

## **Assessment of State Infrastructure Coordination Models - New York Water and Sewer Infrastructure Co-Funding Initiative**

**Year of inception:** 2001; at this time, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among funding agencies was initiated by the New York Environmental Facilities Corporation. Nine months elapsed until the final memo was signed and implemented.

**Formality:** Formal; the MOU was signed to formalize coordination which had previously occurred informally.

**Meetings:** The Initiative meets monthly to discuss projects and bi-monthly for other business. Meetings to discuss projects may take up to 1.5 hours and are conducted by conference call to avoid scheduling conflicts.

**Membership:** There are six members, all of which are funding agencies. Other organizations sit in on the Initiative's meetings on an ad-hoc basis.

**Committees/Sub-committees:** The Initiative has two committees: a project review committee and a steering committee. Most funding coordination takes place in the project review committee, which includes all funding agencies. This committee has evolved to make decisions about project funding through cooperative efforts. The steering committee meets bi-monthly in person and sets goals and objectives for outreach, marketing and promotion. It plans workshops, project consultations, and presentations at conferences throughout New York.

**Staff:** The Initiative has elected not to hire any full-time staff positions. The Environmental Facilities Corporation handles the administrative functions.

**Budget:** Administration costs by the Environmental Facilities Corporation are paid from the state revolving fund program. Agencies each provide a percentage of the funding for workshops and other incurred expenses. Most of their money comes primarily from their appropriated funds for water infrastructure projects.

**Promotion/Outreach:** The Initiative advertises extensively to communities. Agencies hold workshops around the state on how to piece together competitive projects and other tips for successful funding. In 2005, they held 65 one-half hour project consultations with communities. Nearly every funding agency and regional agency was represented at each consultation to instruct communities on their funding options and the funding process.

### **Description:**

The Co-Funding Initiative's MOU does not negate the authority or autonomy of participating funding agencies. Individual funding agencies continue to make decisions

for which projects they will fund and how much they will contribute to each one. Federal agencies have no obligation to participate, but the USDA Rural Development Program's state representative has nonetheless signed the MOU and fully cooperated with the agreement. Agencies meet regularly, share information, jointly finance whenever possible, minimize applicants' duplicated efforts, and cooperate to meet objectives outlined in the MOU.

The Co-Funding Initiative was established primarily for assisting jointly-funded projects. All communities are not required to use its services; however, the agencies ultimately work with every community that uses co-funding. Agencies share applicant information through ongoing communication and a centralized database.

**Shared Information:**

- 1.) Central Information Database – It is currently underused by the Initiative but has the potential to help agencies make more informed funding decisions. The database has fields such as median household income for determining a community's ability to pay. The Environmental Facilities Corporation updates the database as often as possible. The Corporation collects information from funding agencies by making phone calls and receiving carbon-copy e-mails about projects. For example, it receives information on all of USDA's preliminary eligibility determinations because USDA is typically the lead agency for wastewater projects. For drinking water, the corporation must exert more effort to track down new projects and project updates from multiple agencies. Few, if any, co-funded projects fall through the cracks using this database. Some have suggested that the Initiative begin to incorporate project expenditure data into the database.
- 2.) Co-funding Questionnaire – New York has considered a joint application but has not developed one. However, it does utilize a co-funding questionnaire. Information from this questionnaire is imported into the centralized database and presented to the funding agencies. However, the questionnaire is rarely used by communities.
- 3.) Eligibility Self-Assessment Tool – The Initiative has developed a website application for communities to determine which funding programs their project qualifies. This provides communities with an initial glimpse into options for public funding.