

Comments on Funding Allocations (LIHWAP Model Plan Section 1)

1.1 Good option, but please clarification on what a rate reduction looks like. Is it a rate reduction (dollar amount, volume amount, or percentage) on wastewater and drinking water fee schedules? Also, please clarify the duration of the rate reduction, such as monthly, bi-monthly, annual, or other. This should be answered until LIHWAP formally announces how much funding is awarded to each state/administrator. For example, if Corona Federal Reconnection Program, Housing and Community Development and that program helped water debt, where 20% at \$20 million of water debt in the state was paid off to offset water debt. On the flip side of the coin, \$0 assistance has been provided to sewer and the backlog of that is also \$80 million dollars. How much should be allocated where to ensure effectiveness of program administration.

Re Model Plan Section 1: HHS should define "rate reduction" in the context of the intent of the COVID relief bills that are designed to provide assistance to households with water arrearages and who face challenges affording current bills. While "rate reduction" carries with it a particular understanding (development of a Low-Income Percentage of Income Payment Program), in more general contexts, the term has been used more broadly. In LIHWAP, with its focus on low-income household water and wastewater assistance, "rate reduction" should be defined broadly to include any charges that can make water and wastewater bills unaffordable and thus jeopardize continued access to essential water and wastewater services. Assistance should also be defined broadly to capture the additional charges, fees and penalties related to water and wastewater arrearage forgiveness, flushing and plumbing costs related to safe reconnection practices (see e.g., <https://www.michigan.gov/documents/egle/egle-tou-dweh-171201.pdf>).

It is unclear whether "rate reduction" is analogous with "bill payment assistance." If it is, the latter wording is much clearer.

What is the meaning of "Rate Reduction"? Does this simply mean that the program will give grants to households that they can then apply to their bills (if that is what "rate reduction" means) or helping with arrearages? Why make that distinction. The more significant data point is the cost of service.

What is meant by "wastewater/drinking water rate reduction?" Is this accomplished by making a direct payment on the applicant's bill? Is this program in LIHEAP? Provide examples of how we might ensure there is no difference in the treatment of categorically eligible households receiving assistance when determining eligibility and benefit amounts? There are several categories listed under applicable forms of income. Are there any that can each State make their own interpretation of what sources will be included in calculating income?

Clarification on Rate Reduction for Wastewater and Drinking Water components. What will this entail and how can we use LIHWAP funds for this?

1.1 Are we reducing their rates? Or are we reducing what is due currently? And then what is in arrears (late payments)? We would need to ensure that we are not charging customers. And again, it feels disingenuous to charge something other than 'cost of service.' I would prefer to give a discount than to charge more.

There is not space here to identify funding used for reconnection fees. It was my understanding that reconnections were a key piece of the program. How should this be added as an option for what funds will be used for.

Too long and involved. Needs to be pared down and simplified. If customer already is receiving benefits that are income based, why go through the process (income stamps, Section 8 other assistance) make it automatic for this assistance and only those who are not receiving any assistance already would need to provide documents. Make documents needed simple and easy for client to provide.

On question 1.3, if someone answers "no", I think you should ask why.

The category of cost allocations to the different types of assistance is unreasonable. How can we anticipate the % of where we will spend on this and why this is needed upfront and not in the final reporting.

Having no history, estimating percentages per component is difficult. We advocate that changing the percentages as needed throughout the program, understand that at no time, can the administrative and planning costs exceed 15%

OHCS has no historical data related to drinking water or wastewater expenses and use; it will be difficult if not impossible to determine the rate reduction or arrearages of household accounts; if there are other programs using the same income eligibility markers in Oregon—administered under categorical eligibility. The upfront costs to develop this program will require far more than 15% of whatever program awards are projected. The needs and costs of the LIHEAP operational experiences.

It seems like the first section to allocate funds to is confusing and needlessly wordy. The options that seem pertinent would just be water and wastewater. It is unnecessary to break it down further; however, I understand if congressional language requires that. It makes it more complex to operate and report broken down. I have had issues with grants.gov in the past when reporting and being able to complete and submit a report when my % did not match the plan & that seems wrong and causes undo burden.

Section 1.2 Allocation: Please clarify whether estimated amounts to be spent on each component can be modified. Needs are not predictable. Income: States should be encouraged to make countable income the same as for the current LIHEAP program.

For tribes, one bill is issued by our Utility department and does not separate waste water and drinking water. This may become an issue with allocation. Can crisis be included? (I.e. verge of disconnection or HH has been disconnected to due to arrearages)

Section 1.2 requires an estimate of how much of the grantee's funds will go toward "rate reduction" vs "arrears". Will states be held to that based on what they learn about actual need? Most states have little if any data on need.

Include "stormwater" in relation to arrearages and rate reduction in 1.1. NYC DEP does not charge separately for stormwater, but many use stormwater utilities.

DC Water does not differentiate between wastewater and drinking water; it would be helpful to consider overall water expenses (similar to LIHEAP between generation and transmission costs). Suggest using the same terminology as LIHEAP - regular benefits (to address energy burden issues, disconnection or risk of disconnection).

How do we address service providers that bill water and sewer as one item? We cannot determine how much is water and how much is sewer.

Topic	Decision - Action Taken
Define Rate reduction/Arrearages	Maintained terminology. Removed first question and restructured Section 1. Created definition in instructions document.
Define Rate reduction/Arrearages	Maintained terminology. Removed first question and restructured Section 1. Created definition in instructions document.
Define Rate reduction/Arrearages	Maintained terminology. Removed first question and restructured Section 1. Created definition in instructions document.
Define Rate reduction/Arrearages	Maintained terminology. Removed first question and restructured Section 1. Created definition in instructions document.
Define Rate reduction/Arrearages	Maintained terminology. Removed first question and restructured Section 1. Created definition in instructions document.
Define Rate reduction/Arrearages	Maintained terminology. Removed first question and restructured Section 1. Created definition in instructions document.
Define Rate reduction/Arrearages	Maintained terminology. Removed first question and restructured Section 1. Created definition in instructions document.
Define Rate reduction/Arrearages	Added definitions that now clearly specify reconnection fees are part of allowable expenses under arrearages.
Eligibility	Clarified with instructions that 1.9 only applies to households not already categorically eligible.
Eligibility	Added row indicating that if answer was "no" to 1.3, grantee must a justification.
Percentage estimates	Revised Section 1.2 to request percentages for Household Benefits, Outreach/Eligibility Determination, and Administration. Administration is separated into two rows... one for state or tribe administration and another for subgrantee administration). Additional details provided in instruction document.

Percentage estimates	Revised Section 1.2 to request percentages for Household Benefits, Outreach/Eligibility Determination, and Administration. Administration is separated into two rows... one for state or tribe administration and another for subgrantee administration). Additional details provided in instruction document.
Percentage estimates	Revised Section 1.2 to request percentages for Household Benefits, Outreach/Eligibility Determination, and Administration. Administration is separated into two rows... one for state or tribe administration and another for subgrantee administration). Additional details provided in instruction document.
Percentage estimates	Revised Section 1.2 to request percentages for Household Benefits, Outreach/Eligibility Determination, and Administration. Administration is separated into two rows... one for state or tribe administration and another for subgrantee administration). Additional details provided in instruction document.
Percentage estimates	Revised Section 1.2 to request percentages for Household Benefits, Outreach/Eligibility Determination, and Administration. Administration is separated into two rows... one for state or tribe administration and another for subgrantee administration). Additional details provided in instruction document.
Percentage estimates	Revised Section 1.2 to request percentages for Household Benefits, Outreach/Eligibility Determination, and Administration. Administration is separated into two rows... one for state or tribe administration and another for subgrantee administration). Additional details provided in instruction document.
Percentage estimates	Revised Section 1.2 to request percentages for Household Benefits, Outreach/Eligibility Determination, and Administration. Administration is separated into two rows... one for state or tribe administration and another for subgrantee administration). Additional details provided in instruction document.

Storm water	Clarified in instructions that stormwater may be included as a component of wastewater. Added definitions of both stormwater and wastewater in instructions.
Wastewater vs drinking water	Added instructions for grantees when water utliies have a combined bill.
Wastewater vs drinking water	Added instructions for grantees when water utliies have a combined bill.

Comments on Benefits (LIHWAP Model Plan Section 2)

Under Section 2 (Benefits) of the Model Plan, a category for "Elderly" applicants is inexplicably excluded from the list of possible Priority and timeframes. This oversight should be corrected to ensure that elderly persons are included in the Priority groupings. See also https://www.nclc.org/images/pdf/special_projects/covid-19/NRDC_HHS_Emergency_Water_Assistance_Program.pdf. In addition, this section of the Model Plan asks Grantees whether they provide individuals who are physically disabled the means to submit applications for benefits without leaving home. Access to remote processing of applications is critical at any time for the homebound or physically disabled, but in particular during a pandemic when community action agencies remain closed to in-person enrollment. The allocation of LIHWAP funds by grantees should follow current state policies, which typically examine county-level poverty detailed in the U.S. Census American Community Survey. Subgrantees would get a percentage of funding by percent of poverty within their jurisdiction. Allocations should be accompanied by dispersal timeline requirements so that grantees can allocate funds where most needed, and to ensure that low-income customers are actually receiving the benefits that have been allocated.

2.8, we would include elders, age 60 and older as another priority group.

2.7. Benefit Periods Is this a one-time benefit? Does this mean a HH can be assisted once per FFY or once for the entire duration of the funding period (from program start through 09/30/2023)?

This section should be modeled after section 2.1 of the LIHEAP Model Plan, allowing further flexibility for states to use the higher of the Federal Guidelines or State Median Income.

Is it possible to use the a combination of FPL and SMI? For example, our LIHEAP uses SMI up to about 4 people per HH, then FPL takes over if the threshold is higher. If so, how do we denote that in the form?

Section 2 of the Model Plan should require states to identify any data they have concerning magnitude of need for low-income water assistance used or could be used to inform decisions about the state benefits matrix and eligibility criteria.

Not a suggestion for clarification, but NYC DEP is interested in HHS's / partners' experience administering LIHEAP benefits to renters that have been included in their rents to better understand how NYC DEP can target similar populations on water bills.

Same feedback as above - please allow states/DC to consider water costs overall instead of bifurcating between waste/drinking water.

Not sure why we need to address the break out of renters, subsidized as that is not really applicable here. I understand to duplicate the LIHEAP model everything should have to be in those section if not needed for this program.

Topic	Decision - Action Taken
Add category for elderly	Added "Older Adult/Seniors (60 and Over)" as option in Question 2.8. Addressed in instructions.
Add category for elderly	Added "Older Adult/Seniors (60 and Over)" as option in Question 2.8. Addressed in instructions.
Benefit	Added instructions clarifying that frequency is a grantee level decision. Revised 2.6 to remove reference to fiscal year and replaced with project period.
clarify	Added instructions indicating that selection of Federal Poverty Guidelines vs. State Median Income is based on grantee policies and recommending modeling after LIHEAP policies.
HH Need	Added an option for "Hybrid Federal and State" to Question 2.1. Also addressed in instructions.
HH Need	No narrative section or additional data requested (because of additional burden for grantees), but OCS will address in technical assistance regarding benefits determination.
T/TA	No change to Model Plan but OCS will consider in future guidance and technical assistance.
Wastewater vs. drinking water (addressed in other section)	Addressed through instructions.
	No change to model plan.

Comments on Outreach (LIHWAP Model Plan Section 3)

Another method we have found useful are automated outbound phone calling campaigns that alert customers to the program and invite them to apply. We also use social media frequently to reach our community.

Utilities should have to consider calling or texting potentially eligible homes. Utilities should also have to consider having informational materials in highly trafficked areas.

The list includes good ideas for reaching customers via existing programs. Utilities may also have existing channels not on the list for reaching customers, including social media and door to door; existing efforts should be encouraged to continue at the utility's discretion, potentially through other specified approaches. Utilities may have existing outreach materials designed and printed, and any costs to update these due to LHWAP availability should be considered as part of reimbursable administrative expenses.

Suggest adding flyers to food distribution boxes.

Section 3.1 should include 'multi-lingual announcements in all languages spoken by low income households within utility service area' and 'notification in ethnic language news and broadcast media outlets'; 'notification through public health outreach pathways utilized for COVID-19 information dissemination'; outreach to faith institutions serving low income, people of color, and non-English speaking congregations'.

should include 'multi-lingual announcements in all languages spoken by low income households within utility service area' and 'notification in ethnic language news and broadcast media outlets'; 'notification through public health outreach pathways utilized for COVID-19 information dissemination'; outreach to faith institutions serving low income, people of color, and non-English speaking congregations'.

Outreach may need to occur in multiple languages. Also we know that many immigrants did not take advantage of other COVID benefits due to concern of impact on path to citizenship.

Outreach has always been a hurdle with customer assistance programs (CAPs) in water. Language considerations will be important. There should also be an effort to connect with local charitable and religious organizations such as the Salvation Army, that routinely assist low-income households.

3.1 - Include option to "Work directly with utilities to identify potential recipients." This is a more targeted approach in addition to mass mailing all utility bill recipients.

Need government to provide information to water districts so they understand the program and eligibility. Found less buy-in with small and rural local cities.

Provide Water venders with publications to their clients they can send with their billing.

Get arrearage \$ amounts from the districts, not directly from customers that fall within the unsustainable formulas used to determine ass needs.

Consider adding selection about working with water providers to communicate about LIHWAP to customers.

We would like to increase the mandate from monthly PSAs to include a mandate to have dedicated staff to manage program. The State stress to CAA's and partner organizations to be more flexible in getting the word out, with the goal of making it more convenient for hou sign up.

3.1 Ads on radio stations, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Hulu, Gmail banners, Credit Karma, water bill inserts, news paper articles every network with partnering state and local assistance programs.

Most of these outreach methods work. We have had good experience with automated telephone notices and direct telephone calls. Wel other social media also work but may not reach everyone.

Are these suggestions for the Sub-Grantee? If not, and the State makes elections, can the Sub-Grantee utilize other means not listed, such media outreach.

Use of social media (Facebook, nextdoor) to reach customers. Use community centers (recreation centers, churches, senior centers, schoo homework packets that go home to parents) to reach customers. Use direct dial messaging services to reach customers.

The outreach is minimal at best and must incorporate the use of digital more, walking and proactive outreach, and must not depend on th bill inserts as much. It must also depend on the use of community agencies far more than just traditional methods of bills and dependenc utilities.

How would outreach be recommended? Through internet and websites, we currently aren't able to use any community halls yet due to COVID. It's difficult getting the word out to everyone that doesn't use social media.

The scale of the delinquency problems requires new ways to reach families. The outreach needs to move beyond ways that require the home visit. We need to go in to a Community Action Org. Technology could be used to reach thousands of families quickly in each city and town. Utilities know that newspaper inserts and fliers are no longer effective.

Topic	Decision - Action Taken
Automated outbound calls	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
Automated outbound calls	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
door to door	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
food distribution boxes	Not added, but other content was added to outreach options and "other" category will allow this.
Multi lingual, ethnic centered media outlets, faith based outlets	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
Multi lingual, ethnic centered media outlets, faith based outlets	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
Multi lingual, ethnic centered media outlets, faith based outlets	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
Multi lingual, ethnic centered media outlets, faith based outlets	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
outreach through water utility providers	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
outreach through water utility providers	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.

outreach through water utility providers	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
outreach through water utility providers	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
outreach through water utility providers	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
PSAs	Added new content and outreach options (including reference to PSAs), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
social media	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions. Section includes "other" option as well.
social media	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
social media	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
social media	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
social media	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.

social media	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.
texting	Added new content and outreach options (e.g. automated phone, social media, multi-lingual outreach), reorganized the section and added some instructions.

Comments on Coordination (LIHWAP Model Plan Section 4)

4.1 Add 'Trusted community-based outreach providers' 4.2 Describe how you will coordinate with relevant regulatory authorities that govern over water supplies [add: 'to ensure all customers lacking access to water services gain such access'.]

The types of information requested in section 4.1 ("Describe how you will ensure that the LIHWAP program is coordinated with other programs available to low-income households (LIHEAP, TANF, SSI, EPA, WAP, etc)") should be expanded significantly. The examples provided in 4.1 relate to coordination in the intake/application process. However, coordination can (and should) be much more holistic than that. Especially since the current LIHWAP funding level will not meet the full need for emergency low-income water and wastewater assistance, Model Plan section 4 should require grantees states to identify any steps they are taking to secure or leverage other sources of funds to meet the full need for water and wastewater assistance, including the following examples of possible funding/programs for water and wastewater customer assistance that should be listed in the model plan as prompts for the grantees [RESPONSE CONTINUED IN THE BOX FOR QUESTION 28 DUE TO CHARACTER LIMITATIONS]:

re: 4.2 - the relevant regulatory authorities are U.S. EPA and the State offices implementing the federal Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act.

Same feedback as above - please allow states/DC to consider water costs overall instead of bifurcating between waste/drinking water.

Topic	Decision - Action Taken
Coordination partners	Did not add "trusted" community-based providers as that is subjective. Maintained 4.2. as general question about coordination.
coordination partners	OCS added to the list of programs for coordination (specifically added Department of Treasury Emergency Rental Assistance Program and Homeowner Assistance Program. While the other proposed changes are useful, OCS did not significantly expand this section and will address other areas of coordination (e.g. leveraging funds and ensuring that coordination is useful from a customer perspective) through training and technical assistance. OCS did expand the instructions regarding coordination and the instructions now discuss coordination with private and philanthropic organizations and how LIHWAP funds will leverage other resources.
Specific coordination with clean and safe drinking water offices	No change made - question 4.2 discusses coordination with regulatory authorities.
waste water drinking water (addressed in other section)	Addressed in Section 1

Comments on Agency Designation (LIHWAP Model Plan Section 5)

Allow for a narrative explanation.

Local Community Action Agencies DHHS Salvation Army, etc.

Add water agencies to list. They could administer and should have a role.

Add utility provider to the list.

Add: 5.5a 'Who ensures racial equity in approval of benefits?' 5.6 What is your process for selecting local administrative agencies [add: 'with cultural competency in reaching the most-impacted communities?'] Add 5.8 "Describe your accountability process for ensuring reconnection of service and continuation of service, and the process by which vendors will assure the use of payments follows the terms set out in the vendor agreements".

Add: 5.5a 'Who ensures racial equity in approval of benefits?' 5.6 What is your process for selecting local administrative agencies [add: 'with cultural competency in reaching the most-impacted communities?'] Add 5.8 "Describe your accountability process for ensuring reconnection of service and continuation of service, and the process by which vendors will assure the use of payments follows the terms set out in the vendor agreements".

CONTINUATION OF RESPONSE TO QUESTION 27 (MODEL PLAN SECTION 4): -Any assistance that is specific to investor-owned utilities or other utility commission-regulated water and wastewater utilities -Any other local water and wastewater assistance programs operated at the utility or municipal level -Any use by the state or local governments of other federal COVID relief funds for water and wastewater assistance -Any direct state appropriations or other state funding sources directed to water and wastewater assistance -Rules concerning utility deferred payment agreements or arrearage management plans -Add to the examples of federal programs that must be coordinated with - e.g., the Homeowner Assistance Fund run by the Treasury Dept. should be added. It should also be added to Terms and Conditions 11.d and 11.e. (<https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/homeowner-assistance-fund>) 2- Regarding coordinated outreach and intake for multiple programs, the Model Plan should prompt grantees to clearly explain how this coordination will be useful and effective from the customer's perspective, and not just a matter of pointing an applicant to another office or agency and send them off.

Under 5.1 it states if "Welfare Agency" is selected 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 must be completed; however there plan jumps to 5.5.

There is not a question for 5.3 and 5.4 for Welfare Agencies.

In Section 5.8 of the Plan LOCAL AGENCIES We believe grantees should not only identify their selected subgrantees but provide assurances that those organizations have demonstrated experience in outreach to low-income households and utilities and in delivering emergency services to the eligible population. Community Action agencies that now deliver LIHEAP and /or COVID Relief emergency assistance should be assumed to be subgrantees for delivering water assistance.

Topic	Decision - Action Taken
Add narrative	No change made to Model Plan. Instructions clarify that a narrative explanation may be provided.
Add to list	No change made to Model Plan.
Add to list	No change made to Model Plan.
Add to list	No change made to Model Plan.
Racial equity	No change made to Model Plan in this section. Section 3 now includes items related to multilingual/multicultural outreach and Section 7 now includes more specific prompts on nondiscrimination. Terms and conditions and reporting requirements will include information on accountability process.
Racial equity	No change made to Model Plan in this section. Section 3 now includes items related to multilingual/multicultural outreach and Section 7 now includes more specific prompts on nondiscrimination. Terms and conditions and reporting requirements will include information on accountability process.
Section 4	OCS added to the list of programs for coordination (specifically added Department of Treasury Emergency Rental Assistance Program and Homeowner Assistance Program. While the other proposed changes are useful, OCS did not significantly expand this section and will address other areas of coordination (e.g. leveraging funds and ensuring that coordination is useful from a customer perspective) through training and technical assistance.
Typo	Correct and check all numbering. Remove reference to 5.2-5.4 from the header
Typo	Address numbering issue.
	No change made to Model Plan. Community Action Agencies are already specifically highlighted as a potential provider.

Comments on Water Suppliers (LIHWAP Model Plan Section 6)

Change language of 6.5: Do you make payments contingent on all vendors (regulated and unregulated) taking all appropriate measures to alleviate the water burdens of all eligible households? Describe accountability measures taken to withhold payments if eligible households are not identified and restored service or granted assistance.

Question 6.3 may be impossible to answer beyond having this as a clause in the vendor agreement. Enforcement may be difficult.

Add "stormwater" to the note at the beginning of Section 6. The note should read as: "Water suppliers refers to drinking, wastewater and stormwater suppliers as they may be different entities at the local level"

Can you provide examples of appropriate measures that unregulated vendors may take to alleviate the water burden of eligible households?

Is EFT the same as ACH? What is an unregulated water vendor? All water utilities are regulated to some degree.

The following language is a bit unclear, but it seems it will be burdensome: "6.3 How do you assure that the home water supplier will charge the eligible household, in the normal billing process, the difference between the actual cost of the water and or wastewater and the amount of the payment?"

Again, many of these requirements will mirror our LIHEAP plan, except it will be water vendors. Since we do not even know yet, for sure, these benefits will be issued - by check or EFT - this model plan is asking for information that has not yet been decided, When we do not know how much money we are receiving it is hard to determine the most efficient and economical way to administer these benefits,

Plan section 6.5 We believe the language should apply to all vendors. The protections are essential, and are generally not guaranteed by utilities at present. We do not understand the basis of this distinction in the plan.

Section 6.5 asks "Do you make payments contingent on unregulated vendors taking appropriate measures to alleviate the water burden of eligible households?" This Model Plan provision should not be limited to "unregulated vendors". There's no reason to distinguish here between water utilities that are or aren't regulated by utility commissions. Moreover, in some states, regulated water utilities aren't subject to the same consumer protections as regulated energy utilities, and in most they don't have the same assistance available as regulated electric/gas utilities. It certainly can't be assumed that states have this issue covered for regulated water systems. Additionally, Section 6.5 should list the following potential measures, which states should indicate whether they are doing or not: -COVID-specific: ----
Disconnection moratorium ----No late fees, interest, or penalty charges ----Ability to enter into payment plan of 6 months or longer ----Reconnection of service for disconnected customers ----Enrollment in a discounted rate -General (not COVID-specific) ----Consumer protections regarding shutoffs (e.g., minimum notice period, protection of vulnerable populations, minimum amount overdue before disconnection allowed, opportunity for payment plan before disconnection, other procedural or substantive restrictions on shutoffs) ----Data reporting requirements for utilities - on a permanent basis - e.g., periodic reporting on number of shutoffs (as in CA) ----Percentage of income payment plan ----Lifeline rates ----Water efficiency assistance

Topic	Decision - Action Taken
Accountability	This question was removed. For now, the question of "unregulated" vendors (which would relate to water delivery companies or potentially well-maintenance or septic companies) will be addressed through other guidance.
difficult requirement	No change to model plan.
Drinking water/stormwater/wastewater	No change to model plan, but instructions now specifically address stormwater.
Examples	This question was removed. For now, the question of "unregulated" vendors (which would relate to water delivery companies or potentially well-maintenance or septic companies) will be addressed through other guidance.
Instructions/Definitions	The model plan was modified to spell out Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). This item was also added to definitions in an instructions section which also discusses Automated Clearinghouses and wire transfer.
Plain language	Question was modified to read as follows: "How do you notify the household of the amount of assistance paid, and the timing of the assistance payment?"
Planning sequence	No change to Model Plan.
Vendors	This question was removed. For now, the question of "unregulated" vendors (which would relate to water delivery companies or potentially well-maintenance or septic companies) will be addressed through other guidance.
Vendors	Move 6.5 to Section 2 Benefits. OCS added the list of items from this comment in Section 2.

Comments on Program, Fiscal Monitoring and Audit (LIHWAP Model Plan Section 7)

7.1 ADD: "How will you establish Racial Equity Results Monitoring? What will inform your baseline, and how will you measure eligibility coverage against baseline?" 7.5 ADD: "Racial equity data results monitoring" 7.7 ADD: "Stakeholder consultation sessions"

The references to OMB Circular A-133 should be replaced with 45 CFR 75 and/or 2 CRF 200

Topic	Decision - Action Taken
Racial equity	Question 7.5 was modified to highlight monitoring of nondiscrimination requirements (along with other items). "Racial Equity Results Monitoring" is not added at this point, but OCS will continue to consider ways to assess this issue.
Update Text	Replaced reference to OMB Circular A-133 with 45 CFR part 75 subpart F throughout section 7. Revise 7.2 to request if grantees have secured the auditor. Additional language is included in draft LIHWAP Plan.

Comments on Timely and Meaningful Public Participation (LIHWAP Model Plan Section 8)	Topic
8.1 Add: "Survey of households with arrearages"; "Stakeholder meetings with consumer advocacy and water advocacy organizations serving communities of color and low income communities"; "Community design and consultation sessions to inform program design and efficacy."	Add category
Overall: Make community planning and engagement a required feature of the Model Plan. 8.1 Add: "Survey of households with arrearages"; "Stakeholder meetings with consumer advocacy and water advocacy organizations serving communities of color and low income communities"; "Community design and consultation sessions to inform program design and efficacy."	Add category
Include virtual town halls.	Add option for virtual meeting
Since this is a water funding program they should be required to engage utilities.	Engage Water providers
Requests for comments and stakeholder consultation must include opportunities for water/wastewater utilities to provide input. Utilities will be vital in ensuring the LIHWAP program is a success in their state and nationally, and their input is vital on the front end.	Engage Water providers
Consider adding questions about what was done to ensure engagement was equitable. Also consider adding something about gaining feedback from (potential) program participants.	Ensure equitable input
Make information available in several different ways (not just web based) and in various languages.	Multi lingual option
HHS must make sure public participation is real and meaningful, not just a state checking a box and burying a notice on a website that no one will see. In particular, T&C 11.I requires "meaningful public participation in the development of the [grantee's] LIHWAP implementation plan," but states that "publication and acceptance of comments via the grantee's website" would be sufficient. And Model Plan 8.1 allows the outreach for solicitation of comments to be satisfied simply by checking a box that the "request for comments on draft Plan is advertised." HHS should provide more direction to make sure that the notice of availability of the plan for comment is widely disseminated to relevant stakeholders and communities, so that people will know they have the opportunity to comment. This is a new program, so there is not a community of people that knows to look out for annual notices of a draft plan, as there may be with LIHEAP. We commend HHS for including in the model plan (sections 8.2 through 8.5) a requirement to summarize comments received and any changes made in response to comments.	Request Comment summary

Decision - Action Taken
<p>OCS added a box to question 8.1 for "Comments are solicited during outreach activities." OCS did not consider surveys our households with arrearages to be immediately feasible.</p>
<p>OCS added a box to question 8.1 for "Comments are solicited during outreach activities." OCS did not consider surveys our households with arrearages to be immediately feasible.</p>
<p>No change to Model Plan. This item could be addressed through stakeholder or consultation meetings.</p>
<p>Add parentheses behind box for stakeholder consultation meetings with various potential stakeholders (e.g. water utilities, community service providers, potential program participants).</p>
<p>Add parentheses behind box for stakeholder consultation meetings with various potential stakeholders (e.g. water utilities, community service providers, potential program participants).</p>
<p>Add parentheses behind box for stakeholder consultation meetings with various potential stakeholders (e.g. water utilities, community service providers, potential program participants)</p>
<p>Addressed in Outreach section.</p>
<p>Added question 8.4 (Summarize the comments you received on your plan here).</p>

Comments on Fair Hearing (LIHWAP Model Plan Section 9)

you can remove 9.1 thru 9.3 as this is a new program.

Subject	Decision - Action Taken
Plan Content	Questions 9.1 through 9.3 were removed. These relate to results of past hearings. While potentially useful for LIHEAP, the question is not relevant for LIHWAP at this stage. The following questions were renumbered.

Comments on Training (LIHWAP Model Plan Section 10)

Section 10.1.c Training for Water Suppliers: It will likely be impractical for the state agency to conduct training for all of the water suppliers held responsible for producing training materials that local agencies can distribute to their water suppliers.

ADD: 10.1b. Describe local agencies outreached to and trained: ___ Consumer advocates, ___ Water affordability advocacy groups, ___ Community ___ Direct services organizations serving low income populations (eg Food Banks, Legal Services, Faith ministries, etc) ADD: 10.2: Describe to educate community about the program and application process, including which languages materials produced in.

Can technical and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training be stipulated?

Topic	Decision - Action Taken
Training for Water Suppliers	Restructured the training section to request a general narrative on grantee training strategy.
Types of Organizations Trained and Content	Restructured the training section to request a general narrative on grantee training strategy.
	Not added. Training section does not specify details of training content other than an orientation to Terms and Conditions and State Policies and Procedures.

Comments on Performance Goals and Measures (LIHWAP Model Plan Section 11)

11.1 ADD: 'including demographics of applicants and beneficiaries'.

The draft has this section titled as "Performance Management".

Assistance averages and goals should be verified- How was the goal created? Did your agency meet your goal- why or why not?

LIHEAP Tribes are exempt from this section. This section is only required for LIHEAP states. Will tribes be exempt?

Topic	Decision - Action Taken
Demographic Information	Added demographic information to the list in 11.1
Section Title	Section Title maintained... question in survey mislabeled.
Question on Goals	Not changed. OCS may ask for this information in future reporting.
Tribal Exemption?	OCS is not specifically exempting tribes from completing this section, but may create special tribal guidance for reporting.

Comments on Program Integrity (LIHWAP Model Plan Section 12)

It is critical that HHS establish an emergency program that is flexible, fair to the consumers most in need of assistance and committed to the goal of ensuring that all Americans have access to safe and affordable drinking water and wastewater services. The Model Plan currently requires applicants to possess a social security number -- a requirement that inequitably denies any water assistance to those who are living and working in communities throughout the country. That requirement should be removed from the Model Plan to ensure that this population group as well as those possessing social security numbers. Undocumented persons have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic from a public health and economic perspective. It is estimated that there are more than 10 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. who work in the hospitality and other industries negatively impacted by the pandemic. And, because undocumented immigrants are more likely to begin with, they are likely not to have savings to rely on and are therefore especially vulnerable. Many are having to make the hard choices so they can pay for essentials, or keeping themselves and their families safe by following social distancing recommendations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to emphasize that handwashing is essential to limit the spread of COVID-19. Safe and affordable drinking water and wastewater services are essential for housing conditions, so loss of these services jeopardizes access to housing. A recent report by Duke University researcher found that undocumented immigrants were barred nationwide from March through November 2020, COVID-19 infections rates could have been reduced by 8.7% and deaths by 1.5%. In California, a staggering \$1 billion in household water debt affects nearly five million people, with an average debt of \$500 dollars per household. If this continues, millions more risk losing running water because they cannot pay their water bills. Nationwide, the Department of Labor reports that in 2020, 10.7 million Americans were unemployed and the unemployment rate and the number of unemployed individuals was double that of 2019. In California, a staggering \$1 billion in household water debt affects nearly five million people, with an average debt of \$500 dollars per household. From over, with more than 460,000 lives lost as of February 9, 2021 and over 26.8 million active cases of COVID-19. People continue to struggle to protect themselves from and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, thereby increasing their household water usage and water bills. Having access to safe and affordable wastewater service is tied to the very habitability of the home. The status of a person's citizenship should not be a qualifying factor for assistance. It must be noted, too, that in particular, undocumented persons have been omitted from the many state and federal benefit programs during this pandemic. Any immigrant, not just undocumented individuals, who does not have a social security number did not receive assistance under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security ("CARES") Act or a relief check from the recently enacted American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. If you do not have a social security number, if they filed taxes and listed an undocumented child or family member on the returns, they will not receive assistance. Undocumented persons do not qualify for unemployment, which is affecting thousands throughout the U.S. Moreover, excluding undocumented persons from assistance under the LIHWAP applicants is inequitable. An often-overlooked fact by those who seek to exclude undocumented persons from assistance programs is that undocumented immigrants pay payroll taxes and sales taxes. NCLC urges HSS to eliminate this barrier to essential water assistance for millions of U.S. residents. <https://www.npr.org/local/309/2020/03/27/822475329/thousands-of-undocumented-workers-face-the-pandemic-without-a-safety-net> <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/covid-19/home/employment-and-financial-assistance.html> ("Undocumented immigrants are not eligible, you must be authorized to work in the U.S.") <https://www.nber.org/papers/w28394> https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/certlic/drinkingwater/covid-19watersystemsurvey.html

Overall, the program operator should identify all eligible participants by those that have experienced shutoffs or that have water debt or are incumbent on potential participants to learn about the program and submit independent applications. 12.2 ADD: 'Medicare card' to list examples to address low income seniors who may not have other government issued i.d. 12.3 ADD: 'Match Medicare card to HHS/CMS ID' PROVISION: The program should allow all income-qualifying applicants eligibility regardless of documentation status.

Could also include a reporting method for any discrimination taken against clients who receive a benefit through LIHWAP.

Topic	Decision - Action Taken
Citizenship Questions	<p>OCS will maintain consistency with LIHEAP policy regarding citizenship as this would be a significant departure from current policies and procedures. However, the instructions make clear proportionate eligibility if household has mixed citizenship status. Note: If a household has already determined for LIHEAP it does not need to be re-tested.</p>
Documentation and Citizenship Status	<p>OCS will maintain consistency with LIHEAP policy regarding citizenship as this would be a significant departure from current policies and procedures. However, the instructions make clear proportionate eligibility if household has mixed citizenship status. Note: If a household has already determined for LIHEAP it does not need to be re-tested.</p>
Discrimination Reporting	<p>No change in this section, but Section 7 was modified to specifically request information on how grantee will enforce nondiscrimination requirements.</p>

Other General Comments on LIHWAP Model Plan

Cannot fill the form online, yet, there are a lot of boxes to tick, and explanations to write down.

Please make this program a 2021-era program with modern technology, with fast track qualification process, funding that is expended quickly to support low-income customers, transparent data about funding expenditure to the public, and any other information that can be announced to customers have been suffering for far too long. Other programs including internet and cell phone assistance programs have outpaced this program's attention to offset their high water bills through short term and long term assistance. How can this be achieved quickly and effectively?

HHS should consider removing the words "Low Income" from the name of this program. An alternative appropriate program name could be "Water Assistance Program (HWAP)." We agree with comments made on the April 20th webinar that titling the program as "Low Income" could dissuade some qualified applicants.

-Overall, the program operator should identify all eligible participants by those that have experienced shutoffs or that have water debt on their bills. -Potential participants to learn about the program and submit independent applications. -Model program should make clear the undocumented costs of the program. Model program should be seen as data collection mechanism for a long term permanent program to understand trends in unaffordability of water service affected. Therefore, demographic data should be collected for all applicants and noted in any eligibility or program decisions to ensure reach of the program.

Some sections can be condensed to reduce the length of this plan.

I will need to review

Keep it simple to administer

The states will have different levels of water customer debt, partly due to whether there was a state-wide moratorium on shutoffs.

These needs to be set up for a simplified method to be filled out and submitted without having to start a free trial or subscription with Ad Hoc.

Please see my comments in the previous section about limiting the complexity of this process as much as is feasible, given that it is a one-time effort to be the key in getting these funds distributed to those in need sooner rather than later.

The elements associated with items 30 to 35 are too complicated for most small utilities. There are 50,000 public utilities in the US. Average utility size is small. The effort to expend the funds should not exceed the funds allocated.

This application process seems burdensome and likely to result in underutilization of the funding which we know is needed given the amount of need. This should be addressed to simplify and streamline.

Get arrearage \$ amounts from the districts, not directly from customers that fall within the unsustainable formulas used to determine assistance.

accompany water assistance grants with home conservation assessments and education sessions.

The grant application is large and for smaller allocation Tribes does not seem worth the time.

OHCS cannot provide accurate estimations without understanding the funding allocation to Oregon.

This benefit is not available to undocumented households who experience a disparate economic burden based on income, housing and ut

Overall, state administering agencies should be encouraged to mirror the LIHEAP Wood, Propane and Oil program to the greatest extent p

Will need more time to conduct a thorough analysis of the components of the plan. Ability to request technical assistance is key.

Again, is funding available for all enrolled Tribal members of SRPMIC (on/off the community), or only if residing within the boundaries? A
funding that are residing within the boundaries.?

The LIHWAP application is very similar to LIHEAP Model plan. We should not have any issues completing the plan.

We would like to submit the LIHWAP Model Plan via OLDC.

Decision Action Taken	
A fillable PDF will be provided upon OMB clearance.	
A fillable PDF will be provided upon OMB clearance. OCS will work with grantees on other technological outreach options in the future.	
The word "low-income" was in the appropriations language and will be part of the program name. However, guidance will be provided for local outreach and marketing, because the term "low-income" does not need to be highlighted in outreach and intake efforts.	
This is a repeat of input from other sections.	
OCS removed several sections from the LIHEAP plan, but the current sections are all considered necessary at this stage.	
N/A	
A fillable PDF will be provided upon OMB clearance and technical assistance will be provided to assist grantees where possible.	
No change... benefit levels are determined on a state-by-state basis.	
A fillable PDF will be provided upon OMB clearance. Grantees will not need to have Adobe.	
No change...OCS will consider ways to keep simple and managable while integrating with current processes and procedures.	
No immediate change to Model Plan. OCS will continue to review and provide technical assistance.	
No immediate change to Model Plan. OCS will continue to review and provide technical assistance.	
No immediate change to Model Plan. OCS will continue to review and provide technical assistance.	
No immediate change to Model Plan. OCS will continue to review and provide technical assistance.	

OCS will continue to consider assistance to tribes and has established a minimum allotment of \$10,000 which will assist smaller tribes.	
OCS will publish allocations with the award amounts.	
OCS will maintain consistency with LIHEAP policy regarding citizenship as this would be a significant departure from current policies and procedures. However, the instructions make clear proportionate eligibility if household has mixed citizenship status. Note: If a household has already determined for LIHEAP it does not need to be re-tested.	
OCS will continue to consider issues and guidance around water delivery services, well maintenance and septic, but these are not clearly identified in the appropriations language and are not highlighted in the instructions.	
No immediate change to Model Plan. OCS will continue to review and provide technical assistance.	
Additional guidance and technical assistance for tribes will be developed.	
No change.	
A fill able PDF will be developed as the most immediately feasible approach and additional guidance will be provided on submission of the plan.	

Subject
Plan Content
Policy
Program Design
General Feedback
Other

Potential for Follow Up
Actionable
Non Actionable