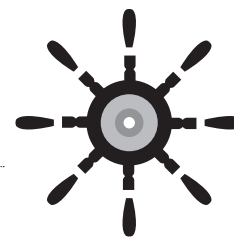


Community Development Financial Institutions Fund



By Shannon Ross, Director, Government Relations, Housing Partnership Network

Administering agency: U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury)

Year program started: 1994

FY16 funding: \$233.5 million

Also see: *Capital Magnet Fund*

The Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund is comprised of seven programs designed to expand the capacity of financial institutions to provide credit, capital, and financial services to underserved populations and communities in the United States.

HISTORY

The CDFI Fund was created by the Riegle Community Development Banking and Financial Institutions Act of 1994.

OVERVIEW

To understand the CDFI Fund it is first necessary to describe CDFIs and what they do. CDFIs are specialized private sector financial institutions that serve economically disadvantaged communities and consumers. As of December 2015, there were 977 CDFIs, according to the CDFI Fund at Treasury. CDFIs assume many different forms, including banks (118), credit unions (265), depository institution holding companies (62), nonprofit loan funds (518), and venture capital funds (14). CDFI customers include small business owners, nonprofits, affordable housing developers, and low income individuals. Nearly 70% of CDFI customers are low income persons, 59% are racial minorities, and 52% are women. CDFIs operate in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

United by a primary mission of community development, CDFIs work where conventional financial institutions do not by providing financial services, coupled with financial education and TA, to help alleviate poverty for economically disadvantaged people and communities. CDFIs offer responsible, innovative financing that banks

would not typically offer. CDFIs also provide basic financial services to people who are unbanked, offering responsible alternatives to predatory lenders. CDFIs implement capital-led strategies to fight poverty and to tackle tough economic infrastructure issues such as quality affordable housing, job creation, wealth building, financial literacy and education, community facility financing, and small business development and training.

PROGRAM SUMMARIES

The CDFI Fund operates seven primary programs designed to both build the capacity of CDFIs and increase private investment in distressed communities nationwide. These programs include: the CDFI Program, the Native Initiatives Program, the Bank Enterprise Award Program, the New Markets Tax Credit Program, the Capital Magnet Fund (CMF) Program, the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, and the CDFI Bond Guarantee Program. The CDFI Fund is the largest single source of funding for CDFIs and plays an important role in attracting and securing non-federal funds for CDFIs.

The CDFI Fund is unique among federal programs because it takes an enterprise approach to its programming by strengthening institutions rather than funding specific projects. CDFIs match the federal investment from the CDFI Fund multiple times over with private money, using these funds to revitalize communities through investment in affordable housing, small businesses, and community facilities, and by providing retail financial services to low income populations.

CDFI Program. The CDFI Program is comprised of two components: Financial Assistance (FA) and Technical Assistance (TA). Through these two components, the CDFI Program provides loans and grants to CDFIs to support their capitalization and capacity building, enhancing their ability to create community development opportunities in underserved markets. CDFIs compete for federal support based on their business plans, market analyses, and performance goals.

FA awards are for established, certified CDFIs and are used for economic development, affordable housing, and community development financial services. FA awards must be matched at least one-to-one with non-federal funds. TA awards are for start-up or existing CDFIs and are used to build capacity to serve their target market through the acquisition of goods and services such as consulting services, technology purchases, and staff or board training. The FY16 funding level for this program is \$153.4 million.

Native Initiatives Program. This program is the cornerstone of the CDFI Fund's Native Initiatives, which are designed to overcome identified barriers to financial services in Native Communities (including Native American, Native Alaskan, and Native Hawaiian populations). Through TA and FA, the CDFI Fund seeks to foster the development of new Native CDFIs and strengthen the capacity of existing Native CDFIs. Financial education and asset building programs, such as matched savings accounts, are particularly important to Native Communities. Despite being founded in 1994, the first TA grants were not made until 2002 after a comprehensive study of the capital and credit needs of Native Communities had been performed. FA followed in 2004. The CDFI Fund continues to collaborate with tribal governments and tribal community organizations through ongoing research and analysis that informs the recommendations for Native CDFIs. The FY16 funding level for this program is \$15.5 million.

Bank Enterprise Award Program. The Bank Enterprise Award (BEA) program was created in 1994 to support FDIC-insured financial institutions around the country that are dedicated to financing and supporting community and economic development activities. The BEA program complements the community development activities of insured depository institutions (i.e., banks and thrifts) by providing financial incentives to expand investments in CDFIs and to increase lending, investment, and service activities within economically distressed communities. Providing monetary awards for increasing community development activities leverages the fund's dollars and puts more capital to work in distressed communities throughout the nation. The FY16 funding level for this program is \$19 million.

New Markets Tax Credit Program. Congress established the New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) program as part of the Community Renewal Tax Relief Act of 2001 to encourage investors to make investments in low income communities that traditionally lack access to capital. Conventional access to credit and investment capital for developing small businesses, retaining jobs, and revitalizing neighborhoods is often limited in economically distressed communities or in communities with large low income populations. The NMTC provides investors (financial institutions, corporations, etc.) with a tax credit for investing in a Community Development Entity (CDE) that, in turn, reinvests the funds in qualified low income communities. CDEs are domestic partnerships or corporations with a primary mission of serving or providing investment capital for low income communities or low income persons. CDEs use capital derived from the tax credits to make loans to or investments in businesses and projects in low income areas.

The NMTC program is administered by the CDFI Fund, which allocates tax credit authority—the amount of investment for which investors can claim a tax credit—to CDEs that apply for and obtain allocations. To date, the CDFI Fund has made 912 awards totaling \$43.5 billion in allocation authority. Awards for the 2015 round are expected to be announced in the summer of 2016.

The authority for NMTC had expired at the end of 2014. On December 18, 2015, Congress extended the authorization of the NMTC program for \$3.5 billion per year through 2019.

Capital Magnet Fund Program. The CMF was created through the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008. Through the CMF, the CDFI Fund provides competitively awarded grants to CDFIs and qualified nonprofit housing organizations. CMF awards can be used to finance affordable housing activities as well as related economic development activities and community service facilities. Awardees will be able to utilize financing tools such as loan loss reserves, loan funds, risk-sharing loans, and loan guarantees to produce eligible activities with aggregate costs at least 10 times the size of the award amount.

A minimum of 70% of CMF money must be used for housing. One hundred percent of housing-eligible project costs must be for units

for households with income below 120% of the area median income (AMI); at least 51% of housing eligible project costs must be for units for households with income below 80% of AMI. If CMF finances rental housing, then at least 20% of the units must be occupied by households with income below 50% of AMI. Maximum rent is fixed at 30% of either 120% AMI, 80% AMI, 50% AMI, or 30% AMI, depending on the household's income. For example, if an assisted household has income at 120% AMI, their maximum rent is 30% of 120% AMI. Assisted housing must meet the above affordability requirements for at least 10 years.

As with the National Housing Trust Fund (NHTF), funding for the CMF is intended to be provided in part by the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) and the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (Freddie Mac). Because Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac went into conservatorship soon after the authorizing statute creating those programs became law and the collection of the contributions was suspended, in FY10 the administration requested and Congress approved an initial appropriation of \$80 million to capitalize the CMF. Two hundred and thirty CDFIs and nonprofit housing organizations applied, requesting more than \$1 billion. Twenty-three awards were made, which leveraged at least \$1.6 billion for the financing of affordable housing within underserved communities, and helped put underserved neighborhoods on the path to recovery and revitalization. There have been no further appropriated funds for the CMF.

The suspension of contributions of assessments on new business of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac was lifted at the end of 2014; contributions began January 1, 2015, and the funds were to be distributed to CMF and NHTF in March 2016. The deadline to apply for the second round of CMF was March 30, 2016, and awards should be announced later this year.

CDFI Healthy Foods Financing Initiative. The CDFI Healthy Food Financing Initiative, launched in 2011 as part of the multi-agency Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI), provides grants to CDFIs focused on developing solutions for increasing access to affordable healthy foods in low income communities. The HFFI is an interagency initiative involving Treasury, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Department of

Health and Human Services. HFFI represents the federal government's first coordinated step to eliminate 'food deserts' by promoting a wide range of interventions that expand the supply of and demand for nutritious foods, including increasing the distribution of agricultural products, developing and equipping grocery stores, and strengthening producer-to-consumer relationships. The FY16 funding level for this program is \$22 million.

CDFI Bond Guarantee Program. Enacted through the Small Business Jobs Act of 2010, the Treasury may issue up to \$1 billion each year in fully guaranteed bonds to support CDFI lending and investment. Long-term, patient capital such as this is difficult for CDFIs to obtain. The program experienced regulatory delays related to making it cost neutral to the federal government. To date the CDFI fund has guaranteed \$852 million bond loans. The CDFI Bond Guarantee Program is authorized through FY16 at \$750 million, but advocates are encouraging Congress to extend it at \$1 billion as allowed by statute.

Authorized uses of the loans financed may include a variety of financial activities, such as: supporting commercial facilities that promote revitalization, community stability, and job creation/retention; community facilities; the provision of basic financial services; housing that is principally affordable to low income people; businesses that provide jobs for low income people or are owned by low income people; and, community or economic development in low income or underserved rural areas. Since the bonds have a minimum size of \$100 million that are larger than most CDFIs can readily invest, groups of CDFIs can put in joint applications.

FUNDING

The appropriation for the CDFI Fund in FY16 is \$233.5 million. The president's FY17 budget requests \$245.9 million, a \$12.4 million increase from the previous year. Considering the austere budget environment for all domestic discretionary funds, these funding levels represents a dramatic turnaround from budgets only a few years ago that called for elimination of the CDFI Fund. The George W. Bush Administration demonstrated opposition to the continued existence of the CDFI Fund, but with broad bipartisan support, the CDFI Fund remained funded, although at lower appropriations levels.

Applications for CDFI Fund awards consistently exceed the supply of funds. Since 1996, applicants to the CDFI Program have requested more than four times the amount awarded. The CDFI Fund received 238 applications for the 2015 round of the NMTC Program, representing \$17.6 billion in NMTCs, five times the available funding.

FORECAST

Given the fiscally constrained environment, it is good news that the FY16 CDFI Fund appropriation is higher than the previous year. Housing Finance Reform is unlikely to take place before 2017. The CDFI Bond Guarantee Program has completed three rounds of awards, and the lessons learned will set the stage for a campaign to extend the program beyond 2016.

WHAT TO SAY TO LEGISLATORS

Advocates should contact Members of Congress, especially members of the Senate and House Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Subcommittees, to encourage support for continued support for at least \$233.5 million in FY17 for the CDFI Fund and an extension of the CDFI Bond Guarantee Program, to help meet the demand for financial services and capital in low income communities.

Finally, CDFIs design innovative below-market products that banks would not offer, providing homeownership and financial opportunities to underserved individuals and communities. Advocates can play an active role in helping to communicate the positive role of CDFIs in low-wealth markets.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The CDFI Fund, 202-653-0300, www.cdfifund.gov

CDFI Coalition, 202-393-5225, www.cdfi.org

Opportunity Finance Network, 215-923-4754, www.ofn.org

Find local CDFIs at <https://www.cdfifund.gov/Pages/FAQ.aspx> ■

