



United States Department of Agriculture

September 15, 2020

TO: Danielle Jones
Senior Desk Officer
Office of Management and Budget

THROUGH: Ruth Brown
USDA Information Collection Officer

FROM: Michele Brooks
Director, Regulations Management Division
Innovation Center, Rural Development, USDA

SUBJECT: Request for Emergency Approval of a New Information Collection Request for Notice of Funds Availability for the Technical Assistance and Training for Innovative Regional Wastewater Treatment Solutions Grant Pilot Program (TAT/RWTS)

The Rural Utilities Service (RUS), an agency of the Rural Development (RD) Mission Area (Agencies) within the United States Department of Agriculture, is requesting emergency review and approval of a new information collection for the Notice of Funds Availability (NOFA) for the Technical Assistance and Training for Innovative Regional Wastewater Treatment Solutions Grant Pilot Program (TAT/RWTS). The Agency is expecting to publish the NOFA, in which the 60-day notice is embedded, in the **Federal Register** by September 30, 2020. Approval of this emergency request is important because the TATA/RWTS Pilot Grant Program will not be able to be implemented prior to the end of FY 20, as the use of normal clearance procedures is likely to prevent the collection of information from applicants which, in turn, will have negative consequences on the intended recipients. It is essential to the agency mission.

On December 20, 2019, Congress passed the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020, which established the TAT/RWTS pilot program. Under this NOFA, the RUS will announce the availability of up to \$ 5 million in competitive grants to eligible entities to fund a new pilot program for the study and design of innovative treatment solutions of regional wastewater systems for historically impoverished communities that have had difficulty installing traditional wastewater treatment systems due to soil conditions.

Due to the ongoing Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant an emergency declaration for all states, territories, and the District of Columbia, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (the CARES Act or the Act)

(Pub. L. 116–136) created servicing options that immediately required the RUS Water and Environmental Programs (WEP) to reprioritize and refocus its efforts into implementing the CARES Act provisions, leaving the implementation of the TAT/RWTS to a later date this fiscal year.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has indicated that implementation of this program is a priority publication prior to the close of the FY 2020 because the Congress and USDA are concerned about raw sewage discharge in some already severely impacted rural communities, particularly historically impoverished communities that have had difficulty utilizing Rural Development programs. Projects funded under the TAT/RWTS Pilot Grant Program can play a vital role in the economic recovery created by time, distance, location, and lack of resources, which has been severely compounded by the COVID- 19 pandemic. In lieu of the compressed deadline to the end of fiscal year 2020, Rural Development, USDA is requesting approval by no later than September 24, 2020. Failure to collect proper information from borrowers could hinder the government’s selection of grant recipients, and result in improper determinations of assistance, increase legal costs to the grantees as well as encumber customer service and, ultimately, slow the deployment of rural wastewater management including county needs assessments, testing wastewater options, defining funding mechanisms for remediation to unserved and under-served rural areas.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Michele Brooks, Director, Regulations Management Division, Innovation Center, Rural Development by telephone at (202) 690-1078 or by email at Michele.Brooks@usda.gov. or MaryPat Daskal, Management Analyst, Regulations Management Division, Innovation Center, Rural Development by telephone at (202) 720-7853.