Section 2: Rural Innovation Fund (RIF) Evaluation Data Collection Tools

This section provides a facsimile of the RIF Telephone Survey Instrument as well as the relevant material that will precede or accompany the survey. We will conduct this survey with the 51 RIF grantees who received funding from the FY 2010 NOFA.

2.1 RIF Telephone Survey Instruments and Procedures

2.1.1 Proposed Pre-Survey Procedures

For the RIF telephone surveys, it will be necessary to identify a "primary respondent" from each grantee who will respond to the survey. We will begin the process by identifying the grantee coordinator or administrator from the administrative files, grant applications, and more recent reports from the grantee. These files and access to the reports have already been provided the RIF program and we will develop a list of these individuals prior to beginning the telephone interviews. We will then ask the RIF Program Office to initiate contact with the grantee to schedule an appropriate time to hold the interview. The local HUD Field Office will also be notified at this time.

We will attempt to complete most of the logistical preparation while awaiting OMB clearance. After we receive OMB approval, we will notify the RIF Program Office that it is time to contact the grantees and introduce the Econometrica team. Econometrica will then schedule the interviews directly with the grantees. In Section 2.2, we have provided an email template introduction to the RIF Evaluation Project, the Econometrica team, and the telephone survey.

2.1.2. Proposed Telephone Survey Email Invitation

Dear [insert name of RIF project contact here]:

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is seeking your help. HUD has contracted with Econometrica, Inc.—a research firm located in Bethesda, MD—to conduct a study of the Rural Innovation Fund (RIF) program. The purpose of the study is to explore how the larger grant amounts available through the RIF have changed program activities, impacts, and outcomes relative to its predecessor, the Rural Housing and Economic Development (RHED) program.

As part of their study, Econometrica will conduct a series of telephone interviews with representatives from all RIF grantees. This information is necessary to evaluate the impact of the RIF program relative to the RHED program and will help HUD develop policy approaches to rural housing and economic development issues in the future.

We have identified [insert name of RIF project contact here] as the Project Coordinator for [insert name of grantee organization]'s [insert RIF grant number]. If this information is incorrect or out of date, please respond with the person currently responsible for [insert RIF grant

number]. If no available staff members have actively managed this grant, we would like to interview the current Executive Director of [insert name of grantee organization].[1]

This email serves as an introduction to key project staff including the HUD Representative, Ndeye Jackson, and the Econometrica Project Lead, James Hedrick. Econometrica staff will be working with you directly to schedule a time to conduct the telephone interview. They will be following up with you to determine your availability within the next 2 weeks. Please work with them to establish a time to conduct the interview.

The interview should take approximately 45 minutes to complete. Due to the open-ended nature of some of the questions, the interview may last up to 1 hour. Please allow for extra time when scheduling.

If you have any questions about the telephone survey or the overall evaluation, please do not hesitate to contact Ndeye Jackson, GTR/COTR, in HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) at (202) 402-5737. She will be pleased to talk with you.

Thank you for your hard work and we look forward to your participation in this research effort.

Sincerely,

Aaron Taylor
Community Development Specialist
Office of Community Renewal
Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

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[1] Since all RIF projects are still active, we believe it is unlikely that we will need to include this sentence in the introductory email to RIF grantees. However, many RHED grantees may have closed their projects years ago and high staff turnover in rural organizations means it is likely that we will have to include this or a similar sentence in the introductory email to RHED grantees.

2.1.3 Proposed Pre-Survey Instructions Script

This survey concerns the RIF grant for project number _____, originally approved in _____ (fiscal year); known as the _____ (project name); with the following purpose:

_____

_____

_____.

The purpose of this evaluation is to explore how the larger grant amounts available through the RIF have changed program activities, impacts, and outcomes relative to the RHED.

First and foremost, this is not an audit or a monitoring exercise. Econometrica is performing a *programmatic evaluation* of the RIF program. We are interested in hearing from you about how you operated your grants, what partners you engaged, what resources you leveraged, how the grants affected your organization's capacity, and the overall impact of the project on the community. No information you provide will be used to evaluate your organization specifically.

Additionally, your responses will be anonymous and will not be attached to you specifically or to your organization. We may quote some passages or responses to open-ended questions, but we will not identify the source of the comment without your consent.

Please answer honestly and fully to the best of your knowledge. If you are unsure of any question or believe that someone else would be better able to answer any question, please let us know and we will make a note of it in your response.

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about the survey or any concerns you would like to express to HUD, you may contact Ndeye Jackson, GTR/COTR, in HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) at (202) 402-5737.

If you are ready, we can begin.

2.1.4. Proposed Survey Instrument for the Evaluation of the Rural Innovation Fund

Organization of the Survey

    I.   General Information
    II. Grant Use and Capacity Building
    III. Grant Application and Management
    IV. Leveraging
    V. Partnering-Linkages
    VI. Program Outcomes and Impact
    VII. Conclusion

Rural Innovation Fund (RIF)
Grantee Telephone Interview Instrument

Section I: General Information

Grantee Entity: (Organizational entity submitting grant application and winning grant award.)
Respondent: (Organizational official currently responsible for managing RIF grant activities or follow-up to grant activities. Additional staff may participate in interview if requested. Confirm positions and names at beginning of interview.)
Date of Interview: (mm/dd/yy)
Project Team Interviewer: _____

Section II: Grant Use and Capacity Building

1. Were the RIF grant funds used in any manner that differed from your application? Please describe differences.

   _____

2. Have the number of your FTEs changed due to the funding you received via the RIF grant?

   Yes ☐   No ☐

   If yes, to what extent do you think the RIF grant contributed to your organizational growth?

   a. Growth attributed almost solely to RIF. ☐
   b. Growth attributed largely to RIF. ☐
   c. Growth somewhat attributed to RIF. ☐
   d. RIF one of many factors leading to growth. ☐

   If staff has decreased since the completion of your RHED grant, what factors led to the decrease?

   _____

3. An often-used measure of an organization's basic financial strength is assets divided by liabilities. How would you characterize your financial strength today compared to when you first received your RIF grant?
   a. Financial strength is better than when grant was awarded. ☐
   b. Financial strength is about the same as when grant was awarded. ☐
   c. Financial strength is worse than when grant was awarded. ☐

4. How would you characterize the impact of the RIF grant on your organization's financial strength? Did the RIF grant help your organization improve your financial strength in any way? If so, how?

   _____

_____

5. Since you were awarded your RIF grant, has your organization moved into areas of activity where you had not previously been active?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, what were the new areas of activity?

_____

If yes, how did the RIF program help your organization to move into this/these new area(s)?

_____
_____

6. In your opinion, how important was the RIF grant in enabling your organization to address the issues – such as high unemployment, low education levels, etc. – that your organization listed in your grant application?

_____
_____

7. Did your organization consider any other grant sources to address the issues you included in your application?

Yes ☐   No ☐   Unsure ☐

If yes, what other sources?

_____
_____

Section III: Grant Application and Management

1. How would you characterize the current status of your RIF-funded project?

_____
_____

2. How would you characterize the status of your RIF-funded project relative to the original schedule from your application?

    a. Completed as scheduled. ☐
    b. Ahead of schedule. ☐
    c. Progressing on schedule. ☐
    d. Progressing but behind schedule. ☐
    e. Have experienced significant delays implementing the project. ☐

If your project is behind schedule or has had problems getting started, what barriers have you have encountered in implementing the project?

_____

_____

3. How would you characterize the impact of the RIF grant on your organization's overall technical capacity? Has administering your RIF grant increased your organization's ability to implement certain types of projects?

_____

_____

4. How would you characterize the impact of the RIF grant on your organization's overall administrative capacity? Has it improved your organization's ability to handle federal grants as well as other sources of funding?

_____

_____

5. How would you characterize the RIF's administrative and reporting requirements compared to other Federal programs from which you receive funding?

    a. Requirements are more burdensome than other Federal funding sources. ☐
    b. Requirements are similar to other Federal funding sources. ☐
    c. Requirements are less burdensome than other Federal funding sources. ☐

6. Did you in any way see the RIF grant as complementary to funding you were receiving or could receive from other Federal agencies?

        Yes ☐   No ☐

7. If Congress were to authorize a new round of RIF grants, what would be the likely response of your organization?

    a. Would almost certainly apply for a grant. ☐
    b. Would probably apply for a grant. ☐
    c. Would consider applying after looking at organizational priorities. ☐
    d. Likely would not apply for a RIF grant. ☐

Section IV: Leveraging

1. In your original grant application, you indicated *(retrieve from application)* as a source(s) for obtaining leveraged fund support for your RIF project. Is this the funding source you actually used at project start-up?

        Yes ☐   No ☐

If no, why were you were unable to access those planned-for funds?

_____

_____

2. At project start-up were you able to leverage any additional funds other than those mentioned in your grant application?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, please specify the additional source(s) and amounts of funding.

_____
_____

Also, if yes, did this additional funding allow you to expand or qualitatively enhance your project design?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, what changes did you make in your project design?

_____
_____

3. Did your winning the RIF grant enable you to access funding sources that you otherwise may not have been able to access?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, please specify the new sources, and explain how successful you have been in obtaining funds from one or more of these sources.

_____
_____

4. How would you characterize the impact of the RIF grant on your ability to leverage funds for ongoing or future projects?

a. Has significantly increased the range of funding options open to us. ☐
b. Has somewhat increased the range of funding options open to us. ☐
c. Has had minimal impact on our ability to obtain additional funding. ☐

Section V: Partnering-Linkages

1. How many formal partnerships (characterized by exchange of resources and/or signed agreement) were created primarily because of the RIF grant?

_____

2. How important was securing the RIF grant in establishing these partnerships?

a.   Could not have had relationship without RIF. ☐
b.   RIF was very important in establishing relationship. ☐
c.   RIF was a factor in establishing relationship. ☐
d.   RIF was not important in establishing relationship. ☐

3. Will your organization be able to build upon the linkages established on the RIF project for further collaboration?

    a. Already involved in further collaboration. ☐
    b. Further collaboration has been planned but not implemented. ☐
    c. Unsure if there will be further collaboration at this time. ☐

4. Overall, how would you characterize the impact of your RIF grant on your ability to establish productive working relationships with other groups in your community? Has it helped you establish new partnerships with other local organizations?

    _____
    _____

Section VI: Program Outcomes and Impact

1. What individuals or groups did you originally intend to target with your RIF project? What outcomes did you expect for these recipients?

    _____
    _____

2. How would you characterize your progress toward achieving these outcomes for recipients?

    _____
    _____

3. Is your organization using any indicators to measure the progress of your RIF-funded projects toward completion?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

    If yes, what data indicators have you used (are you using) to measure the progress of your RIF-funded projects toward completion?

    _____
    _____

    If yes, how effective have these indicators been in allowing you to manage the implementation of your project?

    a. Very effective. ☐
    b. Somewhat effective. ☐
    c. Not very effective. ☐

    If yes *and* indicators were "not very effective," have you looked at different indicators?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

    If yes, what indicators are you using now or will be using in the future?

    _____

5. Currently, how would you characterize the capacity of your organization to collect and analyze data for planning and management purposes?

    a. High level of technical capability. ☐
    b. Adequate level of technical capability. ☐
    c. Marginal level of technical capability. ☐
    d. Less than adequate technical capability. ☐

    If you have a "high" or "adequate" level of capability, how important has the RIF grant been in improving your capabilities in this area?

    a. Extremely important. ☐
    b. Somewhat important. ☐
    c. Not important. ☐

6. Did you have to develop the organizational capacity to obtain and analyze both project implementation data and impact data?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

    If yes, were you able to increase your staff capability to collect and analyze data during the implementation of your RIF grant?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

7. How would you characterize the overall impact of your RIF project so far? How has it impacted the community as a whole?

    _____
    _____

8. Does your organization have a strategic plan or other statement of organizational goals?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

9. If yes, how have you integrated your RIF project into this plan? How does your RIF project support your organization's overall goals?

    _____
    _____

Section VII: Conclusion

Overall, what has your impression been of the RIF program? Do you have anything to add about your experience that we have not covered here?

_____
_____
_____