



2020 Stellar Communities FAQ

Eligibility

1. Which communities are eligible to apply for the program?

- a. Any incorporated Indiana community of any size that is not entitled to direct Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding through U.S. HUD is eligible to apply. See list below:

There are **21 entitlement communities and 2 entitlement counties** within the State of Indiana:

City of Anderson	City of Gary	City of Michigan City
City of Bloomington	City of Goshen	City of Mishawaka
City of Columbus	City of Hammond	City of Muncie
City of East Chicago	City of Indianapolis	City of New Albany
City of Elkhart	City of Kokomo	City of South Bend
City of Evansville	City of Lafayette	City of Terre Haute
City of Ft. Wayne	City of LaPorte	City of West Lafayette
City of Greenwood	Hamilton County	Lake County

- b. The community must have a comprehensive plan that has been created or updated within the past seven years.
- c. Counties, cities and towns are all eligible partners.
- d. At the time of LOI submission, all communities within the region must be in good standing with the State.

2. Are population divisions still a component of the program?

- a. No, this requirement has been removed as of 2018.

3. Is population a consideration with the program?

- a. No, regions may be comprised of communities of any population size.
- b. In order for a community to receive any federal funding, a community must be a HUD non-entitlement.



4. If I am a previous Stellar Designee, am I still eligible to be a part of a region that is applying?

- a. Yes, previous Stellar Designees are eligible to apply. However, previous Stellar Designee community projects should be no more than 35% of the overall project budget unless agreed upon by all parties.

5. Are there any special instructions for communities located in a metropolitan planning organization (MPO)?

- a. MPO communities are not required to have a commitment for transportation funding from INDOT or their MPO to submit an LOI since the community may have other sources to address transportation issues that they have identified. Communities submitting LOIs must include transportation issues but each community must define the issues and the method of addressing them. If you plan to attend tomorrow and don't have a commitment from your MPO, you should plan on meeting with the State Team following the adjournment of the workshop to discuss the transportation component of your LOI.
- b. If the community falls within an MPO's Planning Area, they must have a letter of recommendation from the MPO for the proposed projects
- c. If the community falls within an MPO urbanized area, they must have approval from the MPO for the proposed projects. If selected, any funding for the proposed projects must be financed by the MPO.

6. If my community falls within an MPO, what proposed projects must be approved by the MPO?

- a. INDOT funds cannot be used in an MPO's urbanized area. Any transportation projects located in an urbanized area with gaps in financing would need to use the MPO's funding. INDOT cannot provide additional funding to the MPO due to program regulations. IHCD and OCRA programming do not need to be discussed with the MPO.

7. Which programs will a community, within a region, be ineligible to apply for funding during the Stellar Community period?

- a. IHCD-
 - i. They will still be eligible for all other IHCD resources, including CreatING Places.
- b. OCRA-
 - i. Communities within a designated region who receives CDBG funding will not be eligible to apply to any additional CDBG grants during a 3-year period following designation; or until all the projects are closed out. Communities within the Region who DO NOT receive OCRA CDBG Stellar funding are still eligible to apply for other CDBG rounds.



- ii. When communities are again eligible to apply, the CDBG point reduction is in place for projects of the same type as those funded with Stellar funds. Disaster funds are considered CDBG funds. EX: parks, facades, historic preservation, community center, etc.
 - iii. They will still be eligible for programs such as QuIP and Historic Renovation Grant Program.
 - iv. Any new programs created by OCRA will have a determination made of eligibility for Stellar Designees at the time of creation and roll out.
- c. INDOT-
- i. Communities that fall inside of Regional Stellar Designations will not be eligible to apply to INDOT for the Rural Federal Aid Program during a 3-year period following designation. However, if a community within the Regional Designation does not receive these funds, they may enter INDOTs competitive application rounds.
- d. Other Stellar Partner Agencies-
- i. Designated communities will not be restricted from any other partner agencies' programs.

8. Can communities within a Region who do not receive Stellar CDBG funding, still apply for CDBG funding in other rounds during the Stellar period?

- a. Communities within the Region who DO NOT receive OCRA CDBG Stellar funding are still eligible to apply for other CDBG rounds.
- b. All communities must be in good standing with OCRA in order to apply for all CDBG funding.

9. What are the requirements for establishing a region?

- a. Must be comprised of at least two communities.
- b. Must be able to describe how and why the region was developed.

10. Is an RDA an eligible applicant?

- a. Yes, a Regional Development Authority (RDA) is an eligible applicant.

11. Is there a limit on how many partners can be in a region?

- a. No. A minimum of two partners is required but there is no limit. The number of partners is not a factor for selecting finalists or designees.



12. If I am a previous Stellar Designees, do I have access to the new The State Office of Rural Health (ISDH), health & wellness grant?

- a. Unfortunately, no. This grant only applies to those regions who are selected as 2019 designees.

13. If my community is participating in Regional Cities, can my community still apply as part of a region?

- a. Yes, we encourage you to apply.

Funding

14. What are the funding amounts available from each partner agency?

- a. Designated Stellar Communities may be eligible to apply up to the following amounts.
- b. However, a designated Stellar Community is *not guaranteed* they will receive the maximum amount available.
- c. Local match is required between 10-20% for total region.
- d. Additional funding sources may be identified by Stellar Community partners that are not set-aside or identified in the following matrix:

Program	OCRA	INDOT	IHCDA	ISDH
CDBG	\$8,000,000			
Planning Grants	\$20,000			
Stellar Placemaking Grant	\$30,000			
Historic Renovation Grant Program*	<i>As prioritized</i>			
Rental Housing Tax Credits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Fund – Loan • HOME Investment Partnerships Program Loan 			Designees can request up to \$1,600,000 in annual credits. \$500,000 \$400,000	
Owner Occupied Rehabilitation (CDBG)			\$250,000	
Rural Federal Aid Program		\$2,000,000		
Health & Wellness Program				\$75,000



15. What type of projects can we use the ISDH funding for?

Projects can address a challenge identified in their Community Health Assessment. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- A community garden
- Farmers' markets
- Wellness programming
- Behavioral health services
- Support groups
- Community meal services
- Breast feeding support

16. Are project limits in place for the available funding?

- a. Except when required by federal regulation, typical per project limits used by the partner agencies will not apply for the Stellar Communities Program.
- b. OCRA CDBG programs will still be looking at a \$5,000 per beneficiary amount.

17. Can a community include two multifamily affordable developments in their Regional Development Plan for the QAP Stellar set-aside?

- a. Yes, the designated region may have up to two Stellar Community RHTC projects in the same region if: (1) both RHTC projects are noted as potential RHTC projects in the RDP and (2) the market study for each project demonstrates a need for both projects. All projects must meet minimum threshold, scoring, and underwriting requirements as published in the QAP and related documents.

18. What is the time frame for project completion?

- a. All projects, including complimentary projects, should be expected to be completed within four years after the Stellar Communities designation. All applications should be submitted within three years of designation.

19. How do CDBG project limitations apply to Stellar projects? E.g. for OCRA funds, are income surveys or blight areas required as documentation?

- a. Projects utilizing CDBG funds will continue to be required to meet federal guidelines, so the projects must meet a national objective and an eligible activity. Requirements such as public hearings, environmental review, utilizing Davis-bacon wages, and following the uniform relocation act will still be in place.



20. Do CDBG Stellar projects compete in the regular timed rounds throughout the year or do they come in on a rolling basis?

- a. The designated regions will have set-aside funding, so they will not be required to compete in normal rounds. The funding is available as the projects are ready for application.

21. Can funds be used for a county property within a non-entitlement community?

- a. Yes.

22. Can funds be designated for a sub-recipient for a CDBG eligible project?

- a. Yes, non-profits are eligible to be sub-recipients for eligible projects.

23. Can CDBG funds be used for feasibility or planning studies?

- a. Yes, the funds can be used for planning.

24. If designated, how will funding be awarded?

- a. Individual projects will be funded based on eligibility criteria. Projects will require an application, a review for eligibility, and approval by each funding agency.

INDOT

25. What type of transportation projects are eligible? Are bridges eligible projects or only roads?

- a. The funds can only be used for construction projects such as trails, roads, sidewalks, etc. Bridges are also eligible.

26. Can INDOT funds be used for Engineering, Right of Way acquisition and construction inspection or construction only?

- a. INDOT funds can only be used for construction.

27. Can Stellar Funds be used as match for INDOT Community Crossing?

- a. No, the Stellar program is separate from the Community Crossings program.



LOI Submission Process

28. Should we identify matching funds from our community in the LOI and Regional Development Plan?

- a. Yes, each project should include the local funding from the community along with a gap in funding (if it is known).

29. Which documents should be included with the LOI packet?

- a. Project Matrix
- b. Information Sheet
- c. Project Worksheet
- d. Project Area Map
- e. MPO Doc (if applicable)
- f. Prior Planning (if applicable)

30. If a community finished a downtown master plan, would this meet the plan requirement?

- a. No, this would not be an acceptable replacement for a comprehensive plan.

31. Has the performance matrix changed from previous years?

- a. The performance matrix should be completed by each participating community.

32. Does each Town Council President and County Commissioner President sign LOI or can the region designate a signatory?

- a. The chief elected official should approve the submission of the LOI.

33. What is the purpose of the planning grant since the project worksheet includes a listing of projects as part of the LOI?

- a. The planning grant will be used by the region to develop the final regional development plan using the project prioritization tools from Ball State to review the projects included in the project worksheet. The regional development plan will have information much like the strategic investment plan for the region.

34. Is there a page limit for the LOI?

- a. No, there is no page limit. However, the questions do have a character limit.



35. Will we need to submit a letter of interest (LOI)?

- a. A hard copy of LOI will not be accepted. Everything is now submitted via Foundant. All questions are answered directly through the program.

36. Can I submit the LOI in person or does it have to be online only?

The LOI must be completed online. No printed documents or hard copies will be accepted.

37. What if there are multiple applications from our county, and people who serve the entire county are asked to take the survey – do they have to take the survey more than once?

- a. An individual can only take the survey one time. If the same person is being surveyed for more than one application, their name, title, and email address should be listed on each letter of interest/application. Their survey responses will be added to the data for each appropriate application.

38. What other type of requirements are required of a designated Region?

- a. Each designated community is required to hold three meetings a year for the four-year designation period with the State team to provide project updates.
- b. Each designated region will be required to provide data throughout the designation period.
- c. Participating communities must adopt an inter-local agreement committing to the partnership for a period of at least four years by final application.

39. Is an inter-local agreement need to be in place at the LOI submission?

- a. The agreement wouldn't need to be in place until the finalists submit their regional development plan.

40. Are there any page-size requirements for the color map? Would it be acceptable to provide the map in an 11x17 format or multiple 8.5 x 11 pages?

- a. There are no specific requirements on the map. It is acceptable to provide multiple maps.

41. A Comprehensive Plan resolution is requested, in addition to an adoption Document. Is the Adoption Document referring to just a resolution again or the full Comprehensive Plan to be uploaded?

- a. We ask to please submit the resolution. You are welcome to submit a link to the comprehensive plan.



42. Who can we contact concerning specific questions related to the online submission?

- a. All questions should be directed to stellarcommunities@ocra.in.gov.

LOI Evaluation

43. What areas are used for the evaluation of the LOI?

- a. Outcomes
 - Describe the ultimate outcome(s) for the Stellar Community proposal.
 - Describe key achievements the community would like to achieve with the designation.
- b. Target Area/Planning
 - Describe the targeted area.
 - Include previous planning and implementation of projects in the proposed targeted area.
 - Include recently completed projects, projects underway and future projects.
- c. Impact
 - Describe the local and regional impact and how future investment will be attracted to the community.
- d. Reasonableness
 - Explain the reasonableness of project scope.
 - Describe how the proposed projects will be completed within the four year timeframe.
 - Describe how the proposed project costs are feasible.
 - Describe local financing for proposed projects.
 - Describe how proposed projects will leverage additional resources.
- e. Readiness
 - Describe the steps taken thus far in each proposed project's process
 - How is your community ready for Stellar designation?
- f. Leadership
 - Describe your leadership capacity.
 - Briefly describe the development team.
 - Describe the development team's ability to implement a multi-project plan.
 - Past experience working together successfully?
- g. Community Engagement
 - Describe public participation and community engagement process
 - Describe future community engagement plans
 - How will you keep the community apprised of the status of your Stellar designation and the status of individual projects? What is the plan for on-going communication with the public?
- h. Maintenance



- Describe your ability to maintain the Stellar projects as well as to continue additional community development efforts after the Stellar designation period has ended?
- i. Leveraging Designation
 - Describe how a Stellar Community designation will be used to market the community to attract residents and businesses.

44. Does the involvement of local foundations increase the viability of a project?

- a. Yes, past designees have involved their local foundations to help with the sustainability of their efforts.

45. If a community, that is a part of a region, is submitting a streetscape project for the upcoming CDBG round, will it negatively affect their LOI application?

- a. No, it will not have an impact on the review of the region's LOI.

46. Does a region score higher if it has a higher amount of a local match?

- a. No, match is not a component of the review process.

Finalist Selection Process

47. Will the Indianapolis Community Presentation take the place of the Site Visit?

- a. Yes.

48. What are requirements associated with providing public access to local meetings?

- a. All meetings for the development of projects should follow Indiana's Public Access Laws. Questions should be sent to the Public Access Counselor.

49. How will the process for technical assistance be determined for partner agencies?

- a. Communities are welcome to include projects for agency involvement in their LOI and SIP, but each partner will review projects for opportunities to provide assistance.

50. Do the LOI and/or RDP need to identify projects for every partner agency?

- a. No, each partner agency does not need to be included in the LOI or Regional Development Plan. But their involvement as a partner should be clearly identified throughout both the LOI and SIP.



51. What is the evaluation process?

- a. A committee comprised of representatives from each partner agency will review every LOI in comparison to criteria provided in the Call for Letters of Interest document for eligibility, completeness and quality.
- b. The committee will reach a consensus based on their reviews to select up to six regions as finalists.
 - All regions not selected as regional finalists will be provided a conference call to discuss feedback from their LOI.
- c. The committee reviews each finalist's regional development plan in comparison to criteria for eligibility, completeness and quality.
- d. The committee will attend the region's presentation of the RDP and reach a consensus based on the region's ability to meet the criteria.

52. Has a study been completed to review the success of past participants in the program?

- a. Yes, the Sagamore Institute is working on a study that utilizes a multi-method case study research approach, looking at the efforts of program partners and convening community partner organizations in the designated communities.
- b. The report can be found at stellarindiana.org/.

53. How will infrastructure projects be viewed from a competitive standpoint?

- a. Each community should include projects that fit the needs of their community. Infrastructure projects are not excluded from the program, but the community will need to illustrate how all the projects are tied together with past and future plans.

54. What is the structure for the finalist community presentations?

- a. More details to come.

55. How long after designation do regions have to complete their projects?

- a. Regions have four years to use designated funding to complete projects identified as part of their regional development plan.

56. Are communities required to have an Indiana Main Street organization?

- a. No, communities are neither required to have an Indiana Main Street organization nor required to fund their community's Main Street organization. Collaboration is a key to success within the program. Past successful communities have partnered with key community organizations including main street organizations, chambers of commerce,



economic development organizations, community foundations, and school corporations.

- b. If you have downtown projects in your Main Street district, and you have a Main Street organization, they must be involved in the conversation.

57. What is Ball State’s Indiana Communities Institutes involvement?

- a. The role is to:
 - Provide feedback to the communities regarding their internal alignment and their alignment with each other.
 - Compile and analyze the questionnaire feedback, the project lists from the community located within finalists regions.
 - Conduct economic and demographic analysis.
 - Facilitate a minimum of three (3) meetings with your community.

58. What is Purdue University’s Purdue Center for Regional Development Center (PCRD) involvement?

- a. Their role will focus on:
 - Support for project implementation.
 - Guidance with internal and external communication.
 - Assist with long-term sustainability efforts.(PCRD works with Stellar regions **post designation**)

59. Who should complete the survey?

- b. To following personnel are required to complete the survey:
 - Mayor (*if applicable*)
 - All County Commissioners **if** they are one of the joint applicants
 - Clerk Treasurer
 - All City/Town Council members
 - Director of Community Development
 - All Regional Development Board Members
 - Key Investors

Other recommended participants include:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ▪ City Planning Director | ▪ Board of Works |
| ▪ Planning Commission Member | ▪ School Board |
| ▪ Redevelopment Commission | ▪ School Superintendent |
| ▪ Economic Development Commission | ▪ Parks Board |
| ▪ All County Council | ▪ LEDOs |
| | ▪ Community Foundation Director |
| | ▪ Chamber Director |



- Main Street Director or Board President
 - United Way or Community Non-Profit
 - Hospital Foundation
 - Hospital Administration
 - Local Safety Officer or Judicial Official
- Local Arts Council or Organization
 - Faith Based organization
 - Local Financial organization
- c. We believe as many of these as possible should take the survey. It is critical that this process starts early and is completed as part of your LOI submission.
- d. As part of your LOI you should provide the names, emails and positions of those that you have complete the survey. It should take only approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Please send this link: www.surveymonkey.com/r/RLXN8MR. It's important all questions are answered.

60. Who should attend the meetings conducted by Ball State? How do we prepare?

- a. One of the benefits of being selected by OCRA to be a 2019 Stellar Finalists is it's the finalists title offers an unique community educational opportunity. The Indiana Communities Institute (ICI) at Ball State University will come to your region for a pair of sessions. These are designed to offer data and other information about your region. They will offer an opportunity for some dialogue about your relative strengths and the projects you plan to complete. The sessions are intended to be used as a resource to further enhance your self-knowledge and regional collaboration.

Because of the small window of time between being selected as a Stellar Finalist and the beginning of the SIP process, you are required as part of your Letter of Intent to indicate your top three preferences for both 'Meeting A' and 'Meeting B' with ICI.

Meeting A will take place on the same day for you and your partner community. The ICI team will come to the first community in the morning and then travel to the partner community for the afternoon session. All meetings are expected to last three hours.

Meeting B will take place approximately two weeks after meeting A and your two communities will share that meeting.

The communities are responsible for arranging the venue and all related logistical details. The venue should be identified in the LOI and reserved for each of your selected dates. The venue should accommodate seating for up to 100 people and should have ample wall surface so that posters may be temporarily affixed to the walls for use during the meeting. In the days following the finalists' announcement, OCRA and Ball State will contact your designee to lock in your meeting dates and times.



There will be two planning meetings between the project leads from each community, their chief elected officials, OCRA, and Ball State. Please indicate in your application if you have date preferences or restrictions. OCRA and Ball State will try to accommodate as best as possible, but cannot guarantee a community's top preferences.

61. How long will the Ball State meetings be?

- a. Ball State will work with finalists to determine meeting logistics. Attendees should not expect meetings to last half a day, but more than three (3) hours.

62. Who should attend 'meeting A'?

- a. The community's Stellar Team, elected officials not part of the team, and anyone from the community at-large.

63. Who should attend 'meeting B'?

- a. The Stellar Team from each community, as well as the key community leaders.

64. Are the Ball State meetings open to the public?

- a. All meetings should follow Indiana public access laws. Questions should be sent to the public access counselor for your community.
- b. OCRA's recommendation is to open the meeting to the public and be inclusive to community members interested in being involved in the process.

65. Why do we need to select available dates in April, May and June?

- a. You're indicating preferences for the two meetings with OCRA and Ball State. Your project leaders and your chief elected official will need to attend a 90 minute planning meeting. Next, you'll be hosting a community meeting (meeting A) for up to 100 people in each community, and a second meeting (meeting B) for a similar number of people with your partner community approximately two weeks later.

66. How should we divide our projects throughout the region?

- a. Each community should know their own priorities, while as partners there should be consensus about regional priorities. One of the outcomes of the work with Ball State will be a suggested regional prioritization based on input from each community.



Final Selection of Designees

67. How will representatives from BSU and PCRD be involved in the selection of the two designees?

- a. BSU will only be involved in the program during the creation of the RDPs by providing sessions in the communities prior to the submission of the RDPs. PCRD will only be involved in the process after the committee made of State agencies have selected the designees. Neither of the universities will be involved in the selection of the two designees.

68. Who should I contact if I have questions?

- a. All questions be directed to stellarcommunities@ocra.in.gov.