Preservation Fund is a federal program administered by the DHPA to assist important local preservation projects and help the State meet its goals for cultural resource management. The DHPA makes grant awards in three different project categories through a competitive annual round.

1. **Who are eligible applicants for the Historic Preservation Fund?**

**a.** Eligible applicants include registered not-for-profit organizations, county and municipal government agencies, and colleges and universities. Historic buildings or structures to be documented or rehabilitated with grant federal funds must already be listed in the National Register of Historic Places at the time of application.

1. **What is the National Register for Historic Places?**

a. The National Register for Historic Places is the federal list of historic properties that have been formally recognized by the National Park Service. The DHPA reviews and maintains the nominations for Indiana properties included in the National Register.

1. **What is the Indiana Register of Historic Sites and Structures?**

 a. The Indiana Register of Historic Sites and Structures (the State Register) was created by an act of the Indiana General Assembly in 1981. The Department of Historic Preservation and Archaeology administers the program. Note that all Indiana properties listed in the National Register are automatically listed in the State Register. However, sometimes properties are listed solely in the State Register.

1. **What are examples of types of projects for the HPF?**
	1. **Architectural and Historic projects** include: National register nominations for eligible historic districts; public education programs and materials about preservation, such as workshops, training events, publications, and brochures; feasibility studies or historic structure reports for National Register-listed properties; plans and specifications for the rehabilitation of National Register-listed properties; and historic context studies with National Register nominations for certain types of historic resources. Grant requests in this category can range from $5,000 to $50,000.
	2. **Archaeological projects**, include: Survey, testing, and research focused on specific geographic areas or cultural groups; National Register nominations for individual or multiple archaeological items; and public education programs and materials about archaeology. Grant request in this category can range from $10,000 to $50,000.

c. **Acquisition and Development** projects include: preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and acquisition of National Register-listed properties. This category is often referred to as “bricks and mortar money,” and issued to help save buildings and structures that are threatened or endangered in some way. Properties that are not already listed in the National Register are not eligible for HPF grant assistance. Grant requests in this category can range from $10,000 to $75,000.

1. **What is the timeline for the HPF application and implementation?**

a. August 1: Application packets are posted on the DHPA’s website.

Early October: The grant application deadline is normally the first Friday in October.

Late January: Projects selected for funding are tentatively notified of funding status.

June 1: Earliest project start date. Projects cannot begin until DHPA has received confirmation of its award from the National Park Service and has provided official grant awards to recipients, which may be later than June 1.

June 30: Latest project end date, Projects must be completed by the end of June two years after the grant award.

1. **What are the match requirements for the HPF Program?**

a. All grant awards must be matched with funds from any non-federal source. The applicant must document that it has the required matching funds available within its own accounts at the time of application. The short program cycle does not allow time to fundraise the required match during the grant period.

b. **70/30** grant-to-match ration is available only to colleges and universities for archaeological survey projects conducted in prioritized areas due to the DHPA’s need for site location data.

c. **60/40** grant-to-match ration is available only to communities that are federally designated as Certified Local Governments (CLGs) to conduct any type of project.

d. **50/50** grant-to-match ratio is available to all other applicants, regardless of project category.

1. **How is HPF funding received?**

a. All grant funds are paid out on a reimbursement basis as work progresses, not as a lump sum at the beginning of the project. The grant recipient must pay project costs with its own funds, then seek periodic reimbursement by carefully documenting project expenses. Grant reimbursements are paid electronically about 30 days after submission and approval of appropriate documentation. The DHPA normally hold the final 15% of the grant funds as a retention until the completed project s reviewed and approved.

**Indiana State Department of Agriculture**

1. **What is program offered by the Indiana State Department of Agriculture?**
	1. This new program is called the Stellar Food and Agriculture Program. The Stellar Food and Agriculture Program provides funding to empower local communities to address food insecurity and access to local foods, through public and private partnerships.
2. **What are examples of the Stellar Food and Agriculture Program?**
	1. Project ides may include, but are not limited to:
		1. Farm to institution (school, hospital, etc.) programs;
		2. Farmer’s Markets;
		3. Projects addressing food deserts;
		4. Agriculture education programs who are involved in food production for their local school or community;
		5. Community supported agriculture programs
		6. Programs that increase education and knowledge in youth about food and agriculture in Indiana.

**Indiana Destination Development Corporation (IDDC)**

1. **What services will be offered by the Indiana Destination Development Corporation?**
	1. IDDC has submitted a program plan to provide quality of life cooperative marketing. Two (2) designated Stellar Pathway communities are eligible for $50,000 to $100,000 worth of in-kind marketing services aimed at both external and internal market audiences.
2. **When will these in-kind services be made available to Stellar Pathway Designees?**
	1. The in-kind services will be made available to Stellar Pathway Participants in 2028. The cooperative agreement is continent upon available funding in the State Budget for co-operative marketing.

**Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC)**

1. **Question:  If my community participates in the Stellar Pathways Program, will the communities’ local match be eligible for READI 2.0 Program’s requirement of 1:1 match from local public funding?**
	1. Answer: Yes.

**LOI Submission Process**

1. **Which documents should be included with the LOI packet?**
	1. Past and Existing Plans Excel Attachment
	2. Current Projects Excel Attachment
	3. Local Unit of Government(s) Financials for all participating entities
	4. Letter of Interest from Local Unit of Government(s) (Only applicable to Non-Government Lead Applicants)
	5. Interlocal Agreement (Only applicable to County Government-led Applicants)
	6. Letter of Acknowledgement from an MPO
2. Application Information and Narrative Answers
3. **Does each Town Council President and County Commissioner President sign the interlocal agreement or can the region designate a signatory?**
	1. If the Lead Applicant of the Stellar Pathways Program is a County government, the interlocal agreement mut be signed by the County commissioners and County council president and each participating municipality must provide the signature of the chief executive officer of the city or town.
4. **Is there a page limit for the LOI?**
	1. No. there is no page limit. However, the questions do have a character limit.
5. **Will we need to submit a letter of interest (LOI)?**
	1. A hard copy of LOI will not be accepted. Everything will be submitted via the Grants Management System (GMS). All questions are answered and all attachments attached.
6. **Can I submit the LOI in person or does it have to be online only?**
	1. The LOI must be completed online. No printed documents or hard copies will be accepted.
7. **What other type of requirements are required of a designated Region?**
8. Each designated community is required to hold four meetings a year for the four-year designation period with the State team to provide project updates.
9. Each designated region will be required to provide data throughout the designation period.
10. Participating communities must adopt an inter-local agreement committing to the partnership for a period of at least four years by final application.
11. **Is an inter-local agreement need to be in place at the LOI submission?**
	1. The agreement needs to be in place upon submission of the LOI.
12. **When is the LOI due to OCRA?**
	1. The Letter of Intent will be due to OCRA on May 1, 2024.

**LOI Evaluation and Program Selection**

1. **How will the Stellar Pathway Committee evaluate the Letter of Intent?**

a. The Stellar Pathway Committee will evaluate the Letter of Intent based on the following information provided by the applicant(s):

i. Attachments (all must be present to be selected as a Stellar Pathway Participant)

ii. Narrative answers (all must be present to be selected as a Stellar Pathway Participant)

b. Additionally, once all communities LOI’s have been reviewed, Stellar Pathway Committee members will review each LOI individually and provide feedback. Lastly, each pathway committee member will be asked to rank the communities from first to last.

c. All Stellar Pathway committee members will meet to discuss the results of the evaluation process and select four (4) communities to participate in the Stellar Pathway Process.

1. **When will the communities know if they were selected as a Stellar Pathway Participant?**

a. Stellar Pathway Participants will be selected and announced in June 2024. Once announced, Stellar Pathway Participants receive $50,000 towards the creation of their Strategic Investment Plans.

1. **What happens if our Region is selected?**

a. If your Region is selected, the Region will be enrolled in the Stellar Pathway Process. All information regarding the process will be sent to the community key contact person to disseminate to the group.

1. **What happens if our Region is not selected?**

a. If your Region is not selected, OCRA will provide feedback and rationale from the Stellar Pathway Committee to each participating Region.

**What is the Stellar Pathways process?**

1. **What is process for Stellar Pathway Participants?**

a. Stellar Pathway Participants will receive facilitated community engagement and individualized coaching from Ball State University Indiana Communities Institute based on the Letter of Intent submission.

b. Stellar Pathway Participants will utilize this time to do the pre-planning, engineering, and project design associated with the creation of the Strategic Investment Plan.

1. **What is the timeline for the Stellar Pathway Participants?**

a. **January 2024 –** Program Launch

b. **February – March 2024 –** Regional Workshops

c. **April – May 2024 –** Applicants gather materials for the Letter of Intent

d. **May 2024** – Letter of Intent is due to OCRA.

e. **June 2024 –** Announcement of Stellar Pathway Participants

f. **July – October 2024** – Stellar Pathway Participants will develop their Strategic Investment Plans.

g. **November 2024 –** Strategic Investment Plans will be due to OCRA. In-person presentations to the Stellar Pathway Committee.

h. **January 2025** – Announcement of two Stellar Pathways Designees.

1. **What is the purpose of the planning grant?**
	1. The planning grant will be used by the region to develop the final Strategic Investment Plan. Each community enrolled in the Stellar Pathway Process will be allocated $50,000 from the Office of Community and Rural Affairs to be used towards the Strategic Investment Plan and planning process.
2. **What is Ball State’s Indiana Communities Institutes involvement?**
	1. The role is to:
		1. Provide feedback to the communities regarding their internal alignment and their alignment with each other.
		2. Compile and analyze the Letter of Intent feedback. Create content related to items identified in the Letter of Intent and feedback from Stellar Pathway Committee.
		3. Facilitate a minimum of one (1) meeting with your community.
3. **How long will the Ball State meetings be?**
	1. Ball State will work with finalists to determine meeting logistics.

**Strategic Investment Plan**

1. **Does the involvement of local foundations increase the viability of a project?**
	1. Yes, past designees have involved their local foundations to help with the sustainability of their efforts.
2. **If a community, that is a part of a region, is submitting a streetscape project for the upcoming CDBG round, will it affect negatively their LOI application?**
	1. No, it will not have an impact on the review of the region’s LOI.
3. **Does the Strategic Investment Plan need to identify projects for every partner agency?**
	1. No, each partner agency does not need to be included in the Strategic Investment Plan. But their involvement as a partner should be clearly identified throughout both the LOI and SIP. It is highly recommended to create projects for use of the set-aside funding.
4. **How should we divide our projects throughout the region?**
	1. Each community should know their own priorities, while as partners there should be consensus about regional priorities. One of the outcomes of the work with Ball State will be a suggested regional prioritization based on input from each community.
5. **What Sections are required for the Strategic Investment Plan?**
	1. OCRA has provided a document titled “Indiana Stellar Pathways Program Strategic Investment Plan Guidelines”. This document outlines the minimum requirements. Sections that should be included include:
		1. Cover Page
		2. Section 1 – Current State of the Region; Introduction
		3. Section 2 – Current Momentum
		4. Section 3 – Engagement
		5. Section 4 – Data Profile
		6. Section 5 – Project and Program Identification
		7. Key Acknowledgements
		8. Attachments – Budget Matrix

**Final Selection of Designees**

1. **How will representatives from BSU be involved in the selection of the two designees?**
	1. BSU will only be involved in the program during the creation of the SIPs by providing sessions in the communities prior to the submission of the SIPs.
2. **What is the structure for the Stellar Pathway Participants community presentations?**
	1. Each Community will present their Strategic Investment Plan to the Stellar Committee who will then review the information and strategic investment plan. The committee will then decide on the 2 communities that will be designated as Stellar.
3. **Who should I contact if I have questions?**
	1. All questionsshouldbe directed to stellarcommunities@ocra.in.gov.

**Implementation Period**

1. **How long after designation do regions have to complete their projects?**
	1. Regions have five years to use designated funding to complete projects identified as part of their strategic investment plan.
2. **If my community participates in the Stellar Pathway Process, at what point would my community be ineligible for Community Development Block Grant Funds?**
	1. Participating communities of the Stellar Pathway process will only be ineligible to apply for CDBG at the start of the designation period. OCRA encourages all communities to apply for annual rounds of Community Development Block Grant.

**Miscellaneous**

1. **What are requirements associated with providing public access to local meetings?**
	1. All meetings for the development of projects should follow Indiana’s Public Access Laws. Questions should be sent to the Public Access Counselor.
2. **How will the process for technical assistance be determined for partner agencies?**
	1. Technical Assistance will be offered at the regional workshops as well as to chosen Stellar Pathway Participants.
3. **Are communities required to have an Indiana Main Street organization?**
	1. No, communities are neither required to have an Indiana Main Street organization nor required to fund their community’s Main Street organization. Collaboration is a key to success within the program. Past successful communities have partnered with key community organizations including main street organizations, chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, community foundations, and school corporations.
	2. If you have downtown projects in your Main Street district, and you have a Main Street organization, they must be involved in the conversation.