UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
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OFFICE OF WATER

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Guidelines for Enhancing Public Awareness of SRF Assistance Agreements

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TO: Water Management Division Directors
Regions I-X

Last year, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) implemented an agency-wide initiative to enhance public awareness of EPA assistance agreements nationwide. The Office of Water has developed guidelines to inform states how this initiative should be implemented in the State Revolving Fund (SRF) Programs.

The guidelines were developed with input from EPA and state SRF staff. The guidelines recognize that each of the state SRF programs and the projects they fund are different and that one implementation method will not work for everyone. Therefore, as a result of input from the states, the guidelines offer a number of options that can be used to enhance public awareness of SRF assistance agreements.

Implementation of these guidelines will begin with the awarding of the FY 2015 SRF capitalization grants. A term and condition on compliance with the guidelines is to be included in all new SRF grants.

Please have your staff provide copies of the guidelines to your states. Questions regarding the guidelines should be directed to Sheila Platt (202/564-0686) or Howard Rubin (202/564-2051).

Attachment

Enhancing Public Awareness of SRF Assistance Agreements

Introduction

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently implementing an agency-wide initiative focused on signage to enhance public awareness of EPA assistance agreements nationwide. The intention of this effort is to communicate the positive impact and benefits of EPA funding around the country and increase awareness surrounding the improvements communities receive as a result of State Revolving Fund (SRF) assistance. Projects implemented with Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) monies are included in this initiative, as many CWSRF and DWSRF assistance agreements have direct and tangible benefits to populations around the country.

EPA's Office of Water developed these guidelines as a way to inform states of this directive and how it should be implemented in the SRF programs. The primary objective is to enhance public understanding of the positive benefits of CWSRF and DWSRF funding to towns, cities, municipalities and water systems. To that end, states are presented with a range of options for implementing these guidelines. All of these options achieve the ultimate goal of communicating to a broad audience the positive role EPA funding of the state CWSRF and DWSRF programs plays in communities across the country.

The information in the guidelines was developed with input from EPA and state staff across the country as well as the members of the State-EPA Workgroup. The guidelines recognize the wide range of project types, varied locations and different institutional approaches among states and communities. Therefore, providing states and SRF assistance recipients maximum flexibility is optimal. The guidelines allow selection of the implementation method which best balances two goals. First, it should satisfy the overall objective of communicating EPA's role in funding assistance agreements that achieve positive benefit. Second, the implementation method should be practically and financially viable for states and communities and avoid any overly burdensome investment of time and resources. In some cases, it might be appropriate for a state to select a combination of options listed below, provided this does not result in excessive cost to communities.

Project Selection Requirements

Signage requirements will not be required to apply to all SRF projects. Signage will be considered an equivalency requirement for SRF programs. States should select a set of borrowers and/or projects totaling a funding amount equivalent to the amount of their federal capitalization grant to satisfy the signage requirement. There are no other requirements or restrictions on which projects should or should not participate in this initiative. Therefore, it is at the discretion of the state SRF program to select projects most able to efficiently and effectively comply in a way that

meets the intention to enhance public awareness without significant financial hardship to the state or its borrowers. This can be done either through the selection of specific projects or borrowers, or by setting a threshold within the state for which projects will be requested to meet signage requirements. States should note that they have the option of selecting different implementation options for different borrowers depending on the location, project type and available resources. Borrowers and/or projects complying with the signage requirement must ensure limited English proficient individuals have meaningful access to activities receiving EPA funds, consistent with Executive Order 13166 and EPA Order 1000.32.

In this regard, to increase public awareness of projects serving communities where English is not the predominant language, States should encourage recipients when implementing a particular signage option to translate the language used (excluding the EPA logo or seal) into the appropriate non-English language(s). The costs of such translation are allowable, provided the costs are reasonable.

Although the signage requirement does not apply to all SRF projects, we recommend that states encourage all borrowers/projects to notify the public of the benefits of the projects and the role of the SRF, using one of the options below.

Summary of Options

The guidelines present a number of options which communities can explore to implement EPA's signage policy. The option selected should meet all of the above basic requirements while remaining cost-effective and accessible to a broad audience. The guidelines describe the following strategies as acceptable options for communities to follow:

- Standard signage
- Posters or wall signage in a public building or location
- Newspaper or periodical advertisement for project construction, groundbreaking ceremony, or operation of the new or improved facility
- Online signage placed on community website or social media outlet
- Press release

Each of these options is described in more detail in the sections below.

Implementation Option: Standard Signage

EPA recommends that large projects that involve significant expansion or construction of a new facility elect to publicize through standard signage. This option should be selected for projects where the sign would be near a major road or thoroughfare or where the facility is in a location at which this would effectively publicize the upgrades. Some facilities will not find this an appropriate or cost-effective solution. For example, investing in a large road sign for a facility that is located in a rural area or where access is limited to a smaller service road would likely not be an optimal solution.

Signs can also be located away from the project site if there is another reasonable alternative. For example, a community may elect to place a sign advertising the project near a body of water that receives discharge from a particular facility.

States selecting projects that will implement this requirement through use of a traditional sign should ensure the following are included:

- The name of the facility, project and community
- Project cost
- The State Agency/SRF administering the program
- The EPA and State Agency logos (EPA logo may only be used on a sign)

If the EPA logo is displayed along with logos of other participating entities, the EPA logo must not be displayed in a manner that implies that EPA itself is conducting the project. Instead, the EPA logo must be accompanied with a statement indicating that the recipient received financial assistance from EPA for the project. As provided in the sign specifications from the EPA Office of Public Affairs (OPA), the EPA logo is the identifier for assistance agreement projects. States are required to ensure that recipients comply with the sign specifications provided by the OPA, available at http://www.epa.gov/ogd/tc/epa_logo_seal_specifications for_infrastructure grants.pdf. To obtain the appropriate EPA logo graphic file, the recipient should send a request directly to OPA and include the EPA Project Officer in the communication.

Implementation Option: Posters or Brochures

Smaller projects, projects located in rural areas, and other efforts may find that it is more cost-effective and practical to advertise efforts through creation of a poster or smaller sign. If the project involves nonpoint source or green infrastructure components, those can be described at the discretion of the state or community.

The poster or brochure and acknowledgement should be visible, as well as a website or other source of information for individuals that may be curious about the SRF program. The community could also implement this option as a short pamphlet or brochure that is placed in one of these locations for community members to read.

Posters or brochures should be placed in a public location that is accessible to a wide audience of community members. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Town or City Hall
- Community Center
- Locally owned or operated park or recreational facility
- Public Library
- County/municipal government facilities
- Court house or other public meeting space

Given the low cost for producing multiple copies of the same poster, pamphlet, or brochure, communities can explore options for displaying these posters in several locations simultaneously. This would achieve the overall objective of reaching a broad audience and publicizing the project.

States have the option of creating a template verbiage and layout to provide to borrowers, particularly smaller or disadvantaged communities. This could reduce the burden on small municipalities which may or may not have the staffing capacity to meet signage requirements on their own.

States selecting projects that will implement this requirement through use of posters or brochures should ensure the following are included:

- Name of facility, project and community
- State SRF administering the program
- Project is wholly or partially funded with EPA funding
- Brief description of project
- Brief description of the water quality benefits the project will achieve

Implementation Option: Newsletter, Periodical or Press Release

For communities where there is no suitable public space or where advertisement through signage is unlikely to reach community members effectively, projects can be advertised in a community newsletter or similar periodical. States can use guidelines from their standard public notice practices. For new construction, if a groundbreaking ceremony is to be held, an announcement could publicize or accompany publicity for this event.

In some cases, it may be appropriate for the state agency to issue a formal press release announcing construction of a new facility. Distributing a single prepared statement concisely summarizing the project purpose and the joint funding from EPA and state resources can reach a wide audience as the statement goes through multiple news outlets. Programs should consider whether or not this is an option that is likely to effectively publicize the CWSRF or DWSRF program in local news sources.

If a recipient decides on a public or media event to publicize the accomplishment of significant events related to construction as a result of EPA support, EPA must be provided with at least a ten working day notice of the event and provided the opportunity to attend and participate in the event.

States selecting projects that will implement this requirement through use of a newsletter, periodical or press release should ensure the following are included:

- Name of facility, project and community
- State SRF administering the program

- Project is wholly or partially funded with EPA funding
- Brief description of the project
- Brief listing of water quality benefits to be achieved

Implementation Option: Insert or Pamphlet in Water/Sewer Bill
Utilities can consider including a single-page insert within water and sewer bills that are mailed to residents and users in the area. This approach would effectively publicize the project to those individuals directly benefitting from the project. The flyer or insert could emphasize the interest rate and financial savings that the community achieved by taking advantage of SRF funds as well as the environmental and public health benefits to the community.

States selecting projects that will implement this requirement through use of an insert or pamphlet in water/sewer bill should ensure the following are included:

- Name of facility, project and community
- State SRF administering the program
- Project is wholly or partially funded with EPA funding
- Brief description of the project
- Brief listing of water quality benefits to be achieved

Implementation Option: Online & Social Media Publicity
Many communities are increasingly finding that the online forum is the most cost-effective approach to publicizing their SRF programs and reaching a broad audience of stakeholders. Online "signage" should follow the minimum information guidelines above and may appear on the town, community or facility website if available. In some cases, communities may be active on social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter. These can be used as an opportunity for publicizing projects and information about how SRF funds are being used in the community. These online announcements/notices may be appropriate for settings where physical signage would not be visible to a wide audience. They can be a more cost-effective option than traditional signs or publicity in print media outlets. This option may be most useful where the community's website is a well-recognized source of information for its residents.

In the case of some projects, such as nonpoint source or sponsorship projects, there might be additional opportunities for online publicity through partner agencies or organizations. This could take place either on the organization's website or again through social media outlets.

States selecting projects that will implement this requirement through use of online & social media publicity should ensure the following are included:

- Name of facility, project and community
- State SRF administering the program
- Project was wholly or partially funded with EPA funding
- Brief description of the project

- Brief listing of water quality benefits to be achieved

Suggested Language for Alternate Options

For any of the alternate implementation options listed above, SRF programs have discretion to structure their signage as they see appropriate. The language below is offered as an option for use in posters, pamphlets, brochures, press releases, or online materials. States may consider using the following:

> "Construction of upgrades and improvements to the [Name of Facility, Project Location, or WWTP] were financed by the [Clean Water/Drinking Water] State Revolving Fund. The [CWSRF/DWSRF] program is administered by [State Agency] with joint funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and [State Name]. This project will (description of project) and will provide water quality benefits [details specifying particular benefits] for community residents and businesses in and near [name of town, city, and/or water body or watershed to benefit from project.] [CWSRF/DWSRF] programs operate around the country to provide states and communities the resources necessary to maintain and improve the infrastructure that protects our valuable water resources nationwide. "

For projects in certain areas, states should consider whether or not it is appropriate to include additional details about the projects. Specific benefits, such as reduction of CSO events, lessening of nutrient pollution, reducing contaminant levels or water pumping costs, or improvements to a particular water body, may be of interest to community residents. In these cases, including them would further serve to showcase positive efforts financed by the SRF programs. Additionally, for projects with components that meet Green Project Reserve (GPR) criteria, States may elect to detail these particular improvements. For example, the state could include quantitative improvements in energy efficiency or water conservation achieved by project upgrades. If the project includes green infrastructure components such as rain gardens and green roofs that have environmental and aesthetic benefits to the community, these can be described briefly as well. Again, this additional information can be included at the discretion of the state when it is appropriate, given the project type, location, and the type of signage or publicity effort selected.