

IDIS LIVE

...for the Integrated Disbursement and Information System

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Office of Community Planning and Development

NEW YORK CITY NOW LIVE!

On May 18, the City of New York went LIVE on IDIS. Going LIVE in IDIS was a tremendous effort and a great achievement for the City. A huge entitlement grantee receiving almost \$400 million a year in CDBG, HOME, ESG, and HOPWA funds, it took a lot of coordination across four City departments to get everyone trained and their processes organized for the new way of doing business in IDIS.

The City was originally scheduled to go LIVE on Friday, May 15th. With such a large city, the volume of data was immense. It therefore took longer for all of their converted information to migrate to IDIS production than the technical experts expected. Thus, the conversion was not complete until the following Monday, May 18th.

Many thanks go to **Frank DeMarinis** and **Mike Orlay** from the NYC Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Frank and Mike led their staff with positive can-do attitudes about getting the work done and learning the new system. The City's Office of Management and Budget, which works with the CDBG program, handles an average of 30,000 units yearly in over 3,665 buildings in maintenance and rehabs. As you can imagine, this is a huge documentation and data entry effort.

Also leading the pack in the IDIS conversion effort was **Clint Medley** with the New York City Office of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). Clint, **Amani Tawfik**, and **Wayne Mackie** led their staff in helping make the jump from the old HOME CMI system to IDIS. HPD handles close to 8,000 HOME assisted housing units, most of which are rehabs.

The IDIS conversion effort for New York City's Department of Homelessness Services (DHS), which handles ESG, was headed by **Meredith Swackhamer** and **Sarah Segal**. Thanks to Meredith and Sarah for quickly and thoroughly learning IDIS and implementing the system in their department.

Last, but by no means least, was the Mayors Office on AIDS Policy Coordination. The Mayor's Office, which handles HOPWA funds for the City, had over \$100 million in unspent grant funds in the weeks prior to conversion. Training and coordinating the HOPWA effort, while tackling their technical issues, was no small task. **Scott Turner** led the effort at the Mayor's Office, along with **Mir Bashar** and **Adrienne Page**. (Continued on next page)

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One of the more interesting of the City's training sessions occurred on-site at the Mayor's Office in the old Tweed Courthouse in New York. This is the location of the Office on AIDS Policy Coordination. Scott's office knew the technical requirements for an IDIS connection (SprintLink). The PC hook-up, however, from the old Courthouse was not connected. It was a scary reality-check when IDIS trainer, **Phil Helbling**, discovered the source of the problem - the PC's modem was not connected to anything!

The City's connection to just over \$100 million dollars in HOPWA funds was dangling by a phone cord. Phil and Scott quickly resolved the problem, and the Mayor's Office was able to connect.

Again -- many, many thanks go to Frank, Mike, Clint, Meredith, Sarah, Scott and all the others with the City. You are making IDIS work. Congratulations and welcome to the IDIS user community! ■

FIRST NATIONAL MEETING OF HOPWA GRANTEES HELD

Eighty HOPWA formula grantees met in Arlington, Virginia for 3 days of meetings, seminars, and discussions on HOPWA issues from May 14 through May 16, 1998. The meeting was organized by the Office HIV/AIDS Housing at HUD and the Office's technical assistance provider, AIDS Housing of Washington. Grantees were welcomed by **Fred Karnas**, CPD Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economic Development. **Eva Plaza**, Assistant Secretary, Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, gave the keynote address on Thursday, stressing that discrimination in housing against people with AIDS is against the law and her office is committed to pursuing complaints in this area .

On the first day, HOPWA formula Grantees had a chance to discuss with each other how they integrate HOPWA with the Consolidate Plans, work with program sponsors and contractors, and manage their existing resources.

On Friday, grantees focused on the collaboration with the Ryan White Programs. They were addressed by **Dr. Joseph O'Neal**, Director of the HIV/AIDS

Bureau at HHS in Washington, DC and a practicing physician in Baltimore. He spoke about recent advances that have been made in HIV/AIDS treatment. Several members of Dr. O'Neill's staff also made presentations, ran workshops and served on panels.

[The Ryan White CARE Act funded almost 5 billion dollars in programs for FY 1991 through FY 1998. The Ryan White funds supplement the \$197 million (1998) in HOPWA funds in helping entitlements care for their communities. The 1990 Ryan White CARE Act, is named after the Indiana teenager who became an active public educator on HIV/AIDS issues after he contracted the disease. He died the same year the legislation was passed. Ryan White programs fund four "titles": Title I - HIV emergency relief programs, Title II - HIV care grants to States, Title III - HIV early intervention services and Title IV - HIV services and access to research for children, youth, women, and families.]

On Saturday, the grantees heard from **Todd Summers**, Deputy Director of the White House Office on National AIDS Policy. He pointed out that the need for HOPWA housing has actually increased as people in need of housing and residents are living longer.

HOPWA grantees broke-out into specialized sessions later on in the day to discuss approaches to substance abuse, capacity building, working with the Ryan White programs, or technical assistance on IDIS. Thanks to the HOPWA attendees for making this First National meeting a success. With the enthusiasm, involvement and participation of the grantees that came to Arlington, a future meeting for this group is scheduled as part of the Third National HIV/AIDS Housing Conference to be held in Atlanta on September 16 - 20 1998.■

ACCESSING IDIS VIA THE INTERNET - AN UPDATE

IDIS will soon be accessible via your web browser over the Internet! Testing this functionality is in the pilot stages. What exactly, does the ability to access IDIS via the Internet mean?

Accessing IDIS over the web means that you will no longer have to use SprintLink to connect and log on to IDIS! By simply punching in the web address for HUD, you will be able to arrive at the IDIS logon screen. No more SprintLink. No more dedicated modem lines. No more SpintLink IDs and password problems. You will still be logging into the HUD mainframe to use IDIS, it is just that your method of connecting to IDIS that will change.

The ability for you to access IDIS over the 'net' means many things:

- You will no longer require a modem for each PC you want to connect to IDIS. You will be able to connect via your LAN.
- IDIS will have a more modern, Windows-type look and feel. While HUD is still in the process of upgrading IDIS to a totally Windows "point and click" functionality, the look and maneuverability through IDIS when accessed over the Internet will be much improved.

Internet accessibility also means that HUD will save approximately a million dollars a month in line charges (which we currently incur with SprintLink). Think of all the hours and hours of charges each month multiplied by thousands of users utilizing IDIS, and you'll get the idea.

One drawback, however, is that you must have a web browser - access to the Internet. If you or your organization does not have access to the 'net' yet, you will not be able to take advantage of this new way to log into IDIS.

After Internet access successfully completes its pilot testing, we hope to release web access to IDIS by this fall. In the meantime, of course, we will be testing the reliability, security, and data integrity of information entered and accessed via this method. We'll keep you posted! ■

CAPER FOR 1997 PROGRAM YEAR AND IDIS REPORTS

Report problems in IDIS have made it difficult for grantees with early program years to prepare parts of the CAPER for 1997. Several of the reports, as identified in the February 18, 1998 memorandum from Saul Ramirez on the 1997 CAPER, have problems. HUD is working as quickly as possible to repair these problems.

Those CAPER reports which are provided to the public from IDIS must be clear and correct. If a grantee believes that any of the reports which they make public have problems, they should **revise the downloaded report**. Grantees should provide copies of their publicly available reports and other reports to HUD with an explanation of any problems. This article identifies known problems with reports as listed in the February 18 memo and identifies ways in which the grantees can meet their CAPER reporting responsibilities despite report problems.

The February 18th memo listed four reports which contain information that must be provided to citizens. One report, the CDBG Financial Summary, which was expected to be available through IDIS is not complete and must be produced manually. A second report, the Summary of Accomplishments Report, is working properly. Two of the reports with problems are:

Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (PR06) this report is intended to show proposed budgets under each of the projects developed for all previous action plans and a summary of the actual funding, draws and accomplishments for activities related to each of those projects. For some projects this report is not showing the amount drawn. Grantees can find the amount drawn on the List of Activities Report (PR02).

Summary of Activities (PR03). This report serves the same function as the CDBG Activities Report for the Final Statement. It automatically includes each funded CDBG activity which can be considered "open" during the year selected in the parameter. It

includes narratives and disbursements under IDIS for the selected year.

Grantees have had problems including all activities which were converted from a prior plan year, but which still were active during the report year. To have these activities appear, grantees need to fund these converted activities for at least a dollar and show them as open.

Disbursements which occurred after the plan year for expenses accrued during the year, are not included with other disbursements shown for an activity. Until grantees have the ability to relate their draws to the report year in which the draws occurred, grantees will need to reflect accruals in the activity narrative, download the report and modify the downloaded reports to reflect the correct expenditures [disbursements] for any activities with revised or accrued draws. The Grant Drawdown Report (PR05) and the Drawdown Voucher Report (PR07) can be used to identify adjustment amounts. Any changes in the disbursement should be noted in the system under the narrative for the 1997 report year.

There are also some problems with the other reports and downloads which are used by Field Offices and grantees to review program activity. Known problems are as follows:

The ESG Financial Summary (PR12) only needs to be reviewed by Headquarters and Field staff. It will be eliminated from the view by grantees. It need not be submitted by grantees with the CAPER.

The Status of HOME Grants (PR27) "Other Reservation" column just includes subgrants to "other entities". It is being modified to include all subgrants.

The Rehabilitation Activities Report (PR10) lists all multiunit activities regardless of program year. It can be used by the field office and grantees to confirm LOWMOD percentages and review the expenditures per completed units. This report need not be submitted with the 1997 CAPER. While this report need not be included in reports to HUD, the status of the activity should be correctly entered into IDIS. ■

JULY 3RD IS A FEDERAL HOLIDAY. IDIS AND THE TAU WILL BE UNAVAILABLE ON THAT DAY.

IDIS PROFILE: BARON BELL

Baron Bell, a member of the IDIS training team, has provided training and technical assistance in IDIS to users as far south as Miami and as far north as Alaska. Baron has found that no matter how large or small the grantee - IDIS issues are similar. "The grantee may have a large number of projects and activities, or more departmental agencies involved with IDIS. However, the biggest obstacle always seems to be fear of utilizing the system," Baron says. He believes assisting grantees in conquering this fear helps them to achieve success in IDIS.

"Grantees do not need to be computer experts, although being a little familiar with the keyboard does help," admits Baron. "I explain to the grantees that much of IDIS is knowing the proper menu item to select, then knowing how to move the cursor from field to field to enter information they already know."

Having worked for a HUD entitlement community before becoming an IDIS trainer, Baron possesses a good deal of knowledge on HUD program regulations. To Baron, the most challenging and rewarding part of training involves teaching people how to navigate in IDIS and directing them to the appropriate regulations for program information guidance. "You can teach someone how to navigate to the beneficiary screen, and tell them how to answer 'Yes' or 'No' for 'Nature or Location.' However, if the grantee does not understand the question, or if the trainer is not able to provide guidance, that user will still have a level of discomfort with IDIS."

Baron realizes that the utilization of IDIS is only a part of users' job responsibilities, and that they may not retain all of what is taught. He does believe, however, that the secret to training is getting users to feel confident in their ability to avail themselves of the system whenever necessary in their day-to-day work. "When the training is completed, grantees have confidence in their prowess in IDIS. This allows them to concentrate on their job - providing services to low- and moderate-income persons." ■

A GOODBYE FROM MOHNI ANAND

I joined CPD two years ago on May 13th, 1996. At that time, Chester County, PA was the only grantee "live" in IDIS. Joe Smith [former Director of CPD's Office of Executive Services at HUD] and Ed Winkler [former Director of CPD's Systems Evaluation Division at HUD] gave me the responsibility of implementing IDIS for the rest of the entitlement grantees. As you all know, we were given extremely tight deadlines. the outlook appeared daunting. I am sure that, at times, you were overburdened with endless telephone calls and email messages from me.

Although the task seemed impossible, we did it! This past May, we finally got New York City to join the IDIS family. We now have ALL - BUT ONE (i.e., 962 entitlement grantees) "LIVE" in IDIS. We even have seven states converted to IDIS. This has been possible because of the full cooperation and commitment from all of you.

During IDIS training and Users' Group meetings, I had the pleasure of meeting with most of you and I have thoroughly enjoyed working with you. But, the time has come to say "Good-bye" now.

I've moved on to the Office of Housing, Systems and Technology Division. I wish to thank everyone of you for your support in helping me do my job. I wish you all the best in the future. ■

**THE NEXT ISSUE OF IDISLIVE WILL BE
PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 1, 1998.**

LOCAL ADMINISTRATOR TECHNICAL BULLETIN

ODD ENTRY IN GRANTEE LIST

For users with more than one profile (for whatever reason), the Grantee List screen (C04MA20) appears just after the initial IDIS screen that says "PLEASE PRESS ENTER TO CONTINUE", and before the Main Menu screen. Many users have seen it in Pre-Production where they had a choice of the "333333" practice data, or their own data for viewing and verifying.

Some users, predominantly state people, will see an odd entry in their Grantee List, that will likely frustrate them. It is "US DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN". But people can't use it, at all. Why in the name of HUD did John Mayer give them such a useless nuisance?

The reasons:

IDIS does not now allow me to delete a profile. That is an option that is coming, but until it is possible to delete a profile, the only way I can get rid of a profile created in error is to change it to HUD HQ, and flag it INACTIVE. That prevents a Local Administrator from being able to turn it back on, giving access back to a person that he/she shouldn't have in the first place. Why did I create a profile that is an error? Three usual reasons:

First, sometimes it was just a mistake - but one IDIS won't yet allow me to erase. There's a small percentage of those.

Second, more often, it is because I thought the person belonged to one place when he/she belonged to another. That's why so many state people will see this: I thought they belonged to the state capital, rather than with the state itself. To prevent them from getting into the wrong data, and the wrong dollars, I had to disable the "city" profile the only way I could, and in a way that the Local Administrator couldn't undo - by changing the profile to HUD HQ - the only profile that a Local

Administrator can't undo, and that has no data or dollars associated with it.

And third, sometimes it is because a person has moved from one grantee to another, and still works with IDIS.

The effects:

If a regular IDIS user tried to choose the "US DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN" profile, he/she will get to the MAIN MENU screen. At the bottom of that screen just under "TYPE SELECTION AND PRESS ENTER" it will say "LAST TRANSACTION ABORTED". The only key the user should press is F12. That will take him/her out of IDIS, back to Sprintlink, where he/she can try again. Trying anything else, like "X" for exit, yields a flashing "WORKING" in the lower right. And not much else. The user should then hold down both CTRL and ALT, and press Delete. From the next window (CLOSE PROGRAM) he/she should select "End Task", and from the window that opens after that, he/she should select "Yes" to the question "Do you want to terminate this program now and lose any unsaved information in the program?" That will take him/her back to Sprintlink, where he/she can try again.

What we're doing:

From time to time, we will purge the system of these profiles, to remove erroneous profiles and minimize the nuisance. Also, a change to IDIS is in the works, so that Local Administrators (or I) can delete erroneous or out of date profiles.■

—John Mayer

IDIS POCs, AND TECHNICALLY-INCLINED OTHERS.

I've run into the same problem twice today. I was totally mystified the first time, and wanted to warn you about it so if you hear any of your users describing the same symptoms, you'll know what to tell them. The symptoms:

- The user had been getting into Production IDIS just fine, some time ago.
- SprintLink seems to work fine, and the user has it pointed right at Production.
- IDIS takes the ID and password, but says the ID is "Not Defined to Security."
- I unsuspend the ID and reset the password, for Production. It gets me into Production just fine when I test it.
- The user *STILL* gets told the ID is "Not Defined to Security." This is logically impossible. What can be going on?

Why?:

The person has probably had Windows 95 installed on the PC. Now we've learned that SprintLink will work with Windows 95, but IT HAS TO BE REINSTALLED, AND SET UP properly - pointed the right way, etc. If not, the user will see the symptoms above. I had forgotten that. Some users have, too.

SprintLink 2.0a (and that's the *ONLY* version people should be using) won't work with Windows 95 installed on top of it. However, SprintLink 2.0a will work installed on top of Windows 95. ■

—John Mayer

SPRINTLINK REMINDER

Have you found that IDIS suddenly no longer recognizes your password? And you *KNOW* it's been less than six months since you last logged on?

If this has happens to you, the next thing to do is check your "Communications SetUp" in SprintLink and make sure that you are pointing towards IDIS *production* (or pre-production if that's where you want to be.)

This quick and easy check may save you several phone calls and frustration. ■

IDIS Q&A

WHAT IS MEANT BY “REVOLVING”?

Q: Definition of "Revolving" - IDIS Live Issue #16 references different treatment of "non-revolving" program income versus "revolving" program income. Has anyone found a clear written definition of "revolving" program income? In recent IDIS training I was orally told that "revolving" means "earmarked". At the beginning of every budget year/Consolidated Plan year, we estimate anticipated program income and in effect "earmark" that estimated program income to particular projects/allocation types. Does that mean that all consolidated plan/budget estimated anticipated program income is "revolving program income"? Or does the "earmarking" have to be to a particular "activity"? Is there a perceived advantage to characterizing these funds either as "revolving" or "non-revolving"? *Joe in San Diego* ■

Answer #1 (CDBG): “Revolving” program income is income which gets credited by a community to a specific locally-defined “revolving fund.” A “revolving fund” means a separate fund (with a set of accounts that are independent of other program accounts) established for the purpose of carrying out specific activities which, in turn, generate payments to the fund for use in carrying out the same activities [see 24 CFR 570.500(b)]. Thus, it involves a more specific kind of “earmarking” than simply estimating and budgeting anticipated program income. An advantage to establishing a revolving fund relates to the requirements for disbursement of program income in such a fund. While revolving fund program income must be substantially disbursed before additional U.S. Treasury draws are made for the activity for which the fund is designated, such income does not have to be disbursed before Treasury draws are made for other assisted activities. *Office of Block Grant Assistance*

Answer #2 (HOME): The HOME program does not permit the establishment of Revolving Loan Funds. However, when a subrecipient or State recipient administers only one HOME activity (such as a rehabilitation loan program) and the participating jurisdiction has authorized that program income may be retained, the activity may operate in a manner which is similar to some Revolving Loan Funds. In such cases, program income is deposited directly into the recipient or subrecipient account for use in funding additional HOME projects. All requirements governing the receipt and expenditure of HOME program income must be met in administering the funds in this account. These requirements include the prohibitions against drawing down additional HOME funds from the US Treasury before using cash balances in the designated account. *Office of Affordable Housing Programs*

EFFECT OF DRAWDOWNS ON ACTIVITY FUNDING

Q: Drawdown Effect on Activity Funding - when an activity is set up in IDIS we normally also fund that activity using the "entitlement line" in the Activity Funding menu. It is my understanding that when program income is entered into the IDIS system, the very next drawdown will automatically charge the "program income line" and that the IDIS system will automatically bounce back (restore) that draw amount back into the previously funded "entitlement line" without a need to manually do a funding revision. Is this correct? My accounting staff is concerned that draw downs which charge against the "program income line" will still require the PJ to manually do a funding revision to the previously funded "entitlement line". Can someone with program income drawdown experience please comment? *Joe in San Diego*

A: Yes! You’ve got the Program Income / Draw process correct. Activity funding will automatically “forgive” your committed entitlement dollars back to your EN bucket once your draw has occurred and pulled your PI. ■

SETTING UP A HOME PROJECT

Q: I am getting ready to set up a HOME project for the City of Ann Arbor in the next several days and would like some suggestions. The project will commit funds from FY 96, 97 and 98 HOME allocations set up for a CHDO. Ideally, I would like to set up the project under one year; say 1997 and then when I fund it, use the pots from 1996, 1997 and 1998.

However, there are still the CR funds in 1996 in a "generic" acquisition/rehab project that at this point are uncommitted, and the same for 1997. I haven't yet set up our 1998 projects. If I just use one project, then go back and adjust/decrease the funding for the 1996 project and then decrease the 1998 project funding, won't this skew the status of HOME grants reporting by making the project year totals inaccurate?

In the past where a project spanned two program years, we set it up in two different places. This however, results in double counting the units if statistics are listed under both activities. Any suggestions?

A: Just setup the project (HOME activity) once. You can use the existing project for 1997 if you like. You are right. If you set it up separately for each year, say 1996, 1997, 1998, you will be double-counting for the same units.

Just use one project (from the Consolidated Plan) and one activity in IDIS. It is being funded from a single CHDO. Fine. When you fund that activity, be sure to reflect the different YEARS that the funding is coming from on the C04MO05 screen.

Defund the uncommitted, unspent "generic" funds. They will flow back into the CHDO's bucket to be re-applied to the new activity you are creating for the multiple year's. Just create one IDIS activity for this HOME project to avoid double keying and double counting. ■

ENTERING PROGRAM YEAR INFORMATION IN IDIS

Q: My question concerns properly entering accomplishments data for an activity that spans several program years. Our FY 1996 housing program was still underway in FY 1997. We used IDIS and reported FY 1996 accomplishments on Screen C04MA04. How do I report accomplishments on this 1996 funded activity during our 1997 program year (PY)? If I use key F11 to display a new accomplishments screen, the system will not let me save if I enter the PY 1996. When I changed the PY to 1997, I could save this new screen with my 1997 accomplishments. So, does this mean that in order to enter new accomplishment data, I will have to delete the narrative I used for FY 1996? *Aane Aaby, Massillon, Ohio*

A: The program year (PY) field on screen C04MA04 stands for the program year of the performance report. For example, for those grantees reporting on performance for the period 7/1/97 through 6/30/98, this is considered the 1997 program year. In those cases where an activity is carried out over several program years, you do not have to delete prior accomplishment narrative data. You will have a separate C04MA04 screen for each year that it was reported on in the annual CAPER. *Mille Dusha, HUD San Francisco, CA* ■

Q: Suppose you have a FY 1996 funded activity that does not begin until program year 1997. As part of the setup for this activity, screen C04MA04 defaults to a program year of 1996 since it is a 1996 funded activity. However, since the activity is being undertaken in 1997, do we then have to change this program year to 1997 on this screen? *Aane Aaby, Massillon, Ohio*

A: Yes, that means you have to change the program year to 1997. The reports function in IDIS will pick up only narratives for the program year being reported on. Make sure that when you do an accomplishments narrative, all the screens are for the current reporting year (1997). It may help you to remember that the program year really should read "reporting year". *Linda Dresdner, HUD Jacksonville, FL* ■

ALLOCATION OF OPERATING FUNDS

Q: We have received our 1998 HOME funds but the 10% admin and the 5% CHDO operating funds were not broken out into the PJ Admin bucket or the CHDO reserve bucket. Is this a mistake on HUD's part or has the procedure for getting these funds allocated changed? Our prior year moneys were put into their prospective buckets automatically. *Michael Duncan, Georgia Urban Consortium*

A: Yes, IDIS has changed the way HOME funds are put in. The grantee has to establish the "pots" for admin and CHDO via the subgrant menu item. I think the underlying reason for this is that there were many requests to change the automatic 10% admin and 5% CHDO operating, etc., so they decided that the grantees might as well just set up whatever amount they want (within the regulatory minimum and maximum levels, of course).

The 15% CHDO reserve is automatically set up in IDIS, but can be increased by the PJ using the subgrant module. [Note, as always, the 15% may not be decreased.] *Linda Dresdner, HUD Jacksonville* ■

CENSUS TRACTS

Q: How do you enter 3 digit census tracts as the census tract field requires a 7 digit entry (Area Benefit Screen C04MX03)?

A: The field works like this: Census tracts are four digits, a dot, then two digits (9999.00). If the grantee has only three digits, they are probably the last three. They may want to:

- Check their records for the correct census tract,
- Enter 000x.xx as their entry in that field. It would probably be correct.■

NEW GRANTS AVAILABLE?

Q: How do we know when Washington has put our new year (1998) funds into IDIS? The last I heard it was about a week after a signed grant agreement had been received by the area office. Other than printing a report, how do we know?

Larry Friedman, Ann Arbor, Michigan

A: Easy! Check your 02 option in Drawdowns - the View Grant Summary Details screen. Your latest grant is always at the bottom of the list (C04MD51 screen).

If you do not have access to Drawdowns, you can check by simply "eyeballing" your "Amnt Available" column in Activity Funding (C04MO04 screen). Or, as you say, you could run a report to check as well.

As always, your jurisdictions grant will not be inserted into IDIS until your grant agreement has been signed by your field office. ■

STATE UPDATE

Four more States have been added to those
LIVE in IDIS!

**Alaska
Louisiana
Minnesota
Mississippi**

Which join:

**Delaware
Maine
Maryland, and
The District of Columbia**

Welcome to the IDIS Community!

IDIS LIVE GUEST COLUMNS

*If you would like to submit an IDIS Live Guest Column, contact **Vera Perez** by phone (202-708-0614, ext. 4786) or cc Mail: (Vera_A._Perez@hud.gov).*

FROM THE FIELD:

From the Field is a regular feature in which Field Office Representatives share their thoughts about IDIS. Charles Halm, from Baltimore, Maryland office and Margie Dziwulski, of Buffalo, New York office are the contributors for this issue. Thank you both for your insights.

TWO CHEERS FOR IDIS

The relationship that Field Offices develop with IDIS is based largely on their pre-IDIS experiences. I have been a CPD Representative in the Maryland State Office for eighteen years; I am currently the lead Representative for Baltimore City and am also responsible for Baltimore County. For several years I was the only person in my Office who had Representative responsibility for the HOME Program. I was spoiled by the Cash & Management Information System (CMIS) and expected much from a system that would replace it.

I have been living with IDIS for what seems a very long time. I attended the first Fair Oaks training and, shortly thereafter, accompanied my Office's grantees during their very frustrating Fair Oaks experience. For a while, I was our Office's IDIS administrator. However, when our current Financial Analyst joined the staff, I assumed a back-up position. I have continued to be involved with IDIS on the local level for my own communities and as a "consultant" for other Reps. I assisted HUD Headquarters HOME staff in designing IDIS reports, participated in IDIS Advisory Committee meetings, and will be reviewing chapters in the revised IDIS User Manual, currently in the works. I use IDIS more and more each day.

So, am I a satisfied IDIS customer? Am I pleased at how IDIS has worked for our grantees and the Field Offices? Yes and no.

There are many aspects of IDIS that I like. As someone who has worked primarily with HOME and CDBG, I appreciate that IDIS permits input of a lot of data relevant to those programs. I think that Activity Funding has been a useful tool in keeping straight for grantees and HUD the sources of funds for each activity. (As a HOME CMIS veteran, I like the idea of seeing what years' funds are committed to each activity). I am also becoming a fan of the accomplishments screen (C04MA04), which has the capacity to capture a lot of valuable information succinctly. The more I get used to the current list of reports, the more I appreciate their usefulness to us and the grantees.

As a CPD Representative concerned with programmatic issues (i.e., ensuring the grantees are complying with the rules), I feel that IDIS's capacity to provide information in a form that will allow Field staff to assess compliance needs further enhancement.

For example, at present, our grantees must continue to do the Financial Status Report manually. IDIS also does not yet provide information on compliance with ESG caps. I do, however, give IDIS a great deal of credit. It addresses a number of key HOME issues (commitments, CHDO reservations and other entity reservations) through the Subgranting feature. The Status of HOME Grants Report (C04PR27) seems to me to be a model toward which other programs should strive.

As a Rep who deals with a grantee with quite a few Section 108 loan guarantees, I am disappointed that the use of EDI funds and Section 108 proceeds for activities (as opposed to CDBG repaying Section 108 loans) currently cannot be entered into the system. Our Office has a grantee which will be contributing funds (not program income) over several years to its CDBG program in connection with an audit

resolution. These funds will clearly be part of the grantee's program and subject to relevant CDBG requirements. However, IDIS is not designed to "capture" this specific program resource. I'd also like to see the system designed to account for HOME shortfall funds contributed by a local participating jurisdiction.

I also feel we need to provide more accurate explanations of the relationship between the features of IDIS and the programs it supports. For example, there is a field on screen C04MC01 in the IDIS Setup Activity CDBG Path called Favored Activity. The explanation for that field in the IDIS User Manual states that an "X" should be entered into the field "if this is a 'favored' (i.e., one of national interest or of economic development) activity." What does this mean? My best guess is that the field is supposed to denote an activity listed at 570.209(b)(2)(v) of the CDBG regulations. I may be wrong, however, the language of the reference guide should provide clear guidance.

Another concern I have with the system is the Field Office staff's inability to access the Subgranting and Plan/Project menus just as they may in View Activity and Activity Funding. In many instances the inability of the Field to see what the grantees see in IDIS has hampered us in helping the grantees. This was true particularly during the critical conversion months.

Those conversions went relatively well. Our five largest grantees (I am including the State of Maryland in this number) have all gone "live" over a nine-month period, starting with Baltimore City. It went "live" the same week that Activity Funding and Subgranting went into operation. Our experiences with the larger, multi-program grantees have been a real education. It is one thing to have 50 activities at conversion, another to have 1,500. I must acknowledge that both grantees and Field staff were not ready for the extensive preparation, the grantee anxiety, the need to design and redesign procedures and think and rethink responsibilities and staffing requirements --all prerequisites to a large grantee's getting up to speed on the system.

Some larger grantees adjusted to IDIS better than others. Our large grantees have had to learn quickly--and we had to learn even more quickly if we were to be of any help to them--in order for them not to get

too far behind. I noted a substantial decrease in draws from the U.S. Treasury by new IDIS communities during the conversion months. (It would be revealing to calculate the savings in Federal borrowing costs related to slower draws attributable to IDIS conversion).

What I see as the biggest challenge with regard to IDIS is not the system itself, but the collective need for CPD to have a handle on the evolving interaction of Community 2020 and IDIS with the consolidated plan rule, consolidated reporting, and the formula grant programs themselves. Before 1992, most of what the CPD Field staff did was program-specific. Each formula grant program had different rules, different applications, and different reports. There was no "big picture." Things have certainly changed. Our Office recently did some grantee training and every issue we addressed, whether program-specific or not (program income, amendments, action plan preparation, reporting) needed to be treated from the perspective of both changed regulations and the new automated systems. A perspective which, for lack of a better term, I call the "Consolidated Plan/IDIS Environment."

One small example of what happens when the systems and the regulations are so closely linked occurred when IDIS was revised in February 1998. The revision permitted separate reporting of CDBG benefit for extremely low-income persons (up to 30 percent of median). I have to acknowledge that the consolidated plan regulations from the beginning have required reporting at that income level. However, neither the ENTERS version of the Grantee Performance Report nor IDIS accommodated such reporting. Now, grantees could report this breakout of benefit through IDIS. This small change in IDIS will change the language in grantee contracts with subrecipients, require revisions to reporting instruments used by grantees, make grantees distribute and explain another set of income limits, etc.

What has become more obvious to me each day is that the nature of our IDIS work is changing. We have spent most of our time, thus far, as technical assistance providers, getting grantees converted and drawing down funds. Our IDIS role is now evolving in the direction of the "data cop," getting grantees to document accomplishments correctly and quickly.

The language in the HOPWA and ESG grant agreements has been changed to require “quarterly” updating by grantees in IDIS.

The May 11 memorandum from Bill Eargle (Acting Director of CPD’s Systems Evaluation Division) on IDIS Data Review encourages grantees to do more frequent updating on IDIS and will give Field staff additional grantee oversight roles. As the memo states, we are to “re-emphasize to grantees the importance of timeliness, completeness, and accuracy in entering IDIS data” and “notify grantees of incomplete and/or inaccurate records.”

These newly emphasized Field staff roles will somehow have to be balanced with all other Field responsibilities. And, if the data being inputted is to have any value, it is even more important for CPD to make crystal clear the links between programmatic concerns and IDIS. ■

Submitted by Charles Halm, CPD Representative from the Baltimore Field Office

RE-THINKING PROJECT SETUPS IN IDIS

Do you have too many projects in IDIS? Probably. Are there too many activities under these projects? Never! Now that we’re all live in IDIS, many grantees are looking at the yearly action plans that they have previously submitted and they are rethinking the process for setting up future plans. Why? Upon entering their data, a number of grantees are finding that because of the way they have set up their action plans, the activities become the exact duplicates of their projects.

Perhaps it’s time to really look at the projects, too. Do you really want your activities to be a mirror image of your projects? Or, would it be more sensible to generalize your projects while building your activities as the individual contracts in your program? Many of our grantees are setting up an activity for each contract that they enter into. They have found this to be the best way to control their program and track their accomplishments. [In fact, the HOME program requires that each “HOME project” as defined in the HOME regulations be set up as a single IDIS activity.]

It is up to each grantee to determine the range of their data and how that data will best serve them. However, there is one very important question to answer as data is entered into IDIS. “How do I want the information in my GPR to be portrayed?”

In order to adequately show where funds have been distributed in your community, I believe it’s best to get down to the basics and input as much information as possible. For a housing rehabilitation program, for example, you can enter all the rehabilitation cases into IDIS. It’s a big database, but the system can take it! The information that you can produce for your GPR and for mapping your accomplishments would be magnificent. Imagine showing your local citizen group all the rehab that has been completed in their neighborhood. You could also include public facilities, economic development and any other activities carried out in the area.

If you do enter each case in IDIS, you may be able to eliminate any local system you have been maintaining to track your accomplishments. You should try to input as much information as possible as soon as you have it available. When that last drawdown is completed, you should have entered all the data you can into the system and mark the activity as “Complete.” It is important to remember the old computer saying, “Garbage in, garbage out.” So, keep up with your data input and include everything possible.

If you decide not to enter each CDBG case in the system, you must remember to cumulatively track your accomplishments. I believe this is the more complicated method because you may forget to add a case or two to your cumulative amounts. In those instances, the calculation of households versus the funds expended would be incorrect. You would probably have to maintain another local system in order to keep your numbers accurate.

Remember, IDIS is a growing child. I assure you that what you see now is not what you will see in the future. Enhancements are being made every day. So, think about what you can get out of the system and go for it! ■

Submitted by Margie Dziuwlski, Financial Analyst of the Buffalo Field Office

NATIONAL USERS GROUP MEETINGS

Two Users Group meetings were held in the month of May in the cities of Memphis, TN and Omaha, NE. Below are the highlights of those sessions.

Submitted by Tracee Stills of the Shelby County Department of Housing in Memphis, TN

My first step in planning a Users Group meeting came after a telephone call I received from **Lincoln Burruss**. He told me that he was coming down to Tennessee in May to facilitate a session and to start making plans for a meeting. This wasn't as easy as I thought!

Memphis in May is an annual event which draws people from all around the country. The events are held downtown on the Mississippi River. As you can imagine, this makes it virtually impossible to book hotel rooms downtown or anywhere else in Memphis. Add to that, combining the hotel rooms and the meeting room under the same roof, and you can imagine this was quite a task. Just as I was about to give up, a hotel I contacted earlier in the week returned my telephone call. They notified me that they could accommodate both hotel rooms and the meeting space. That was a relief! So, I grabbed it and called Lincoln back to confirm everything.

Getting the word out about the meeting was not difficult. There were many users in our region who were interested in coming to a session of this sort. Also, having the event announced in the IDISLive newsletter helped spread the word. HUD headquarters sent reference materials, agendas, and bulletins several days before the meeting. Everything was falling into place and we looked forward to the big day, May 15th.

We had a total of 38 attendees. That may not sound like a big turnout, however, it included grantees not only from Memphis but from Jackson, TN, and Washington, DC. **Dave Ralston**, the Manager of Grants/Special Projects for the Shelby County Department of Housing, welcomed the attendees. They were very enthusiastic about the meeting and eagerly participated in it.

After Lincoln delivered his presentation, the meeting was divided into three groups: finance, programs, and general interest. Along with Lincoln's expertise in these areas, we had the benefit of the knowledge of **Cathy Marcinko** of our office. She moderated the group dealing with programs in IDIS. We were also fortunate to have **Eric Johnson** from the CDBG office at HUD headquarters in attendance. He helped field the CDBG questions.

The major topics of interest at the meeting dealt with all aspects of reporting (reporting requirements, report content, and generating reports) with a major emphasis on end-of-year reporting. The grantees also wanted information on reconciling converted data specifically dealing with HOME.

Our attendees left the meeting expressing how useful and informative the Users Group meeting was. They not only received knowledge from the facilitators, but from each other. The grantee participation in the Q & A segment of the meeting was overwhelming. It was helpful to learn from other grantees who utilize many of the same programs and to hear what their experiences in IDIS were. The attendees appreciated the opportunity to learn about updates to the system first-hand and to have a platform to offer changes they would like to see made to the system.

Lincoln informed us that since most of the communities are "live" and have been trained in IDIS, ours was one of the last meetings. I am elated that Memphis had this chance as host. We certainly feel that the meeting was a success. We look forward to hearing about changes to the system and any new challenges we will face with it. In the meantime, we know we can utilize the Technical Assistance Unit, as well as, our fellow grantees for advice and help. ■

Submitted by Barry Linstrom, Financial Analyst at the Omaha, NE Field Office

On May 21, 1998, the Omaha Field Office hosted the final IDIS Users' Group Meeting for the year. The session was well attended by forty IDIS users from the states of Iowa, Illinois and Nebraska.

Roger Merideth, from HUD headquarters, facilitated the meeting which opened with a warm welcome by Omaha's CPD Director, **Greg Bevirt**. Greg and his staff provided an atmosphere that was ripe for learning and the grantees rose to the challenge. There was lots of interest in new developments to the system and with the enhancements proposed for the future.

The Q & A portion of the meeting was full of interaction between the attendees. Many felt that this was one of the best parts of the session because it allowed everyone to get involved in the discussion. The grantees were able to share IDIS experiences; both good and bad. Many users found out that there were others who had encountered similar problems to ones they had experienced. Solutions to those problems were discussed and compared.

A topic of great concern to the attendees was reports. Roger explained the importance of entering as descriptive and as accurate data as possible because it affects the reports generated. He also supplied the grantees with an IDIS reports "Cheat Sheet" (highlighted on page 16). It summarized the thirteen most commonly used reports with details of what the reports contained and how to access them. The grantees found this extremely useful.

As the meeting drew to a close, Roger and the Omaha CPD staff encouraged the attendees to utilize the IDIS chat room available through the Internet. They also recommended that the grantees establish a local network among themselves. This would allow them to continue to share information and insights about the system, and to assist each other when "glitches" arise.

The attendees encouraged the continuation of the Users Group Meetings in a similar format until such time as IDIS stabilizes and the users feel more comfortable utilizing the system. ■

IDIS ATTRACTS A CROWD AT NCUA MEETING

On Friday, June 5, in Miami, FL, there was an IDIS session held as part of NCUA's annual conference. At the request of **Chandra Western**, the Acting Director of the National Community Development Association (NCDA), IDIS experts (**Bob Meehan**, of CPDs Systems Evaluation Division at HUD, and **Phil Helbling**) were available in a break-out session for NCUA attendees. Over 50 attendees at the conference attended the IDIS session, making it one of the most popular at the Miami meeting.

Attendees heard about the latest changes to the system and exciting future enhancements. Attendees were given an advance copy of the IDIS Reports "Cheat Sheet" (see page 17 of this newsletter), which generated much discussion. Grantees were most interested in hearing the latest about IDIS reports, their capabilities, hints for downloading and formatting, in addition to reviewing real GPRs submitted by grantees using IDIS.

Also present at the NCUA meeting were **Wendy Cherubini**, Portland OR; **Theresa Pineda** of the CDBG program for the City of Seattle, WA; **Tom McCloskey** of Fall River, MA; **LaCree Carswell**, Jacksonville, FL; and **Stephen Gartrell**, Director of Community Development for the City of Newton, MA. Thanks for coming and thank you for your continuing contributions!

Special thanks to Wendy, Theresa, and LaCree who's help with the new IDIS Users Guide effort is much appreciated. [New IDIS Users Guide tentatively due to publish on September 1, 1998 - stay tuned!]

Since the IDIS User Group forums are on an indefinite hiatus, IDIS sessions as part of national, regional or state association meetings has become an important avenue to continue to share the latest IDIS knowledge about changes, enhancements and tips, as well as to continue to seek and get your feedback on suggestions for the system. We'll keep you posted. As soon as we receive a request from an association or group (and have it approved) we will let you know. As always, these meeting dates and times will appear on the last page of this newsletter. [Next meeting in Orlando with the FCDA on October 1, 1998. See last page of this newsletter for details.] ■

IDIS REPORTS TECHNICAL BULLETIN

On the next two pages, you will find a “cheat sheet” for IDIS reports. The following cheat sheet gives you pointers and hints on some of the most common, and some of the most helpful IDIS reports.

As IDIS has matured and changed, IDIS reports have as well. More reports are available than ever before offering more useful information. IDIS reports are a great management and monitoring tool for you, the grantee, to oversee, organize, and control your programs. Keep in mind, though, that the data printing out on the reports is no better than the data you have entered. Thus, the integrity and usefulness of the data on the reports really begins with you and your data entry process.

A few quick reminders, however, to get you off and running on the right foot. Remember to stay away from any of the reports called “extractions”. These, generally, are not for you. Remember that these are raw data dumps and are not in any format.

Extractions are made for a more technically inclined and advanced software user who can make use of raw data extracts. For those of us simple-minded worker bees, follow the below hints.

Also remember some IDIS report formatting rules of thumb (for WORD or WordPerfect):

- Change your Page Layout to *landscape*.
- Do a “Select All” and change your Font Type to *Courier New*, and your Font Size to “8”.

These simple hints will make all the difference in the world on you getting a useful report, and one that just looks like junk.

Please feel free to share your reporting tips and helpful suggestions with other readers. Do you have a favorite report? One that you like to use at a particular time, with a particular process or program? Let us know by contacting us here at HUD or sending an email or fax. ■

IDIS TECHNICAL BULLETIN

A REPORTS “CHEAT-SHEET”

Confused about some of the report options available in IDIS? Not sure which reports to run, when? There are now 27 reports available in IDIS. Below is a quick summary of the 13 most utilized reports and what they do:

Report Name	Description
Federal Entitlement Grant Funding Report (C04PR01)	This report lists all your grants, by program (CDBG, HOME, etc.), the amount of the grant and the amount remaining by year. TIP: This is an excellent report for high-level tracking of your grants across programs and grant years. An easy “one pager”. Not a detail report.
List of Activities (C04PR02)	This report will give you all the activities you have in the system, regardless of year, program, status, funding, etc. It is a complete picture of everything you have. Activities are listed under their respective project, by program year. TIP: This is an excellent report for trouble-shooting. You can easily eyeball if an activity has been funded, and where exactly it lies in your hierarchy of projects/activities.
Grant Drawdowns (C04PR05)	This report lists all your draws by activity. The report prints in activity number order, with the draws done against that activity underneath. TIP: May be a long report depending on your draws. Good for trouble-shooting if you are researching by activity number. You probably want the Drawdown Voucher Summary report if you are researching by draw or by date.
Summary of Activities - Grantee Performance Report (C04PR03)	This report partially comprises your GPR for CDBG. This report lists only activities that have been <i>funded</i> with CDBG dollars. (The system does not know it’s a CDBG or other type of activity until <i>funding</i> .) This report furthermore, lists CDBG activities that are in a status of Budgeted , or Underway, or any activity that is in Canceled or Complete status but has had a draw during the program year specified or has the same lan year as the Program Year specified. TIP: This is the only report which will print your Accomplishments (the Accomplishments Narrative from the C04MA04 screen). If you have not typed in any Accomplishments Narrative, what prints on this report is a big white space for that activity’s narrative. I.E. - someone can quickly run this report and tell if Accomplishments narrative and data are being entered.
CP Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (C04PR06)	Otherwise known as the “CAPER”. This report compares the description from your project to accomplishments at the activity level.

Report Name	Description
Program Income Detail Report (C04PR09)	This report shows program income received in date order (from oldest received to latest). This report is good for tracking program income. You can track amount received by date and receipt number.
Drawdown Voucher Summary Report (C04PR07)	This report lists all your draws by voucher number in historical date order. This report shows you the amount of the draw, date, and activity(s) the draw was against. TIP: Can be a long report depending on how often you do draws. Great for financial trouble-shooting
Grantee Activity Summary Report (C04PR08)	This report lists your activities by their Grantee Activity Number - the number you have given the activity. Not the HUD Activity Number. This report, however, will show both of these numbers so it is a wonderful cross reference report. TIP: This is a good report for cross-referencing your old HOME CMI "project" numbers which converted into IDIS as the Grantee Activity Number.
Status of HOME Activities (C04PR22)	This report lists all your HOME activities in HUD Activity Number order. It also prints the address, number of units, committed and disbursed amounts, and the percent completed. TIP: A useful report for monitoring HOME activity. Usually not that long of a report. Very condensed for the amount of information provided.
Summary of Accomplishments (C04PR23)	This report summaries all your CDBG and HOME accomplishments. This report displays the total dollars expended for activities by Matrix Code that are Underway and Completed. This is an aggregate report which will also tally your activities by percent low/mod, ethnicity, etc. TIP: This is typically a 5 or 6 page report, regardless of the number of activities you have or the size of your grants.
ESG Grantee Status Report (C04PR19)	This report is organized by project number and prints your activities information organized by ESG residential statistics, beneficiaries, direct benefits and dollars committed. TIP: Can be a long report because of the way the information is organized.
Status of CHDO Funds (C04PR25)	This report shows you all of your CHDO's listed by year. This report is useful to track your compliance with HOME CHDO expenditure requirements as it also gives you percentages by subgrant and their drawn status. TIP: This is a short report, usually no more than 2-6 pages. Good for monitoring and managing your CHDO programs.
Status of HOME Grants (C04PR27)	This report shows status of HOME commitments, disbursements and activities organized by program year. Also shows the percentage CHDO reserved and balances by year. TIP: This is a short report (2-3 pages) and is great for monitoring.

FUTURE GROUP MEETINGS

REMEMBER THESE DATES!

IDIS GRANTEE TRAINING

Tentative training dates and sites through September 1998 are listed below. Contact TONYA, Inc. (202-289-8100), for specific information about each meeting.

	Training Dates	
	Entitlements	States
July—Albuquerque	28-29	30-31
August—Boston	18-19	20-21
September—Washington, D.C.	8/31-9/1	2-3



IDIS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR STATES

If you are associated with a State and have not yet scheduled your visit or received written confirmation of the dates, please call **Jon Kunz** of TONYA, Inc., at 202-289-8100.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Your IDIS Users Group contacts are Lincoln Burruss and Roger Merideth at CPD. You may contact them via the following:

Telephone: 202-708-0790, ext. 4570 (Lincoln)
202-708-0614, ext. 4691 (Roger)

Internet: Lincoln_Burruss@hud.gov
Roger_E_Merideth@hud.gov

Mail: HUD/CPD
Office of Executive Services
451 Seventh St., S.W., Room 7226
Washington, D.C. 20410

For technical information, contact your field office or the CPD Technical Assistance Unit (at 1-800-273-2573). **For SprintLink ID and password information**, contact your local HUD field office. **To have your IDIS ID and password reset**, call HUD Security at 202-708-3300.

SPECIAL IDIS SESSIONS

Look for your IDIS HUD experts at the following upcoming venues:

Third National HIV/AIDS Housing Conference

September 17-18, 1998

Hyatt Regency
Atlanta, GA

To register for the meeting, please contact:

Jennifer Harris

AIDS Housing of Washington

Phone: 206/448-5242

Fax: 206/441-9485



Fall Meeting of the

Florida Community Development Association

October 1-2, 1998

Peabody Hotel
Orlando, FL

A session on IDIS will be included.

For more information, contact:

Jennifer Thomas

Deputy Director of Community Development

City of Daytona Beach

Phone: 904/258-3109

Fax: 904/239-6626