

CDBG funding available for local projects

By Corey Parks

Cities should utilize a variety of funding and financing strategies to meet their local community and economic development initiatives. Grant funds, the issuance of bonds, fundraisers, and public-private partnerships are a few of the ways that a project might be funded.

For projects that benefit low-to-moderate income individuals, the Arkansas Community and Economic Development Program, through the Grants office of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC), may provide needed resources.

The Arkansas Community and Economic Development Program is the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program for Arkansas. AEDC administers the CDBG program through an agreement between the State of Arkansas and the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. This program allows non-entitlement cities and counties to apply for grants to fund projects not covered under other funding categories. The project should benefit low-and-moderate-income community members, eliminate conditions of slum and blight, or address an urgent need.

Grants in the amount of \$75,000 to \$200,000 are available for projects such as homeless shelters, public libraries, food pantries, and infrastructure needs. This list is not fully comprehensive but it gives examples of projects funded in the past. Recently funded projects can be found throughout the state of Arkansas. Benton County was awarded \$185,000 for residential septic system improvements. Conway County's renovation of the Center for Exceptional Children's kitchen/cafeteria received \$182,435. Etowah received \$168,115 for drainage culverts and Howard County's new construction of the Rainbow Learning and Therapy Center was funded \$200,000.

General assistance funding helps cities complete projects that likely would not be possible otherwise. Applications for the upcoming cycle of General Assistance funding are due to the Grants Division by March 30. If you are interested in applying for these funds you should consider the following:

- Does my community project meet one of the national objectives?

- Is the project an eligible CDBG activity?
- Will the project address one of the high priority goals in the state's current Consolidated Plan?
- Is this project eligible for funding under another program in the current Annual Action Plan, making it an inappropriate fit for general assistance funding?

Seeking professional guidance can ensure the application is compliant with guidelines and is completed properly. While it is not required, AEDC recommends applicants work closely with their area Planning and Development District or a private professional who has received proper training from the AEDC. More information can be found on the Planning and Development Districts at www.arkansaseconomicregions.org and AEDC at www.arkansasedc.com/grants. Those applying for general assistance funds should also consider attending a training offered by AEDC so they are more familiar with the CDBG process.

UCA's Center for Community and Economic Development's (CCED) is partnering with AEDC to provide one of these trainings. Completion of the training results in a CDBG Grantee Training Certificate and 30 bonus points for the General Assistance grant application. Participants will gain an understanding of the grants management process, what qualifies as a good project, and how to audit proof their grant.

The next training session will be held on Friday, May 12 in Arkadelphia at the Dawson Education Cooperative. For more information on the Community and Economic Development training series visit uca.edu/cced/ced-training-series or contact us by phone at (501) 450-3460.



Corey Parks is the Project Coordinator of the Center for Community and Economic Development at the University of Central Arkansas.