

**FY 2019 – FY 2020 Rural Capacity Building for Community Development  
and Affordable Housing (RCB) Program**

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

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# FY 2019 – FY 2020 Rural Capacity Building for Community Development and Affordable Housing (RCB) Program

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### **Disclaimer:**

*Remember: We do our best responding accurately and consistently to questions and documenting our answers, but **if an answer below does not completely comport with the NOFA, the NOFA governs.** Please read all published guidance and requirements carefully.*

## **RCB Program Basics**

### **1. What is the Rural Capacity Building for Community Development and Affordable Housing (RCB) program?**

The Rural Capacity Building for Community Development and Affordable Housing (RCB) program is a competitive grant program that funds national organizations with expertise in rural housing and community development. These organizations conduct technical assistance, educational and financial activities to enhance the capacity and ability of eligible beneficiaries serving rural areas to carry out community development and affordable housing activities benefitting low- and moderate-income families and persons in rural areas.

### **2. Who is eligible to receive funding for a Rural Capacity Building grant award?**

- Only National Organizations that are 501(c)(3) nonprofits, other than institutions of higher education, can apply for RCB funding. For the purpose of the RCB program, a National Organization must be a single organization that has experience conducting RCB eligible activities with RCB eligible beneficiaries within the last ten years in at least seven Federal HUD regions. Having relevant experience working in one state in a HUD region is sufficient for counting that region towards the seven-region minimum. Federal regions are described on HUD's website at:  
<http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/localoffices/regions>
- HUD does not award grants to individuals.
- HUD will not evaluate applications from ineligible applicants.

### **3. Is past experience with HUD programs required for an organization to be considered eligible for an RCB program grant award?**

No, however, all applicants must meet the threshold requirements and qualify as a National Organization according to the definition outlined in Section III.A of the FY 2019 – FY 2020 RCB Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) [summarized in FAQ #2 above].

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- 4. My organization has experience in at least seven HUD regions; are we expected to work in all seven regions if we receive a FY 2019 – FY 2020 RCB award?**

No, at this time there is no minimum number of HUD regions that must be served by an applicant through proposed FY 2019 – FY 2020 RCB program activities.

- 5. What are the eligible activities for an RCB grant?**

RCB program funds are limited to three eligible activities that include providing training and education, financial assistance, and technical assistance to eligible beneficiaries.

A complete list describing the eligible activities can be found in Section III.E of the RCB NOFA titled “Program Specific Requirements.”

- 6. My organization buys and improves houses in our city and we would like to provide more affordable housing through our work. Can we apply for the RCB program?**

The RCB program is a capacity building program, and only National Organizations may apply. RCB funds are not directly used to create housing, rather they are used to build the capacity of eligible beneficiaries to carry out affordable housing and community development activities. Further, RCB funds MUST be used in rural areas as defined in Section I.A.4 of the NOFA.

- 7. Who are the eligible beneficiaries?**

Eligible beneficiaries are limited to rural housing development organizations, Community Development Corporations (CDCs), Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs), local governments and Indian tribes, that serve rural areas.

Eligible Beneficiaries in the RCB program are not Eligible Applicants for the RCB program. By definition, RCB Eligible Beneficiaries are not eligible to apply to this RCB NOFA; National Organizations are the only organizations that can be deemed to be Eligible Applicants and apply to this NOFA.

Eligible Beneficiaries must serve rural areas. For-profit organizations are not eligible as RCB beneficiaries.

State agencies and State-wide organizations are not eligible as beneficiaries of RCB program capacity building activities. Post-award, on a case-by-case basis, grantees may present HUD with a request for an exception.

- 8. *Indirect Cost Rate*: Where should I include the statement and documentation about our organization’s indirect cost rate? In Section IV.F of the RCB NOFA, it**

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**indicates that since my organization has a negotiated indirect cost rate, that our application “must clearly state the approved rate and distribution base and include a letter or other documentation from the cognizant agency showing the approved rate.”**

The letter or documentation of your organization’s indirect cost rate should be included as an attachment to the application and does not count against the narrative page limit. The applicant must still state the approved indirect cost rate and distribution base somewhere in the narrative.

**9. My organization does not have a negotiated indirect cost rate, what do we need to do?**

Per Section IV.F of the FY 2019 – FY 2020 RCB NOFA, if your organization has “never received a Federally negotiated indirect cost rate and elects to use the de minimis rate, your application must clearly state you intend to use the de minimis rate of 10% of Modified Total Direct Costs (MTDC).”

## **The Threshold Summary and Showing Eligibility**

**1. What are the threshold criteria to be eligible for an award?**

To be eligible for an award, applicants must:

- 1) Submit their application on time, by 11:59:59 pm Eastern time on September 28, 2020;
- 2) Be a non-profit with active 501(c)(3) status (non-profit status may be verified using the IRS's Exempt Organizations select check tool found at <https://apps.irs.gov/app/eos/>) and provide a copy of the organization’s IRS determination letter showing its status as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt entity (institutions of higher education are not eligible);
- 3) Meet the definition of a National Organization and satisfy the criteria in Section III.C entitled “Threshold Requirements.” Evidence of meeting the definition of National Organization must be provided through:
  - Provision of a Threshold Summary at the beginning of the narrative portion of the application; and
  - Provision of the applicant’s Website address.

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**2. Why do I need to provide a Threshold Summary?**

To improve HUD's ability to accurately assess an applicant's eligibility for the RCB program, applicants must provide a Threshold Summary clearly demonstrating that their organization meets the definition of National Organization included in Section III.A of the FY 2019 - FY 2020 RCB NOFA. The requirements for what is needed in the Threshold Summary are provided in Section III.C of the NOFA.

**3. Where do I need to put the Threshold Summary in my application?**

The Threshold Summary must be included at the beginning of the narrative portion of the application. For each activity cited, the Threshold Summary must clearly identify the:

- 1) HUD Region where the activity was conducted;
- 2) State(s) within the HUD Region where the activity was conducted;
- 3) Type of eligible activity (e.g. loans, grants, trainings);
- 4) Mode of eligible activity delivery (e.g. onsite, online);
- 5) Type of eligible beneficiary of the activity;
- 6) Year(s) the activity was conducted; and
- 7) Amount of funding expended on this activity.

**4. In what format should I present my Threshold Summary?**

HUD strongly recommends presenting the Threshold Summary in table format to increase the ease and accuracy of the review.

**5. Does the Threshold Summary fall within the narrative page limit?**

Yes! The Threshold Summary is part of the 40-page limit for the application narrative.

**6. For the Threshold Summary, do I have to tell you every one of our activities from the past ten years? That would take twenty pages!**

In the Threshold Summary, applicants must provide enough examples to demonstrate that they meet the eligibility criteria listed in the definition of National Organization.

**7. Will the information in the Threshold Summary affect our score?**

No, as stated in Section III.C of the NOFA, the Threshold Summary is only used to determine the applicant's eligibility to apply for funding through the RCB program.

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## **Basics for Applying**

### **1. Where can I find the RCB Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)?**

The RCB NOFA is located on grants.gov. The Rural Capacity Building program is under Funding Opportunity number FR6400-N-08 and can be found at <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/search-grants.html?keywords=Rural%20Capacity%20Building>. Once you are there, you will see four “file tabs” on the main webpage and you can access the NOFA one of two ways:

1. *At the HUD Exchange:* The first tab, “Synopsis” provides a summary of the program and requirements for eligible applicants. It also provides a link to the HUD Exchange webpage for more information. The FY 2019 - FY 2020 RCB NOFA will be available at that link on the HUD Exchange approximately one week after publication on grants.gov.
2. *On Grants.gov:* To find the documents required for the RCB application package, including the RCB NOFA, go to the tab that reads “Package.” On this page you will see a small table for the RCB program. At the far right of that table you will a column labeled “Actions” with hyperlinks for “Preview” and “Apply”.
  - If you select “Preview” and this will provide a pop-up that shows a list of hyperlinks to the required attachments. In that pop-up you will also see a button in the upper right corner that reads “Download Information.” Select that button and you will see a file that contains the FY 2019 - FY 2020 RCB NOFA
  - If you select “Apply” that should direct you to the FY 2019 - FY 2020 RCB NOFA

To complete the RCB NOFA, you must carefully follow the instructions on grants.gov for downloading the RCB application and to submitting the completed application, with all the required forms.

### **2. If my application was incomplete can I resubmit?**

If an application is received by Grants.gov before the deadline, but is rejected with errors, applicants have a grace period of 24 hours beyond the application deadline to submit a corrected application that is received and validated by Grants.gov.

If you would like to make changes to a previously submitted application, you are welcome to resubmit up until the application deadline.

All applications received through grants.gov will be notified of their award status and they may have an opportunity for debriefing.

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**3. How long is the competition open?**

The competition will be open for a minimum of 60 days. Completed applications for the FY 2019 - FY 2020 RCB NOFA are due on September 28, 2020 by 11:59:59 p.m. Eastern time.

**4. What are the formatting requirements for applying?**

- Narratives addressing Factors 1 through 5 are limited to 40 typed pages of single-spaced text based on 8.5 by 11- inch paper, with no less than 1-inch margins, using a Times New Roman standard 12-point font.
- HUD will not review more than 40 pages for all five factors, Preference Points and Threshold Summary combined. The page limit does not include form HUD-50153 in support of the Promise Zones Preference Points, Letter of commitment for HBCU preference points, Letters of Firm Commitments for leverage documentation, Indirect Cost rate documentation, Non-Profit Status, or any of the other required Forms that are provided as attachments.
- All applicants should include the applicant name, DUNS number, and page numbers on each of the narrative pages of the application.

## **Narrative Factors**

**1. The definition of National Organization references activity “within the last 10 years”, but in Five Factors “recent” is defined as “within the last five years,” was this a mistake?**

The two definitions are distinctive concepts and thus they do not contradict each other, but we realize that this can be confusing.

The *within the last ten years* of experience is specific to the definition of National Organization which will determine an applicant’s eligibility for the competition as a Threshold to be met. The definition of National Organization establishes the eligibility threshold and thus allows a longer range of experience. Therefore, the threshold summary showing the applicant’s experience in at least seven HUD regions can go back ten years to 2008.

In Section V.A of the FY 2019 - FY 2020 RCB NOFA, the concept of recent experience is defined as “*within the last five years*” and that is specifically relevant to the applicant’s narrative responses, where past experience can only cover the past five years, back to 2015.

In summary, applicants are allowed to provide ten years’ worth of experience to qualify as a National Organization in the Threshold Summary. But in the narrative



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portion of the application (Five Factors), the applicant must reference the past five years of experience.

**2. We would like to partner with other organizations, can we get credit for their experience for the Management Capacity section in Factor 1?**

No. National Organizations are defined as a single organization and that organization alone is considered the applicant. Thus, for the Management Capacity portion of the Capacity section, the applicant must demonstrate that “that it has sufficient management, financial and programmatic capacity” to successfully manage the RCB program grant.

**3. What counts as leverage for Factor 4?**

Section III.B of the RCB NOFA provides more detailed information and references to help you determine what types of funding do and do not qualify as leverage for the FY 2019 - FY 2020 RCB program.

**4. If the term of the grant is four years, is there a penalty for creating a two-year program or for completing eligible activities in less than the four-year time frame?**

There is not a penalty for completing RCB program activities in less than the four-year grant term. If an applicant expects to complete their proposed RCB program activities in less than four years, then the application should reflect that time frame.

**5. Schedule: If our organization plans to use the grant funds in less than the four-year term, what should we include in the schedule for the years that our work will be done?**

If your RCB program is planned to take less than four years, you must still account for all four years in the Schedule. Applicants may simply indicate that RCB activities have already been completed or are expected to be completed during those years.

## **Decision Making Process**

**1. Do you have any recommendations for how to do well in our application narrative?**

Qualified applicants should be sure to provide a sound written narrative that clearly addresses all the directions in the Five Factors and provides all information requested. Eligible applications will be scored based on the quality of the proposed program and the applicant’s demonstrated capacity and ability to manage federal funds.

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**2. What does the RCB review process entail?**

- All application packages received on-time through grants.gov will be reviewed for compliance with threshold requirements.
- Applications that satisfy threshold requirements will have the application narrative evaluated based on their responses to Factors 1 through 5 from Section V.A of the FY 2019 - FY 2020 RCB NOFA.
  - Applicants must receive a total rating score of 75 points or more for Rating Factors 1 through 5 (without the addition of the bonus points) to be eligible for funding. In addition, applicants must earn at least 21 points for Factor 1, Capacity, to be eligible for funding. HUD will reject any application that does not meet the minimum rating score requirements. Applications that receive a minimum score of 75 points, and a minimum of 21 points in the Capacity Factor will be eligible to receive Preference Points for a total possible score of 102.
  - For more information, see Section V.B “Review and Selection Process.”

**3. How will the results of the competition be announced?**

HUD will notify successful applicants of their selection for funding. HUD will also notify the unsuccessful and ineligible applicants. Notifications to successful and unsuccessful applicants will be sent by email, delivery receipt requested, to the person designated in item 8f of the SF-424 and to the person listed as authorized representative in item 21 of the SF-424.

**4. What is the minimum score needed to be eligible for an award?**

The minimum score needed to be eligible for an award is 75 points on the overall narrative for Factors 1 through 5, which includes a minimum score of 21 points in Factor 1, Capacity. Applications that receive a minimum score of 75 points and a minimum of 21 points in Factor 1, Capacity, will be eligible to receive Preference Points for a total possible score of 102 points.

**5. What if my organization is approved for funding but the grant award amount is less than what we applied for?**

Selected applicants awarded an amount less than applied for in the application are required to participate in a negotiations process with HUD to create an updated program plan and budget that reflects what can be accomplished with the actual award offered. This process is presented in Sections V.B.2.6 and VI.A of the FY 2019 - FY 2020 RCB NOFA, which also identifies potential outcomes for failing to negotiate.

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**Questions Regarding Technical Corrections to the NOFA**

**1. Can an eligible applicant propose to use RCB grant funds to host a meeting or conference?**

Yes. Meetings or conferences may be proposed as an eligible activity if doing so is:

- a. Consistent with the three eligible activity categories as outlined in XXX of the NOFA,
- b. For purposes related to the program and the operation of the grant,
- c. Necessary and reasonable for successful performance under the Federal award.
- d. Eligible applicants must exercise discretion and judgment in proposing conference costs that are appropriate, necessary, and managed in a manner that minimizes costs to the Federal award.

**2. What factors should an eligible applicant consider when deciding whether to host a meeting or conference?**

Eligible applicants should consider the most effective or efficient way to achieve the desired result and whether there are alternatives, such as webinars or video conferences, that would be equally or similarly effective and more efficient in terms of time and costs than a face-to-face meeting.

**3. Can Federal grant funds be used to pay for entertainment?**

Federal grant funds may not be used to pay for entertainment, which includes costs for amusement, diversion, and social activities. (Include 2 CFR part 200 citation)

**4. What are the consequences of using Federal grant funds on unallowable expenses?**

The Department may seek to recover any Federal grant funds identified, through program monitoring, as having been used for unallowable costs, including unallowable conference and/or meeting expenses.

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**More Questions?**

- 1. If I have a question on a specific program requirement who do I contact?**

Questions regarding specific program requirements for this NOFA should be directed to: [CapacityBuilding@hud.gov](mailto:CapacityBuilding@hud.gov). Persons with hearing or speech impairments may access this number via TTY by calling the toll-free Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339.