



USET

SOVEREIGNTY PROTECTION FUND

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Transmitted via ONAP-ICDBG@hud.gov

March 13, 2020

Hilary Atkin, Director, Office of Grants Management
Office of Native American Programs
Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street, SW, Room 4108
Washington DC 20410

Dear Director Atkin,

On behalf of the United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF), we write to provide comment to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on revisions to the grant funding cycles within the Office of Native American Programs (ONAP) from one-year to two-year cycles, specifically the Indian Community Development Block Grant Program (ICDBG). According to HUD, ONAP is moving to a new funding cycle which would “encourage long-term planning,” “further support the development of larger projects,” and would relieve the workload of Tribal applicants who may have limited resources for submitting grant applications. USET SPF underscores that changes in funding cycles and awards would have an impact on the amount and timeliness of resources available to Tribal housing programs. We further note that these changes were made without Tribal consultation and that the agency is seeking input after implementation during recent funding cycles.

USET SPF is a non-profit, inter-Tribal organization advocating on behalf of thirty (30) federally recognized Tribal Nations from the Northeastern Woodlands to the Everglades and across the Gulf of Mexico¹. USET SPF is dedicated to promoting, protecting, and advancing the inherent sovereign rights and authorities of Tribal Nations and in assisting its membership in dealing effectively with public policy issues.

Changes to ICDBG Funding Impact Tribal Nations

Funds provided through the ICDBG are essential in the development of housing solutions for our member Tribal Nations through providing updates to outdated housing units, maintaining current structures, and developing essential public facilities for our governments. In many instances, they are the only construction funds accessed by Tribal Nations. Many Tribal Nations seek the flexibilities under ICDBG to ensure housing is available for our communities as a solution to the burdensome requirements under the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act.

¹ USET SPF member Tribal Nations include: Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas (TX), Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians (ME), Catawba Indian Nation (SC), Cayuga Nation (NY), Chickahominy Indian Tribe (VA), Chickahominy Indian Tribe–Eastern Division (VA), Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana (LA), Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana (LA), Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (NC), Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians (ME), Jena Band of Choctaw Indians (LA), Mashantucket Pequot Indian Tribe (CT), Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe (MA), Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida (FL), Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MS), Mohegan Tribe of Indians of Connecticut (CT), Narragansett Indian Tribe (RI), Oneida Indian Nation (NY), Pamunkey Indian Tribe (VA), Passamaquoddy Tribe at Indian Township (ME), Passamaquoddy Tribe at Pleasant Point (ME), Penobscot Indian Nation (ME), Poarch Band of Creek Indians (AL), Rappahannock Tribe (VA), Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe (NY), Seminole Tribe of Florida (FL), Seneca Nation of Indians (NY), Shinnecock Indian Nation (NY), Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana (LA), and the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) (MA).

Because there is strength in Unity

Revisions to the funding cycle for ICDBG would not have the intended effect as stated within HUD's February 13th "Dear Tribal Leader" letter. Instead, for many Tribal Nations, changing the funding cycle will hinder efforts to ensure our communities have access to housing by delaying access to funding, disrupting long-term planning, and encroaching on the ability to address specific housing issues. For instance, if a Tribal Nation's application is unsuccessful under the new cycle, the Tribal Nation will have to wait two years, as opposed to one year, in order to resubmit an application for critical housing funds. This, in turn, delays processes associated with improvement and necessary revisions to applications that will be submitted for the next application cycle.

Further, the proposed change could result in a reduction in total funds year over year for successful applicants. In an example provided by a USET SPF member Tribal Nation, the ICDBG was previously offered at \$600,000 annually. That Tribal Nation could apply annually and be awarded \$1.2 million over two years. Under the revised process, the two-year total would be capped at \$900,000. This is a loss of \$300,000 to that Tribal Nation, even if successful.

Conclusion

As an agency of the federal government, HUD has treaty and trust obligations to Tribal Nations, which include ensuring equitable access to funding intended to support housing and other infrastructure within our communities. While we appreciate HUD's interest in alleviating Tribal Nation workloads as we seek ONAP program grants, USET SPF underscores that extending the funding cycle to two years could hinder current processes, as well as the award and distribution of funds for successful proposals. We strongly recommend HUD work closely with Tribal Nations through meaningful and ongoing consultation to determine appropriate funding mechanisms. We urge that any changes avoid arbitrary caps or funding limits, and reflect the diversity of government structures, priorities, and planning across Indian Country. USET SPF looks forward to our continued work with HUD on this and other issues facing Indian Country. Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact Ms. Liz Malerba, USET SPF Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs, at LMalerba@usetinc.org or 202-624-3550.

Sincerely,



Kirk Francis
President



Kitcki A. Carroll
Executive Director