



1. Who can apply?

- 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:

There are **21 entitlement communities and 2 entitlement counties** within the State of Indiana:

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

- Regional applications are restricted to those within a single county due to ARPA funding distribution. Regions across county lines may not apply.

2. Does our community need to be a CDBG Low-to-Moderate Income area?

- As noted above, communities must not be entitlement communities but do not need to meet CDBG LMI requirements to apply to be a HELP-designated community. CDBG National Objectives will only be required after the SIP is developed and when the community or region begins seeking OCRA funding to implement projects. Proposed projects that request OCRA funding must meet a National Objective and be an eligible activity under Section 105(a) of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. In general, the project must either

- ◇ Benefit an area or limited clientele whose population is at least 51% low- and moderate-income, or
- ◇ Aid in the prevention or elimination of slums or blight.

3. How many communities will you be designating?

- We will be designating no more than 4 communities or regions in each of the 3 cohort groups. Each cohort group will have program start dates spaced 6 months apart. In total, this program will assist 12 communities/regions.

4. Does my community have to have a current comprehensive plan?

- The community does **not** need to have a current comprehensive plan. The HELP Process includes community engagement and crucial planning around the Four Pathways, which will culminate into a Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) that creates long-term goals for your community.

5. What is the timeframe for HELP?

- HELP is a 52-week process culminating in a SIP and then followed by an implementation stage, but communities are expected to work at the speed necessary to them. Ideally, the timeframe will be broken into four phases:
 - ◇ 26 weeks of Team and Community Collaboration
 - ◇ 14 weeks of Pathways Assessments & Project Identification



- ◇ 12 weeks of SIP Development
- ◇ Implementation ongoing until December 2026

6. What state agencies are included in HELP?

- OCRA is proud to have IHCDA, INDOT, IAC, and ISDH as partners in HELP. Each partner will provide support to communities to aid in the implementation of the SIP.

7. Where does the money in the set-aside come from?

- The money that HELP communities may apply to receive comes from the 2021 installment of the CARES Act, or CDBG-CV, as well as our annual CDBG allocation.

8. How will HELP increase the capacity of rural Hoosier communities?

- The requirement of hiring a community coordinator ensures substantial capacity augmentation. This role will serve as the point of information for all things related to your community's HELP experience. OCRA will be providing \$20,000 to each selected community to fund this position **in the first year**. Communities are required to supply a \$20,000 local match to fund this position, and they are encouraged to provide a minimum \$40,000 to support this position in subsequent years for SIP implementation.
- This role can be an existing employee, but **the majority of the community coordinator's time must be spent working on HELP (minimum of 30 hours per week)**. This employee does not have to be employed by the local unit of government and can instead be housed within a separate community organization such as with the local Community Foundation or as additional staff capacity to a local Main Street.

9. How do we show proof of a Community Coordinator match?

- You will need to upload a signed local resolution that commits funds for the Community Coordinator, along with a gateway report showing the latest fund account balances.

10. If a community decides to use an existing employee as its Community Coordinator for the HELP program, can the employee's salary count as the \$20,000 match to the state \$20,000?

- The introduction of a community coordinator role is to build capacity for communities participating in HELP. If the community wants to use an existing position for the coordinator, that is acceptable *as long* as a minimum of thirty hours is spent on tasks relating to HELP outlined in the [job description](#).
- The \$20k does not have to come from the CLFRF allocation. The only requirement is that the \$20k is *separate* from the 30% allocation of CLFRF; it may be a portion of your CLFRF allocation or from another bucket of funds. Therefore, if your coordinator is an existing position, the salary may count as the \$20k match. Of course, this \$20k requirement is a minimum – if you would like to provide more to this position, you are welcome to do so.

11. Match requirements/ARP match?

- What about communities who have already passed an ordinance obligating their ARP funds?
 - ◇ If your community has already passed an ordinance obligating ARP funds, we would like for you to submit the ordinance in your application and status of obligated funds. We also would like a written commitment to alter the ordinance.
- Why is there a 30% CLFRF allocation minimum?



- ◇ This program helps your community use your CLFRF (Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Funds) to implement projects that will be long-lasting and effectual in your community. The requirement of HELP is an investment into your community, and communities are invited to devote a higher percent of your CLFRF allocation into the program.
- ◇ In addition to the 30% CLFRF allocation minimum commitment, each community will have to provide a \$20,000 match for the community coordinator position. At this time, the U.S. Treasury guidance permits the use of CLFRF for administrative purposes.
 1. “Recipients may use funds to cover the portion of payroll and benefits of employees corresponding to time spent on administrative work necessary due to the COVID–19 public health emergency and its negative economic impacts. This includes, but is not limited to, costs related to disbursing payments of Fiscal Recovery Funds and managing new grant programs established using Fiscal Recovery Funds.” ([See Treasury FAQ 10.2](#))

12. I am a previous Stellar Designee, am I still eligible to apply?

- Yes.

13. If my community is participating in READI, can my community still apply for HELP?

- Yes. A community’s participation in READI should not hinder their HELP application. HELP can easily be seen as a compliment to READI; Being a designated HELP community will strengthen your community’s voice at your region’s READI table from increased knowledge in Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. In the long-term, participation in HELP will give your community the tools to be a better partner in your region from increased community capacity.

14. What should I do if I can’t attend the Informational Webinar or Live Q&A Sessions?

- Watch the recordings on our website or send in your questions [here](#).

15. What is CivicLab’s role in HELP?

- CivicLab is a nonprofit based out of Columbus, Indiana, dedicated to advancing the practice of civic collaboration. With CivicLab, communities will go through an intense data-training process to better understand the needs and trends of their communities. This process includes two elements:
 - ◇ CivicLab will present an online, level-setting training that uses an equity lens to explore the two most significant contexts within a rural community: 1) the neighborhood places where people live, work, learn, and play; and 2) the community systems that contribute to the quality of these places including social services, health care, justice, education, foundations, employers, faith-based organizations, local government, and economic and community development.
 - ◇ Communities will also receive research and practices about the factors that predict the differences in upward economic mobility within communities. Each community in the cohort will receive custom data maps presented at the census block group level for the categories of enhancing quality of place, promoting community wellness, advancing e-connectivity, and strengthening local economies. The CivicLab team will demonstrate how to use the tools and then facilitate a team discussion about the contrasts, differences, and patterns seen across the maps. Ultimately, the data maps help a community see hidden inequities and think about how a place-based approach might be different than the way their community is currently serving people and organizing their work.



16. What are the institutes of higher education's roles in HELP?

- All four universities will assist communities in developing projects related to the four pathways. Purdue Center for Regional Development will work on Advancing e-Connectivity, Indiana Center for Rural Engagement on Promoting Community Wellness, Ball State Indiana Communities Institute on Enhancing Quality of Place, and Ivy Tech Community College on Strengthening Local Economies. With them, there will be ten weeks of Pathway Committee Meetings.
- The Indiana University Center for Rural Engagement will conduct a thorough evaluation of existing plans during the first twelve weeks of the program. They will discern what projects are eligible uses of CLFRF and how to best support your community's development.

17. What projects are eligible?

- Eligible projects are those that align with the guidelines of the American Rescue Plan Act. Broadly, this includes:
 - ◇ A response to the public health emergency caused by or the negative impacts directly attributable to COVID-19,
 - ◇ Any provision of government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue,
 - ◇ Providing premium pay to essential workers,
 - ◇ Necessary investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure, and
 - ◇ Direct aid to Qualified Census Tracts (QCTs) or other communities adversely impacted by the public health crisis.
- We also encourage communities to reference the [US Treasury FAQ](#) as well as the OCRA toolkit on these funds located [here](#).

18. What are the four pathways?

- The four pathways, Advancing e-Connectivity, Enhancing Quality of Place, Promoting Community Wellness and Strengthening Local Economies, are key community development themes to keep the goals of HELP and the CLFRF at the center of this program. Each community will have four Pathways Teams of about six people who will be devoted to brainstorming and implementing projects related to each pathway.

19. What is included in the application? How do we submit an application?

- The application includes an Intake Form, which is a narrative self-assessment to be filled out by the Chief Elected Official. Required uploads to be included are:
 - ◇ Form on existing plans and efforts around each of the four pathways (template on our website)
 - ◇ Letter of Interest from highest elected official, relaying support, financial and time commitment, and which 5-7 community members will be joining this effort on the core advisory team.
 - ◇ Council resolution committing matching funds \$20k for Community Coordinator positions.

20. What criteria will be used to evaluate the application?

- Communities will be evaluated on their ability to form committed Core and Advisory Teams, the expected benefit of participation in HELP, their history of or reception to community collaboration and alignment in support of sustainable development.

21. What should I do if I have more questions?

- Submit additional questions here: <https://forms.office.com/g/kpa441kwKS>



- As always, you are encouraged to first contact [your district's Community Liaison](#) for questions about this program.