

Rural Utilities Service, USDA

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decision may be made by the applicant under 7 CFR part 11.

§ 1780.38 [Reserved]

§ 1780.39 Application processing.

(a) *Processing conference.* Before starting to assemble the full application, the applicant should arrange through the processing office an application conference to provide a basis for orderly application assembly. The processing office will explain program requirements, public information requirements and provide guidance on preparation of items necessary for approval.

(b) *Professional services and contracts related to the facility.* Fees provided for in contracts or agreements shall be reasonable. The Agency shall consider fees to be reasonable if they are not in excess of those ordinarily charged by the profession as a whole for similar work when RUS financing is not involved. Applicants will be responsible for providing the services necessary to plan projects including design of facilities, environmental review and documentation requirements, preparation of cost and income estimates, development of proposals for organization and financing, and overall operation and maintenance of the facility. Applicants should negotiate for procurement of professional services, whereby competitors' qualifications are evaluated and the most qualified competitor is selected, subject to negotiations of fair and reasonable compensation. Contracts or other forms of agreement between the applicant and its professional and technical representatives are required and are subject to RUS concurrence.

(1) *Engineering and architectural services.* (i) Applicants shall publicly announce all requirements for engineering and architectural services, and negotiate contracts for engineering and architectural services on the basis of demonstrated competence and qualifications for the type of professional services required and at a fair and reasonable price.

(ii) When project design services are procured separately, the selection of the engineer or architect shall be done by requesting qualification-based pro-

posals and in accordance with this section.

(iii) Applicants may procure engineering and architectural services in accordance with applicable State statutes or local requirements provided the State Director determines that such procurement meets the intent of this section.

(2) *Other professional services.* Professional services of the following may be necessary: Attorney, bond counsel, accountant, auditor, appraiser, environmental professionals, and financial advisory or fiscal agent (if desired by applicant). Guidance on entering into an agreement for legal services is available from the Agency.

(3) *Bond counsel.* Unless otherwise provided by subpart D of this part, public bodies are required to obtain the service of recognized bond counsel in the preparation of evidence of indebtedness.

(4) *Contracts for other services.* Contracts or other forms of agreements for other services including management, operation, and maintenance will be developed by the applicant and presented to the Agency for review and concurrence. Guidance on entering into a management agreement is available from the Agency.

(c) *User estimates.* Applicants dependent on users fees for debt payment or operation and maintenance expenses shall base their income and expense forecast on realistic user estimates. For users presently not receiving service, consideration must be given to the following:

(1) An estimated number of maximum users should not be used when setting user fees and rates since it may be several years before all residents will need service by the system. In establishing rates a realistic number of users should be employed.

(2) *New user cash contributions.* The amount of cash contributions required will be set by the applicant and concurred in by the approval official. Contributions should be an amount high enough to indicate sincere interest on the part of the potential user, but not so high as to preclude service to low income families. Contributions ordinarily should be an amount approximating one year's minimum user fee,

and shall be paid in full before loan closing or commencement of construction, whichever occurs first. Once economic feasibility is ascertained based on a demonstration of potential user cash contributions, the contribution, membership fee or other fees that may be imposed are not a loan requirement under this section. A new user cash contribution is not required when:

(i) The Agency determines that the potential users as a whole in the applicant's service area cannot make cash contributions; or

(ii) State statutes or local ordinances require mandatory use of the system and the applicant or legal entity having such authority agrees in writing to enforce such statutes, or ordinances.

(3) An enforceable user agreement with a penalty clause is required (RUS Bulletin 1780-9 can be used) except:

(i) For users presently receiving service; or

(ii) Where mandatory use of the system is required.

(4) Individual vacant property owners will not be considered when determining project feasibility unless:

(i) The owner has plans to develop the property in a reasonable period of time and become a user of the facility; and

(ii) The owner agrees in writing to make a monthly payment at least equal to the proportionate share of debt service attributable to the vacant property until the property is developed and the facility is utilized on a regular basis. A bond or escrowed security deposit must be provided to guarantee this monthly payment and to guarantee an amount at least equal to the owner's proportionate share of construction costs. If a bond is provided, it must be executed by a surety company that appears on the Treasury Department's most current list (Circular 570, as amended) and be authorized to transact business in the State where the project is located. The guarantee shall be payable jointly to the borrower and the United States of America.

(5) Applicants must provide a positive program to encourage connection by all users as soon as service is available. The program will be available for review and concurrence by the proc-

essing office before loan closing or commencement of construction, whichever occurs first. Such a program shall include:

(i) An aggressive information program to be carried out during the construction period. The applicant should send written notification to all signed users in advance of the date service will be available, stating the date users will be expected to have their connections completed, and the date user charges will begin;

(ii) Positive steps to assure that installation services will be available. These may be provided by the contractor installing the system, local plumbing companies, or local contractors;

(iii) Aggressive action to see that all signed users can finance their connections.

(d) *Interim financing.* For all loans exceeding \$500,000, where funds can be borrowed at reasonable interest rates on an interim basis from commercial sources for the construction period, such interim financing may be obtained so as to preclude the necessity for multiple advances of RUS loan funds. However, the approval official may make an exception when interim financing is cost prohibitive or unavailable. Guidance on informing the private lender of RUS's commitment is available from the Agency. When interim commercial financing is used, the application will be processed, including obtaining construction bids, to the stage where the RUS loan would normally be closed, that is immediately prior to the start of construction. The RUS loan should be closed as soon as possible after the disbursement of all interim funds.

(e) *Reserve requirements.* Provision for the accumulation of necessary reserves over a reasonable period of time will be included in the loan documents.

(1) *General obligation or special assessment bonds.* Ordinarily, the requirements for reserves will be considered to have been met if general obligation or other bonds which pledge the full faith and credit of the political subdivision are used, or special assessment bonds are used, and if such bonds provide for the annual collection of sufficient

taxes or assessments to cover debt service.

(2) *Other than general obligation or special assessment bonds.* Each borrower will be required to establish and maintain reserves sufficient to assure that loan installments will be paid on time, for emergency maintenance, for extensions to facilities, and for replacement of short-lived assets which have a useful life significantly less than the repayment period of the loan. Borrowers issuing bonds or other evidences of debt pledging facility revenues as security will plan their debt reserve to provide for at least one average annual loan installment. The debt reserve will accumulate at the rate of one-tenth of an average annual loan installment each year unless prohibited by state law.

(f) *Membership authorization.* For organizations other than public bodies, the membership will authorize the project and its financing. Form RD 1942-8, "Resolution of Members or Stockholders," may be used for this authorization. The approval official may accept RUS Bulletin 1780-28, "Loan Resolution Security Agreement," without such membership authorization when State statutes and the organization's charter and bylaws do not require such authorization; and

(1) The organization is well established and is operating with a sound financial base; or

(2) The members of the organization have all signed an enforceable user agreement with a penalty clause and have made the required meaningful user cash contribution.

(g) *Insurance.* The purpose of RUS's insurance requirements is to protect the government's financial interest based on the facility financed with loan funds. It is the responsibility of the applicant and not that of RUS to assure that adequate insurance and fidelity or employee dishonesty bond coverage is maintained. The requirements below apply to all types of coverage determined necessary. The approval official may grant exceptions to normal requirements when appropriate justification is provided establishing that it is in the best interest of the applicant and will not adversely affect the government's interest.

(1) Insurance requirements proposed by the applicant will be accepted if the processing office determines that proposed coverage is adequate to protect the government's financial interest. Applicants are encouraged to have their attorney, consulting engineer, and/or insurance provider(s) review proposed types and amounts of coverage, including any deductible provisions.

(2) The use of deductibles may be allowed by RUS providing the applicant has financial resources which would likely be adequate to cover potential claims requiring payment of the deductible.

(3) Fidelity or employee dishonesty bonds. Applicants will provide coverage for all persons who have access to funds, including persons working under a contract or management agreement. Coverage may be provided either for all individual positions or persons, or through "blanket" coverage providing protection for all appropriate employees. An exception may be granted by the approval official when funds relating to the facility financed are handled by another entity and it is determined that the entity has adequate coverage or the government's interest would otherwise be adequately protected. The amount of coverage required by RUS will normally approximate the total annual debt service requirements for the RUS loans.

(4) Property insurance. Fire and extended coverage will normally be maintained on all structures except as noted below. Ordinarily, RUS should be listed as mortgagee on the policy when RUS has a lien on the property. Normally, major items of equipment or machinery located in the insured structures must also be covered. Exceptions:

(i) Reservoirs, pipelines and other structures if such structures are not normally insured;

(ii) Subsurface lift stations except for the value of electrical and pumping equipment therein.

(5) General liability insurance, including vehicular coverage.

(6) Flood insurance required for facilities located in special flood-and mudslide-prone areas.

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(7) Worker's compensation. The borrower will carry worker's compensation insurance for employees in accordance with State laws.

(h) [Reserved]

(i) The processing office will assure that appropriate forms and documents listed in RUS Bulletin 1780-6 are complete. Letters of conditions will not be issued unless funds are available.

[62 FR 33478, June 19, 1997, as amended at 63 FR 68655, Dec. 11, 1998; 64 FR 29946, June 4, 1999]

§ 1780.40 [Reserved]

§ 1780.41 Loan or grant approval.

(a) The processing office will submit the following to the approval official:

(1) Form RD 1942-45, "Project Summary";

(2) Form RD 442-7, "Operating Budget";

(3) Form RD 442-3, "Balance Sheet" or a financial statement or audit that includes a balance sheet;

(4) Form RD 442-14, "Association Project Fund Analysis";

(5) "Letter of Conditions";

(6) Form RD 1942-46, "Letter of Intent to Meet Conditions";

(7) Form RD 1940-1, "Request for Obligation of Funds";

(8) Completed environmental review documents including copies of public notices and appropriate proof of publication, if applicable; and

(9) Grant determination, if applicable.

(b) Approval and applicant notification will be accomplished by mailing to the applicant on the obligation date a copy of Form RD 1940-1. The date the applicant is notified is also the date the interest rate at loan approval is established.

[62 FR 33478, June 19, 1997, as amended at 63 FR 68655, Dec. 11, 1998]

§ 1780.42 Transfer of obligations.

An obligation of funds established for an applicant may be transferred to a different (substituted) applicant provided:

(a) The substituted applicant is eligible and has the authority to receive the assistance approved for the original applicant; and

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(b) The need, purpose(s) and scope of the project for which RUS funds will be used remain substantially unchanged.

§ 1780.43 [Reserved]

§ 1780.44 Actions prior to loan or grant closing or start of construction, whichever occurs first.

(a) Applicants must provide evidence of adequate insurance and fidelity or employee dishonesty bond coverage.

(b) *Verification of users and other funds.* In connection with a project that involves new users and will be secured by a pledge of user fees or revenues, the processing office will authenticate the number of users. Ordinarily each signed user agreement will be reviewed and checked for evidence of cash contributions. If during the review any indication is received that all signed users may not connect to the system, there will be such additional investigation made as deemed necessary to determine the number of users who will connect to the system.

(c) *Initial compliance review.* An initial compliance review should be completed under subpart E of part 1901 of this title.

(d) *Applicant contribution.* An applicant contributing funds toward the project cost shall deposit these funds in its project account before start of construction. Project costs paid with applicant funds prior to the required deposit time shall be appropriately accounted for.

(e) *Excess RUS loan and grant funds.* If there is a significant reduction in project cost, the applicant's funding needs will be reassessed. Decreases in RUS funds will be based on revised project costs and current number of users, however, other factors including RUS regulations used at the time of loan or grant approval will remain the same. Obligated loan or grant funds not needed to complete the proposed project will be deobligated. Any reduction will be applied to grant funds first. In such cases, applicable forms, the letter of conditions, and other items will be revised.

(f) *Evidence of and disbursement of other funds.* Applicants expecting funds from other sources for use in completing projects being partially financed with RUS funds will present