

**Whatcom Household Utility Assistance:  
Whatcom County Grant Review Process and Contracting Timeline  
Oct. 28th, 2020**

**Approach**

We will utilize an eligibility-based approach to grant administration, which was developed by an interjurisdictional Steering Committee that met to develop uniform county-wide goals, allocations, eligibility and criteria for the business grant program. The grant application was structured to determine and prioritize eligible households.

Guidance from the WA State Dept of Commerce (“Coronavirus Relief Funds for Local Governments Frequently Asked Questions to Commerce, *Updated October 5, 2020*”) was used as direction to ensure compliance with the funding requirements. *See FAQ to Commerce, attached.*

Households were required to verify their level of business interruption, lost revenue, and adaptive measures due to COVID-19 and the costs associated with this interruption during a defined time period (March 1-Nov 30). *See copy of grant application, attached.*

**Household/Applicant Qualification Criteria**

The following criteria will be used to determine whether a household qualifies for assistance.

1. A primary residence within Whatcom County;
2. A customer/account holder of a participating water and sewer district;
3. Have incurred a financial hardship due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, such as a job loss, reduced work hours, lay off, illness or other circumstance leading to a significant reduction in household income or increase in expenses;
4. Past Due Balance;
  - a. A water and/or sewer account with a past due balance of 60 days or more
  - b. Balance may be partially unpaid or not paid
  - c. Balance must be between March 1<sup>st</sup> and Nov 30<sup>th</sup>
5. At least one of the following verifications of past due balance;
  - a. A current utility statement, stating the amount due/past due, upload by the applicant
  - b. Statement or equal documentation provided by the utility provider
6. Have submitted an application within the approved deadline;

## **Ranking Criteria**

The following criteria will be used to prioritize eligible applications.

### **Points Based Criteria:**

#### **a. Account Status**

- i. 90 Days or more Past Due = 15 Points
- ii. 60 Days Past Due = 10 Points
- iii. 30 Days Past Due = Does not qualify
- iv. Current Balance = Does not qualify

#### **b. Household Income**

- i. Reduced 75% or more = 10 Points
- ii. Reduced 50%-74% = 7 Points
- iii. Reduced 25% to 49% = 5 Points
- iv. Reduced up to 24% = 3 Points
- v. Unaffected/No Loss of income = 0 Points

#### **c. Household Size**

- i. 1 Point per individual living in home up to maximum of 8 points

## **Program Structure**

**Contractor:** Whatcom County will act as the program contractor and fulfill the following roles and responsibilities.

- Provide program qualifications and guidelines
- Provide scoring model for prioritizing program applicants
- Provide program application form
- Identify and contract with water and sewer districts as sub-recipient organization(s)
- Reimburse sub-recipient(s) for grant funds distributed to qualified applicants that have include all required documentation

**Sub-recipient:** Each independent water and sewer district will act as the program sub-recipient and fulfill the following roles and responsibilities.

- Sign sub-recipient agreement with Whatcom County
- Notify eligible customers of program availability
- Collect online and print submissions from applications
- Verify past due status of applicants
- Manually enter print submissions received into online form
- Upload copy of customer's current account statement if not already provided
- Distribute funds directly to the service provider, which will be 100% applied to the beneficiary's account on behalf of the beneficiary.
- Send invoice and supporting documentation to contractor for reimbursement

**Beneficiary:** Beneficiaries of this program will included households that meet the required qualifications as defined in this document and receives the benefits of this program.

- Submit completed application requesting program support

**Program Details:**

- Account balances 60 days and older will be covered for all approved beneficiaries
- Late fees, shut off fees, or any other lost revenue will not be covered
- COVID related payroll, PPE, or any other expenses will not be covered
- Administrative process fees will not be covered

**The following outline describes the application review process and contracting timeline:**

**Oct. 29<sup>th</sup>** – Council approve program, preliminary budget, sub-recipient agreement template, program qualifications, program ranking model, and program application

**Oct 30<sup>th</sup>** – Send program overview, sub-recipient agreement, program qualifications, program ranking model, and application to all water districts and associations

**Nov 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020** – Begin accepting online applications

**Oct 30<sup>th</sup> – Nov 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020** – Interested water districts and associations may complete the following

- a. Deadline for return of signed sub-recipient agreement.
- b. Notifying customers of program via email and either mailer or phone call

**Nov. 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020** – Last day for sub-recipient enrollment

**Nov. 6<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020** – Sub-recipient review and process submitted applications

- a. Review submitted applications to ensure necessary information and documentation has been provided
- b. Resolve any errors or missing information
- c. Verify applicant meets program qualifications
- d. Attached additional documentation
- e. Calculate application score
- f. Add applicant and corresponding information to list of approved applicants

**Nov. 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020** – Application deadline, last day new applicants will be accepted

**Nov. 14<sup>st</sup>, 2020** - Remove duplicate applications and determine eligibility

- a. Notify Ineligible applications
- b. Removal of duplicates based on property address and/or account number
- c. Removal of incomplete applications (required fields OR verification of past due balance).

**Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020** – Double check list of completed applications, documentation, & finalize scoring

**Nov. 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020-** Provide sub-recipients with final list of approved applicants within their district.

**Nov. 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020-** Council meets to review and approve final list of applicants and consider additional funding.

**Nov. 20<sup>th</sup>** – Deadline for sub-recipient award grant, distribution funds, and submit invoices with supporting documentation to Whatcom County Finance Department

**Nov. 30<sup>th</sup>** – Deadline for Whatcom County to issue reimbursement for submit expenses to each sub-recipient

**Dec 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020** - Notify applicants of final application status.

- a) If grant provide, send notification confirming “awarded” status, amount, and payment of past due balance completed
- b) If qualified, but grant not provided, send notification of qualified status for possible future funding rounds

**District Implementation Team**

Justin Clay	General Manager	Lake Whatcom Water & Sewer
Dan Eisses	General Manager	Birch Bay Water & Sewer
Sandi McMillan	Finance Director	Birch Bay Water & Sewer
Dave Olson	District Manager	Water District #2 & #7
Carl Isom-McDaniel	District Commissioner	Columbia Valley Water District