Customer Assistance Program Development Support – 2022 Call for Nominations of a Water Utility

National Water Sentinels has been granted Grassroots Network funds to contract with IB Environmental (ibE) to select and assist a community where the local water utility is interested in developing or expanding a Customer Assistance Program (CAP) to help low-income customers who cannot afford to pay their water bills. This project has been successful over the last couple of years with the Allegheny Group of the Pennsylvania Chapter and the Wilkinsburg-Penn Joint Water Authority as well as the Alabama Chapter and Birmingham Water Works.

This is a call to Sierra Club Chapters to nominate a local community and its water utility for this project. With input from the Water Sentinels Affordability Subteam, ibE will work directly with the community’s utility and a Sierra Club volunteer or a staff person to provide guidance and resources to the selected utility. Having a frontline community organization as a team member will be an asset to your application. Even though the services in the list below will be offered to one specific community only, as part of the program ibE will include other Sierra Club members (via webinars/telephone calls) in the process so that these members may be able to make similar resource suggestions and guidance to other communities.

ibE will provide the following main services to the selected community:

- Teach the utility and community members how to do an affordability assessment for the given service area;
- Provide suggestions on the types of CAPs and related resources that are relevant to the demographics and economics of the selected community;
- Provide community characteristics related to race and age (percentages only);
- Provide a rough estimate on how much money implementing the CAP may cost the utility and ultimately the community;
- Suggest potential funding sources for the CAP, based on the state where the utility is located.

The utility staff and community volunteers can expect to spend 8 – 15 hours on this project from July to September 2022. The applicants should reach out to the utility before their first conference call in order to ask the utility to participate in the call. If they agree to do this project, they need to consent to the time required and participate in the initial Zoom call. The project will last until September 2022. A Zoom call of interested parties must be completed by June 30, 2022.

As part of the application, Sierra Club will need a letter of support from the utility (see attached sample letter) that you are planning to engage. If there are still multiple applicants, a final decision will be made by July 11th.

Once a Chapter has identified a community that would like to have this assistance and their local utility is willing to participate in a Zoom call by the end of June, fill out the online application (here) and send the letter of support to Debbie Neustadt (debbieneustadt@gmail.com) by July 1, 2022.
COPY OF APPLICATION FORM

Please click the link below to access the electronic application form:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SierraClubCAP2022

Nominations of frontline communities are especially encouraged. Explain any adverse impacts to this community and list any organizations that you may be currently working with or intend to work with in this project.

Sierra Club Chapter Information

Name of Sierra Club Chapter
Name of Sierra Club volunteer or staff First & Last Name
Sierra Club volunteer Email address
Sierra Club volunteer Phone number

Fill out sections that are applicable to your chapter’s work. If the chapter does not work with a community group, fill out information on the water utility.

Community Group Information

Have both the community group and water system explicitly agreed to apply for this technical assistance grant and participate if selected?
- Yes
- No

Community Group Information
- Community Group Name
- Community Group Project Lead First & Last Name
- Community Group Project Lead Email Address
- Community Group Project Lead Phone Number
- Community Group Website/Facebook
- Community Group’s key program areas (350 characters max):
- Name of Water Utility Being Nominated
- Water Utility Project Lead First & Last Name
- Water Utility Project Lead Title
- Water Utility Project Lead Email Address
- Water Utility Project Lead Phone Number

Community Background
Describe the community(ies) where you work and the geography of impact (city, state, region, watershed, rural/urban, etc.) (200-character max)
Which of the following best represents the size of the community?

- Less than 10,000
- 10,000 to 100,000
- 100,000 to 500,000
- Over 500,000

**Project Description** (500-characters max)

Please explain:

- Why are your organizations interested in the Customer Assistance Program?

Note: Besides filling out this application online, please submit a letter of support (sample letter attached) from the water utility. Once signed, you can attach the letter of support in an email to Debbie Neustadt – debbieneustadt@gmail.com. Please include the subject line of: “2022 CAP Support - Call for Nominations.”

Applications are due by July 1, 2022.
Sample Utility Letter of Support

Dear Ms. Debbie Neustadt,

The (insert name of the water utility) is interested in resources on water affordability assistance programs (CAPs). We are willing to commit 8-15 hours of a staff member’s time to the Sierra Club’s Customer Assistance Program Development Support project. This staff member will participate in at least two conference calls between June and September 2022. The staff member will also aim to provide answers to questions such as the number of customers served by the utility, and the estimated amount of water used by the typical residential customer per month.

We understand that the services we will receive in return include:

- Learning how to do an affordability assessment for our utility’s service area
- Learning community characteristics related to race and age (percentages only)
- Suggestions on the types of CAPs and related resources that are relevant to our service area
- Receiving a rough estimate on how much money a CAP may cost
- Receiving suggestions on potential funding sources for a CAP, based on the state where our utility is located

Optional: Provide name and contact information of staff member

_______________________
Name

_______________________
Title

_______________________
Signature

Note: Attach this letter of support in an email to Debbie Neustadt (debbieneustadt@gmail.com). Please include the subject line of: “2022 CAP Support - Call for Nominations.”

Application due by July 1, 2022.