

Crawford County
Community Development Block Grant
Program Year 2023
Public Hearing/Meeting Comments

1. Introduction

Good evening, everyone. My name is David Zak, and I am the President and CEO of the Crawford Partnership for Education and Economic Development. I am here tonight to speak to you about the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program and the work that we are doing to support economic development and community improvement in Crawford County.

The Crawford Partnership has successfully won the contract to administer the CDBG funds on behalf of Crawford County. As the program administrator, our role is to help communities identify and develop projects that meet the program's objectives and requirements. Our team has extensive experience working with the CDBG program, and we are committed to ensuring that the funds are used effectively and in a manner that benefits the community as a whole.

2. Overview of CDBG Program

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program is a federal program that provides funding to states, cities, and counties to support community development activities such as infrastructure improvements, housing development, and economic development. The program is administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and has been in existence since 1974. The program is designed to be flexible, allowing communities to use the funding in a variety of ways that best address their unique needs and priorities.

The CDBG program has been successful in supporting community development initiatives across the United States. Since its inception, the program has provided more than \$150 billion in funding to communities across the country, helping to create jobs, improve infrastructure, and support affordable housing development.

One of the key strengths of the CDBG program is its emphasis on community engagement and participation. Communities are required to develop a plan for how they will use the funding, and are encouraged to engage with residents and stakeholders throughout the planning process. This helps to ensure that the projects funded through the program are responsive to the needs and priorities of the community.

3. National Objectives

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program is designed to help communities improve their economic vitality and quality of life by providing grants for projects that benefit low- and moderate-income individuals and families. The program has three national objectives that are intended to guide the use of CDBG funds. The first objective is to benefit low- and moderate-income individuals and families. This means that at the state level, at least 70 percent of CDBG funds must be used for projects that benefit people with household incomes at or below 80 percent of the area median income. Locally, the standard requirement for the Allocation program is 51 percent.

The second national objective is to address urgent community needs, such as improving infrastructure, providing affordable housing, or supporting economic development initiatives. Finally, the third objective is to eliminate slum and blight in communities. This objective allows communities to use CDBG funds to address deteriorating or deteriorated areas that pose a threat to public health, safety, or welfare.

To ensure that CDBG funds are being used effectively, communities are required to develop a plan for how they will use the funding and are encouraged to engage with residents and stakeholders throughout the planning process. Additionally, communities must report on the progress and impact of their CDBG-funded projects, allowing for ongoing evaluation and accountability. Overall, the CDBG program's national objectives provide a framework for supporting community development initiatives that are responsive to the needs and priorities of individual communities.

4. Eligible Activities

There are several eligible activities that can be funded through the CDBG program. These include:

- Housing development: CDBG funds can be used to support the construction or rehabilitation of affordable housing units for low- and moderate-income families.
- Infrastructure improvements: CDBG funds can be used to support the construction or rehabilitation of public facilities such as water and sewer systems, streets, and community centers.
- Economic development: CDBG funds can be used to support business development and job creation initiatives, such as small business loans and workforce training programs.
- Public services: CDBG funds can be used to support programs that provide social services to low- and moderate-income individuals and families, such as child care, health care, and job training.

5. Available Funding

CDBG funding is provided through an annual allocation process, with each state receiving a set amount of funding based on a formula that takes into account population, poverty rates, and other factors. Local governments can then apply for funding through their state, with priority given to projects that address urgent community needs.

Crawford County in Ohio is eligible for various Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) programs that offer different funding amounts and objectives. The Community Development Allocation program is available to provide grant funding for projects such as construction or improvement of public facilities, demolition of blighted buildings, and projects that aim to increase accessibility to the handicapped and elderly or preservation of historic buildings or areas. For program year 2023, Crawford County will be eligible to apply for \$220,000 in Allocation, which translates into \$178,000, for up to two projects. The Allocation program is on a two-year cycle.

The Critical Infrastructure program provides competitive grant funding for high-priority improvements, such as roads, storm damage, fire protection facilities, and other public facilities. Projects must be certified as in critical (failed or failing) condition by an engineer and must have anecdotal evidence that is negatively impacting people that live near them. Crawford County can receive up to \$500,000 through this program. Meanwhile, the Neighborhood Revitalization program offers grant funding to improve the quality of life, livability, and functionality of distressed areas and neighborhoods. Eligible activities include public facilities, improvements in targeted areas of distress that do not fit within the criteria of other CDBG competitive programs. Crawford County can receive up to \$750,000 through this program. The Critical Infrastructure program has an annual application cycle. If, however, not all of the funding is

spent from the July 1 application deadline, another round of funding will be made available in December or January.

The Residential Public Infrastructure Grant (RPIG) program provides grant funding for water and/or sanitary sewer projects primarily for residential users. Projects must have a documented health hazard (e.g., EPA, NPDES). The project must be located in an area with a low- to moderate-income population of at least 51 percent and must have a minimum total project cost of \$200,000. Crawford County can receive up to \$750,000 through this program. The RPIG program has an open application cycle, but funding can sometimes be gone by October (each funding year opens on July 1).

Finally, the Flexible Grant Program offers grant funding for eligible activities that do not fit with other CDBG programs. This program is designed to provide support for economic development, community development, housing, and downtown activities. The amount of available funds through this program varies depending on the needs of the community. The Flexible Grant Program is on an open cycle.

Overall, the CDBG programs offer a range of funding opportunities to help Crawford County improve its infrastructure, support economic development, and enhance the quality of life of its residents.

6. Past Activities

Crawford County, Ohio has received several Community Development Block Grants over the past few years. In Program Year 2015, the county received a grant totaling \$116,000. The funds were used for countywide demolition, with seven structures slated for demolition. Additionally, transportation services were provided to help residents access essential services.

Program Year 2017 saw the county receiving a grant totaling \$607,000, which helped fund several projects. The Livingston Avenue Sewer Extension in Crestline saw the installation of 508 linear feet of sewer line, while the Galion-based Neff Market Building was demolished. Twenty buildings in Galion's downtown area had their facades improved and code violations addressed, and five low- and moderate-income owner-occupied properties in Osceola received on-site septic repairs. The County successfully competed for a \$300,000 Downtown Revitalization grant, in addition to the \$220,000 in Allocation funding and a likely carryover from 2016.

In Program Year 2019, Crawford County received a grant totaling \$220,000. An Impediments Study was conducted to identify and address fair housing issues. Cross Street Sidewalks in Crestline received \$76,000, and River Street Sidewalks and Whetstone Street Sidewalks in Bucyrus received \$54,200 and \$39,800, respectively. The rest was used for program administration.

For the latest PY 2021 grant, the county planned to install sewer lines in Galion and a handicap ramp in Chatfield. However, those projects fell through, and the grant is now supporting a Salvation Army facility/Meals on Wheels. It's worth noting that the Community Development Block Grant program provides flexibility in funding use, allowing communities to prioritize their unique needs and issues.

7. Summary of Program Requirements

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program has several requirements that communities must adhere to when using the funds. First, the project should aim to be finished in 2024, but the official deadline to have all work completed is August 31, 2025. Second, Davis-Bacon prevailing wage rates must apply. This requirement stipulates that workers on construction projects funded through the CDBG program must be paid a wage that is equal to or higher than the prevailing wage for the same job in the

local area. This helps to ensure that workers receive fair wages and that communities do not engage in unfair labor practices.

Other requirements of the CDBG program include the development of a plan for how the funds will be used and regular reporting on the progress and impact of CDBG-funded projects. Additionally, communities must ensure that at least 70 percent of the funds are used to benefit low- and moderate-income individuals and families. Communities are also encouraged to engage with residents and stakeholders throughout the planning process to ensure that the projects funded through the program are responsive to the needs and priorities of the community. Overall, the CDBG program's requirements are designed to ensure that the funds are used effectively and in a manner that benefits the community as a whole.

8. The Process

The process for applying for and receiving funding through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program involves several steps. The first step is to become informed about the Community Development Block Grant program. In addition to speaking at council meetings in Bucyrus, Crestline, Galion, and New Washington over the next two weeks, we are also holding a public hearing on Tuesday April 11 at 1:30 p.m. at the Crawford County Commissioner offices at 117 E. Mansfield St., Bucyrus. We are also holding a virtual Public Informational Meeting on Thursday, April 13, 2023, at 7:00 p.m., which will be held on Zoom. At this meeting, interested parties can learn about the program and the application process. Information about the program, as well as the link to the Zoom meeting, can be found on our website at buildcrawford.org.

Communities and nonprofits in Crawford County are asked to fill out a preliminary needs questionnaire, and if they have defined projects with budgets, a project proposal questionnaire. The final date for submitting a project proposal to us is Tuesday, May 2, 2023, but we recommend submitting it earlier, in the event any additional information is needed.

The Commissioners will then review and choose the projects that will be funded between the Project Submission date and the Second Public Hearing. The Second Public Hearing is required by law and will be held on Tuesday, May 16, 2023, at 1:30 p.m. The location of the hearing is 112 E. Mansfield St., Bucyrus, OH. At this hearing, the Commissioners will review the proposed projects and select those that will receive funding.

Finally, the application submission deadline for the selected projects is June 14, 2023. The County will then submit the applications to the State of Ohio for review and approval. Throughout the process, community engagement and input are encouraged, and communities must ensure that at least 70 percent of the funds are used to benefit low- and moderate-income individuals and families. Overall, the process for applying for and receiving funding through the CDBG program is designed to be transparent and responsive to the needs and priorities of individual communities.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Community Development Block Grant program is an important source of funding for communities across the United States. By supporting a wide range of community development activities, the program helps to create jobs, improve infrastructure, and support affordable housing development. The program's emphasis on community engagement and flexibility makes it an effective tool for addressing the unique needs and priorities of individual communities.