

IDIS LIVE

...for the Integrated Disbursement and Information System

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Office of Community Planning and Development

IDIS WEB ACCESS TO BE ROLLED OUT BY REGION

Beginning in August, CPD will roll out internet access to IDIS in “old” region number order, East to West. By accessing a special URL through the user’s existing internet service provider (ISP) and entering a Web 390 User ID and password, users will have complete access to IDIS. HUD’s Web 390 software means users can run IDIS from any computer with an ISP connection. If you are connected to a network, you will no longer need a separate phone line or modem.

Over 60 IDIS users tried a hands-on demonstration of Web 390 software at the Best Practices Symposium in Kansas City. Their overwhelming response was, “when can we have it?” The software was also demonstrated at the state training session in Alexandria on July 28 to an equally enthusiastic group of users. CPD expects to have all regions on board by September 1, 1999.

By implementing access on a region-by-region basis, HUD can better estimate and respond to capacity and resource requirements. The Web 390 IDs given to a particular region will allow HUD to determine usage in that region.

Each user of IDIS, whether grantee or HUD staff, will be given a Web 390 ID and password that will allow this access. Unlike SprintLink, the Web 390 ID and password are unique for each individual user. Never share your Web 390 ID with anybody.

Each grantee using Web 390 will have to acquire service through its own ISP. (Popular ISPs include America Online, AT&T WorldNet, and EarthLink.) For purposes of using Web 390 access to IDIS, the cost of ISP service is a cost of doing business with HUD and is considered an administrative expense.

The unique Web 390 ID will help HUD’s support personnel to identify the HUD region and the specific person. With this information HUD can help isolate a problem and respond to it efficiently. If a person moves from one HUD region to another, we will assign a new Web 390 ID and password, even though the person keeps the same IDIS ID.

HUD expects to continue supporting SprintLink for some time after the implementation of Web 390 access. ■

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PREPARING STATE HOME GRANTEES FOR IDIS CONVERSIONS

These days Sean Smith is a man with a mission. As a CSC contractor for the HOME Program Office, Smith's mission is to contact state HOME grantees still using the CMI System and offer them assistance and encouragement in migrating to IDIS.

"I'm on the front line of everything," says Smith. "I contact the states and see if they have any issues they want to resolve before they go over to IDIS."

With only 11 states now live in IDIS, Smith makes a lot of phone calls. He reminds each state that CPD will work with them to clean up their data *after* conversion as well as before conversion. "We'll be able to straighten out anything that goes wrong. We don't just switch them over to the IDIS System and leave them alone."

"Most of the time, I find out that as we go through the CMI reports, particularly the Status of Project Funds and Status of Grant Funds, that the states do have some problems with their data. Resolving these CMI problems before they go live in IDIS will make for a much smoother transition. I may have to help them transfer some funds or switch the funding to a different recipient."

To prepare for conversion from CMI to IDIS, states are advised to complete as many activities as possible and clean up their data so their books agree with HUD's. "They want to get as much as they can processed and looking exactly like it should before they are actually converted," says Smith. He finds many errors, for example, when states have returned funds to HUD. "Look at your CMI reports and make sure that those funds were credited. If they weren't, give us a call, and we'll see that the records are corrected." Another common problem concerns funds that were obligated to the wrong fiscal year. Smith also advises fixing this discrepancy before converting to IDIS.

With CPD so willing to help states correct their data, why are the states so reluctant to come on board? "A lot of grantees are just worried about getting their funds," says Smith. "They've become accustomed to the CMI System and they're a little cautious."

As for the eleven states who are on board IDIS, Smith comments on how well they have adjusted. "They were eager to get into IDIS and do a lot of things themselves. They made a lot of suggestions and IT responded by giving them what they requested. Now that they are using IDIS, they are doing well."

Smith went on to discuss the next wave of 15 states who have had their data converted from CMI to the Pseudo region of IDIS. "I've been helping California to clean up their data. They've been great to work with because they know what their problems are. They send me e-mails all the time with corrections that need to be made and funds that they need transferred to different projects."

To the remainder of states waiting to convert to IDIS, Smith has this advice, "IDIS offers you the opportunity to have complete control of your data."

"Instead of seeing this," Smith laments, "they see something bad. Once they get their data into IDIS, they can make suggestions for change to CPD and see that we are responsive to their needs. Eventually, they'll just love the system. They can do everything themselves, they don't have to wait for us to do anything."

I asked Smith whether he had any closing thoughts. "I just want to emphasize the effort that CPD has made. They're doing as much as they can to try to help the state grantees progress."■

ACTIVITY ESTIMATES IN IDIS

Version 4.6 of IDIS, released to production on June 28th, included an edit to enforce a business rule established in the original IDIS Functional Requirements Document (FRD). That rule stated that the sum of a grantee's activity estimates could not exceed their available grant dollars and program income. The new edit checked the Total Estimated Amount entered for an activity on the Money screen (C04MA08). If that amount plus the sum of all the grantee's other activity estimates exceeded available funds, the user received an error message and could not get past the Money screen without lowering the estimate. (If the amount of available funds was zero, the grantee would have to determine which other activity estimates were too high, and adjust them accordingly.) Before implementing this edit in production - it had been available for testing in Pseudo Production for several weeks - CPD expected that grantees would need to correct 25% of their existing activities.

The Monday after the 4.6 Release, the TAU telephone rang off the hook. Grantees were stuck on the Money screen and didn't know how to proceed. The 25% estimate turned into 75%. To give you an idea of the magnitude of the situation, 812 grantees had estimates exceeding available funds in amounts ranging from \$5,000 to \$329,000,000. The combined dollar amounts of high estimates for the top 10 *offenders* exceeded \$1.4 billion. By Tuesday, CPD removed the edit check.

With no edit check on the Total Estimated Amount on the Money screen, grantees have less control over their budgets for individual activities. Additionally, grantees should understand that the Total Estimated Amount entered on the Money screen still gets carried forward to the Maintain Activity Funding (C04MO05) screen - even if it exceeds available funds. Grantees often call the TAU asking why they are getting an error message that an activity can't be funded because the Activity Estimate exceeds available funds. The fix, assuming funds are really available, is for the grantee to go back and reduce the estimate on the Money screen.

CPD plans to develop a new report - watch for the announcement on the IDIS Web Page - that will allow grantees to identify activities where the estimated funds exceeds the actual funds. It would then be up to

individual grantees to decide whether to clean up their data. Grantees who want to maintain the budgeting features of the Money screen will most likely want to clean up their estimates. Having said this, there is one more caveat for grantees who don't use the budgeting feature the Money screen provides: while CPD has no plans to again enforce the edit check, it may be necessary to reinstate the edit check prior to the migration to the DGMS System. ■

IDIS ALLOWS FLEXIBILITY FOR STATE GRANTEES

The following is an edited transcript of an IDIS Live interview of Steve Johnson and Cliff Barnhill of the CDBG State and Small Cities Division.

In the entitlement CDBG program, the grantee carries out most of the activities itself. When grantees submit their Consolidated Plan, they identify what activities they are going to carry out and how much is budgeted for each activity.

States do not carry out activities in the CDBG program. Other than their state administrative costs, and the 1% technical assistance set aside, states are required to give the rest of the funds to units of local government who actually carry out the activities.

The state Con Plan is also fundamentally different from an entitlement's Con Plan. The vast majority of state CDBG money is distributed competitively or through some sort of threshold review process. When states turn in their Con Plan, they don't know what communities they are going to fund much less what activities the local communities are going to carry out.

An entitlement community can put all their information in 2020 software, submit their plan, and have it transferred over to IDIS. A state's annual action plan consists of the method they will use to award the money to their local governments. The awards may not happen for nine months to a year. Projects will be entered into IDIS at the time of activity setup.

Because a state does not carry out the activity itself, state CDBG grants may require multiple levels of subgrants. IDIS allows for up to three levels of subgrants.

As an example, the state awards money to 200 different cities or counties. Then, those cities or

counties award funds to a regional planning district, neighborhood non-profit, or community action group to administer.

While not all states will want or need this level of subgranting, IDIS provides the ability to subgrant funds to any state who needs the flexibility to do so. Another feature of subgranting that many states find valuable is that it offers the option of allowing draw down requests to be paid directly to a local government's bank account.■

ELECTRONIC PER SUBMISSION MEANS EASIER STATE CDBG DATA CONVERSION

When a state decides to convert to IDIS, CPD works with them to get their current Performance and Evaluation Report (PER) activities converted to IDIS. CPD places these converted activities in the Pseudo region of IDIS where the state can analyze the data, correct it, and practice with it, as needed.

Steve Johnson, Director, CDBG State and Small Cities Division offers this advice: "Many states still submit

their PERs on paper. HUD has a contractor responsible for doing all the data entry and creating HUD's database."

"If states will submit their next due PER on a disk to HUD, we don't have to spend hours manually keying their data. We can reduce the data errors and reduce the time the state has to spend double checking and verifying the data."■

TAU TOTALS FOR JUNE

A total of 1,155 problem calls were received by the TAU during June. This is approximately 300 calls higher than the previous record of 850 calls. The TAU customer service representatives answered all but one of those calls on the initial call-in. A review of the calls indicates that 37% of the calls concerned the HOME C/MI System and HOPE 3 program, while 63% of the calls requested assistance with IDIS.■

CDBG ENTITLEMENT COMMUNITIES FINANCIAL SUMMARY REPORT NOW IN PRODUCTION

The CDBG Program Office invites all interested grantees and Field Office personnel to run this long-awaited report, now in the production area of IDIS, to understand what information it provides. First-time users should run the report without any adjustments to better understand what data IDIS extracts by default. On subsequent runs, users can make adjustments, as needed, to produce the output required for annual reporting.

Users will find updated report instructions on the web at <http://www.hud.gov/cpd/idisweb.html>. Acrobat Reader must be installed to print the instructions.

Click on "PDF" on that screen if you need to download and install a free copy of Acrobat Reader.

The new Financial Summary Report does not include a low/mod benefit section for multi-year certifications. IDIS does not have the activity data to do this calculation.

If a grantee needs to report low/mod benefit for a multi-year certification, the grantee will need to do this calculation separately as a special table and submit it to its Field Office along with all the other attachments to the annual CAPER.■

CPD TO STATE OFFICES: “TRAINING READY WHEN YOU ARE”

In business, you often hear the phrases *just in time inventory* and *just in time management*. CPD’s philosophy for state offices about to roll out IDIS might be referred to as *just in time training*.

Says Ron Allen, a trainer for CPD contractor, TONYA, Inc., “States need to have the training right around the time they are expecting to go ‘live’ in IDIS. The training serves to prepare them to go into live status.”

“We like to set up the training no more than two to four weeks in advance of when a state is going live,” Allen continues. “The closer to going live, the better. States need to contact me so we can schedule their training. We need to know as far in advance as possible because we have a lot of states who may want to go live around the same time.”

Allen stresses that a lot happens behind the scenes from the time a state decides to convert to IDIS until the time they go live. “A lot of coordination needs to take place. Phone calls need to be made.”

Adds Louise Milder, another trainer, “HUD will load their data into the Pre Production region ahead of time, maybe a month or so. Then the states have that time to review the data, to make sure their financial information agrees with HUDs. They can practice on their own data if they want to before we arrive.”

Allen goes on to say, “We talk to them about making sure that their data are as correct as possible and if there is any problem, they need to alert HUD so that HUD can get that resolved.”

Dave Schultz, another member of the training team, recently returned from a successful week of training in Nevada. The State of Nevada plans to go live the first week in August.

This fall’s state office training differs from the national state training offered in the past where state representatives came to a central training location. “That training was directed towards more of a management level,” says Allen. “How their offices operated and how were they going to integrate IDIS into that.”

Allen continues, “For new states, we usually plan for a week’s visit, with multiple two-day training sessions for CDBG and HOME and multiple one-day training sessions for ESG and HOPWA. These sessions are fairly intensive. There’s a lot of hands on, a lot of looking at computers all day.”

Milder adds, “Having the internet available for IDIS access is going to make it a lot easier for us to coordinate our training. This was a big issue for states, to find enough computers that had the designated phone lines.” *[see related story in this issue, ed.]*

States wishing to make arrangements for training should contact Ron Allen, at TONYA, Inc. 202-289-8100. ■

**THE NEXT ISSUE OF *IDISLIVE* WILL BE PUBLISHED ON
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“LIVE” STATES GO TO SUMMER SCHOOL

State training held in Alexandria, Virginia on July 27 and 28 provided new and not so new state grantees a chance to learn and practice the latest IDIS features. In particular, CDBG and HOME grantees had the opportunity to practice creating and maintaining subgrants. The IDIS three-level subgrant feature was introduced with Release 3.51 in August of 1998 and may not have been part of the system when the state grantees originally came on board.

When asked what she thought of the training, Crystal Carlson, a first-time attendee from the Minnesota Housing and Finance Agency, commented that Minnesota was already live in IDIS when she took her job. Though she often learned from others in the office (and from her own mistakes), attending live training helped her to sharpen her skills. Her co-worker, Diane Bauleke, added, somewhat jokingly, “We came here to learn what we’re doing wrong - and the enhancements, too.”

These refresher training classes were developed for states who were already live in IDIS. Louise Milder, a trainer, summed up the sessions. “The training was intended for states that have been live and had some turnover of the staff working with IDIS and for those state personnel who felt they needed a refresher. It was basic training. We went through most functions performed in IDIS and answered their questions.”

Gabe Caban and Sandy Leach from the State of Indiana, pleaded to come to the training even though they are currently working in Pseudo Production and expect to go live September 1. Comments Gabe, just three hours into the two day session, “I’ve really learned a lot in a short amount of time. The hands-on approach is really helpful. I’m getting the confidence that if I mess up, I’ll know how to fix the problem.”

Another student, Virginia Belcher, from the State of Maryland, summed up her experiences. “The real training is going back to the office and getting on the system. Here in these training sessions, we have people to show us every step. When we’re on our

own, we’re making mistakes as we go, and we need to know how to fix them.”

The format used in the Alexandria sessions is the same format that TONYA, Inc. uses when it visits each state office before rollout. *[See the related article in this issue, ed.]* Milder explained how state IDIS training differs from the training for entitlements.

“There are several differences, says Milder. “We divide state representatives into different working sessions depending on which program they are working in, whether it’s CDBG, HOME, ESG, or HOPWA. State folks tend to be from different agencies or different departments. In the entitlements, there’s most often one department that works with all four programs.”

Milder goes on to say that the states have a somewhat different way of working with IDIS. “For instance,” says Milder, “in CDBG, the states, rather than using the funds for any of their own programs, distribute the money to small cities and counties. They may want to use the IDIS Subgranting function to make the grant easier to manage and/or to give on-line IDIS access to the city or county.”

“Also,” Milder continues, “the states will sometimes want some of their communities to have direct banking, which means that instead of the money going from the U.S. Treasury to the state, then the state writing a check to the community, they can assign it so that the money goes directly from the Treasury to the community.”■

ACCOMPLISHMENT DATA FOR STATE CDBG USERS OF IDIS

The following article is reprinted from a memo from Kenneth C. Williams, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Grant Programs to State CDBG grantees and Field Office Directors. It is reprinted in entirety.

This memorandum is to respond to states' request for clarification on certain issues of how to report beneficiary and accomplishment data in the Integrated Disbursement and Information System (IDIS). The IDIS system is a system to report on accomplishments and performance and to request and track disbursements.

The IDIS system represents a change in the manner states report activities and their progress for the State CDBG Program, but not a significant change in the basic requirements of the PER Report. Existing guidance for submission of state Performance and Evaluation Reports (PERs) have not been superseded. These PER guidelines are in HUD 1994 Notice CPD-94-23 dated August 2, 1994, as extended. PER guidelines and state program regulations require submission of accomplishment data both on actual LMI applicants and beneficiaries (the racial, ethnic, and gender characteristics) of a state CDBG program activity and performance outputs such as the number of persons served, number of units built, number of businesses assisted, or number of jobs created.

Both accomplishment data types should continue to be reported according to PER guidelines. States should report performance output data in terms of the number of persons assisted and the number of LMI persons assisted for all activities regardless of the national objective matrix code (except for housing and economic development). IDIS will then compute the percentage of persons assisted who are low- and moderate-income. For housing activities, report the number of households, the number of LMI households assisted, the number of persons and the number of low- and moderate-income persons. For economic development activities, report the number of jobs and LMI jobs created, loans given, and businesses assisted. Report public facilities outputs the same as economic development where the public facility is done for economic development. Please note in IDIS "purpose codes" from the PER guidelines are not used. The

national objective matrix codes in IDIS serve a similar purpose. Based on the national objective matrix code selected by the state, IDIS will prompt the operator to enter the appropriate accomplishment output measures. States will continue to report both proposed and actual accomplishment outputs, and will continue to report only actual applicant/beneficiary characteristics data.

States' units of measure may not necessarily be the same as those required for entitlement communities. Using the above-mentioned data elements will, however, provide somewhat greater consistency of reporting across the entire CDBG program and with in the State CDBG program, while maintaining historical consistency with data states have collected for PERs. There are some situations where states have flexibility in deciding what count as performance outputs to measure; for example, whether to measure sewer benefits in terms of persons in the service area or in terms of persons whose houses are actually hooked up to the sewer.

On the project/activity setup screen path, "Target Area" will be added as a choice for type of benefit. This will be accompanied by adding a text field on the LMA screen (C04MX03 screen) in which a state can name and describe the target area, or designate the activity as citywide. IDIS screens and screen paths will be altered so that beneficiary characteristic data will be entered at the same point for all activities, regardless of the national objective matrix code selected. States will thus be able to report beneficiary characteristics data for all activities as they now do in the PER (using actual applicant/beneficiary data). Alternatively, States may rely on census tract or block numbering area information on beneficiary characteristics for area benefit (LMA) activities, as Entitlement communities now do. (To do so, states would select "Census Tract" for type of benefit on the C04MX03 screen.)

Some grantees have voiced concerns about “double counting” of accomplishment outputs. The PER instructions (section III, paragraph 7) uses the example of water and sewer projects as accomplishment measures which overlap. Both water and sewer are separate activities, even if they are in the same ‘identical service area’. Residents are receiving two different benefits, so they should be reported as separate activities. Even though this may be perceived by some as double counting, HUD considers each to be different activities and wants their benefits counted as separate benefits. There are also double counting issues where an activity(s) is closely tied to a main activity such as a project to produce jobs with sub-activities of water line installation and business assistance. This situation is similar to that described in the PER guidelines (section III, paragraph 6) for activities which are incidental to the implementation of other activities. Unlike the residential water/sewer example above, here the two different activities jointly result in the same one benefit (e.g. some number of jobs). In these cases, show all accomplishments under the one main activity and none under the others. There should be annotation of this phenomenon in appropriate notes under the other activity(s).

Another frequently-raised question concerns multiple-year funding (consecutive years or non consecutive years) for one activity. “Multi-year funding” means different things in different states’ programs. In the majority of situations, multi-year funding occurs when a state uses funds from more than one allocation year to initially fund a project. (For example, in its 1999 competition, a state funds a town’s application with a combination of “leftover” FY 1997 funds plus FY1999 funds.) In these situations, the state would set up the project/activity in FY1999 and designate it as a multi-year-funded project/activity. In a small number of situations, a state may provide additional funding in subsequent years to a previously-funded project/activity. (For example, a state may have a “contingency” funding category to award additional money to prior-year projects which encounter unexpected cost over-runs. Or, in the case of states which run “mini-entitlement” programs, a housing rehabilitation program in one neighborhood of a city might receive additional infusions of funds from that city’s subsequent-year grant awards.) In those cases, the state should follow existing PER guidance by putting all accomplishment output and beneficiary data under the oldest year and making reference to the data’s location in the following years.

The one aspect of state reporting which will differ in IDIS (compared to current PER practice) is timing. Currently, states report projected accomplishment output data in the first PER on which the activity is listed; actual accomplishment outputs and beneficiary characteristics data is not required to be shown in the PER until the activity has been completed. In IDIS, states are expected to enter projected accomplishment output data when an activity is set up in IDIS. Actual accomplishment outputs and beneficiary characteristics data should continue to be provided when activities are completed. However, HUD expects states to enter/update data on completed projects on a quarterly basis (based on the state’s program year), rather than annually in the PER. HUD encourages states to enter accomplishments data more frequently.

Certain changes to IDIS are needed in order to allow states to follow this approach to reporting. Changes will be made to individual IDIS screens and to the paths among IDIS screens, so that states can continue to report accomplishment output and beneficiary data as they do in their PERs. These enhancements will be in place by the time remaining states begin to come onto the system later this year.

We hope this letter clarifies some of the most pressing questions states have raised about IDIS data. If you have any further questions, you may contact Clifton Barnhill of the State and Small Cities Division at 708-1322 x4550.■

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Your IDIS contacts are Tracey Peterson and Vivian Baldwin at CPD. You may contact them via the following:

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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. **For IDIS training**, contact TONYA, Inc. at 202-289-8100.