

Assistance Program Evaluations

Task 1: Program Option Definition/Research

This task will involve the identification, analysis, and evaluation of various assistance program options that the City may consider to augment its current efforts to address service affordability. As discussed in the Water Environment Federation's "Affordability" special publication, program options fall into four broad categories, as seen in the table below.

Although some of these program options may be appropriate, a proper determination requires analysis based on evaluation criteria, such as program cost, implementation, administration, legality and sustainability, which are designed to address the issues and concerns of various utility stakeholders and community groups. To facilitate this process, the RFC Team will conduct an Affordability Strategy Workshop with staff to discuss affordability program options and identify evaluation criteria consistent with your goals and objectives. The results of the workshop will provide a more targeted approach to relevant program options, which will then be evaluated against the selected criteria. For example, in assessing the potential cost of program options, estimates will consider the magnitude of assistance levels offered and anticipated levels of participation. In assessing legality issues, which are particularly important in providing assistance programs, all relevant State and local laws will be reviewed to ensure the defensibility of any recommended program option.

For most any program option, one of the most important evaluation criteria is the cost of administration. In our experience it is much more cost effective, when appropriate, to align an affordability program with an existing delivery mechanism in the community, such as a social service agency. RFC understands that the only way to create change in assistance policies is to envision a program that works for all utility stakeholders – customers, elected officials, and utility management.

Task 2: Program Identification and Implementation

Based on the results of Task 1, the RFC Team will recommend additions to existing assistance programs and program administration, and develop a plan for implementation. The plan will highlight specific arrangements for program implementation and identify a preliminary schedule. The program recommendations will recognize legal and billing system constraints, honour community partners, and provide meaningful relief for economically disadvantaged customers. In addition, the RFC Team will outline how the changes to the assistance program should be accounted for in the cost of service analysis and rate study, to ensure the financial implications of the program are fully incorporated into the financial plan.