

PART 2015 - INFORMATION

Subpart B - Public Information Functions of Rural Development Employees

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Exhibit A - News Coverage of Emergency Loan Situations

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PART 2015 - INFORMATION

Subpart B - Public Information Functions of Rural Development Employees

§ 2015.51 Introduction.

The information program tells the public about Rural Development objectives, services, benefits and accomplishments.

(a) The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Office of Communication (OC) in conjunction with the USDA Rural Development Legislative and Public Affairs office is responsible for the overall communication program for USDA Rural Development.

(b) Information released to the public:

(1) Can give explanations for programs or benefits, but does not ask for participation.

(2) Is about an institution, not a person, and does not give criticism.

(3) Says that discrimination is not allowed in the program.

(4) Uses photos and graphics.

(c) USDA Rural Development employees are informed that employment in Rural Development and participation in Rural Development programs are available regardless of race, creed or color. The National Office sends announcements about programs to special interest groups. These groups are asked to tell their members about Rural Development services.

(d) All USDA Rural Development employees are encouraged to communicate with persons who are eligible about programs and services available through Rural Development.

(e) Persons can ask for a correction of erroneous or misleading information about them in Rural Development publicity. Rural Development issues the retraction or correction using the means by which the original publicity was given out.

DISTRIBUTION: W, S, A

Administration
Information

§ 2015.52 Responsibility.

(a) Local and Area Offices. Local and Area Office staff are responsible for giving out information in their areas. They make sure that:

(1) Program information is given to community leaders, including representatives of agencies and organizations, which contact possible users of Rural Development programs. This is accomplished through the use of personal contact and the distribution of literature.

(2) People eligible for Rural Development services are told what is available and where to apply for help.

(3) People are told about the Government's activities in their community.

(b) State Office. State Directors must keep good relations with the public and interested agencies in their states. They:

(1) Tell the public and agencies about Rural Development's objectives and services.

(2) Make sure that the employees meet their information responsibilities.

(3) Make sure that the information given out is accurate.

(4) Work with groups who have direct interest in Rural Development programs.

(5) Send all significant clippings and broadcast scripts from their states to the National Office.

(c) National Office. The Legislative and Public Affairs (LAPAS) Director is responsible for the overall USDA Rural Development information program. The LAPAS Director:

(1) Tells the Under Secretary, Administrators and their staffs, and the State Directors about all public information matters,

(2) Coordinates informational programs to give information to the public and to get the cooperation of other agencies,

§ 2015.52(c) (Con.)

(3) Gives program information to the media. When giving out information which has an effect on Rural Development employees or borrowers, use the Freedom of Information guidelines (see RD Instruction §2015.57(a) and Subpart F of Part 2018).

(4) Tells the Under Secretary about the effectiveness of the program,

(5) Helps the Under Secretary make sure that accurate information is given out, and

(6) Gives coordination to the information activities of Rural Development with those of the OC of the Department and other agency information offices.

§ 2015.53 [Reserved]

§ 2015.54 Information material.

(a) General explanation.

(1) Some news stories are:

(i) Explanations of Rural Development or its programs.

(ii) Reports on achievements or other results the public should know about. Do not give information of which disclosure is not allowed by law or the Freedom of Information Act (see RD Instruction § 2015.57(a) and Subpart F of Part 2018).

(iii) Emergencies (see Exhibit A).

(iv) Reports on available loan and grant funds, amounts and purposes of disbursements and repayments.

(v) Plans, program and follow-up reports of official meetings and events for borrowers, employees or cooperating groups.

(vi) Appointments of employees, changes in office staffs or locations, office hours, etc.

(vii) Publicity about loans for group or community projects that have public significance, which can include publicity about groundbreaking, dedications, etc. See Subpart C of Part 2015 for loan approval information.

(2) Use of administrative and education materials.

(i) Use pamphlets prepared, as outlined in RD Instruction 2015-D, to provide information on Rural Development programs.

(ii) Use multi-media materials prepared to give training to employees to tell others about program methods.

(iii) Use multi-media tools to give training to employees for use at borrowers' meetings to tell about the program.

(b) Preparation.

(1) The LAPAS Director of the National Office gives the State Directors and/or appointed state Public Information Coordinator (PIC) information materials. State Directors and/or PICs give materials to field personnel. States should add local information to the general statements and remove information which does not apply.

(2) Style and graphic guidelines have been established by USDA and Rural Development for the development of informational materials for dissemination to the public. Exceptions to these guidelines require review and advanced approval by the Director of LAPAS before being produced and distributed to the public.

(3) All information provided to the public must be accurate. Statements of agency policy must agree with Rural Development policies. States should give the facts so persons outside of Rural Development can understand them and make the presentation to fit the audience's interests.

(4) For preparation of materials, see the principles in § 2015.51 and applicable Departmental Regulations.

§ 2015.54(b) (Con.)

(5) Advertising and promotional activities that support USDA Rural Development will be permitted, contingent upon approval by Congress to conduct such activities. The following is a summary of the primary promotional activities likely under this authority and the guidelines for each:

(i) Purchase of promotional items (pens, notepads, key rings, mouse pads, business cards, etc.) to be given to the public at meetings and events reaching a particular audience on behalf of USDA Rural Development.

(A) Items will bear the name "USDA Rural Development," the approved logo and/or the approved tagline per the published Graphics Standards, which can be located on the Intranet at:
<http://teamrd.usda.gov/rd/lapas/marketplace.htm>.

(B) Agency names will not be used on the promotional items nor will state-specific emblems, logos or taglines. Items can be tailored to include agency/state office address, phone number, e-mail address, etc.

(C) The selection of the specific items will be at the discretion of the Administrator and State Director, and the cost of the items will be borne from their Salary and Expense budget.

(ii) Prior approval of the State Director is required for any paid advertisement (including advertising as identified in RD Instruction 2024-F, § 2024.253(a) and (c), provided; however, that funding has been authorized and made available for such purpose. (Revised 09-11-11, PN 451.).

(iii) Participating in trade shows and sponsoring public events on behalf of USDA Rural Development.

(A) Funds can be used to purchase space for a USDA Rural Development booth at trade shows and other public events.

(B) Trade show exhibits are maintained for nationwide use by LAPAS. Agencies and states can use their funds to develop their own trade show exhibit, but its design must be consistent with the national marketing messages and designs.

(C) Agencies and states may sponsor an event if there is a clear connection to one or more of our programs and the majority of the other sponsors are other public agencies. The sponsorship cannot be interpreted as an endorsement of the entity hosting the event. Sponsorship should not be considered if the event is primarily a commercial activity.

(6) Prepare information material for current program activities and needs. Use the most recent available facts and figures. Give answers to inquiries and requests for information.

(c) Methods of distributing information.

(1) Give information to the public and to interested agencies through personal contacts, meetings and talks, letters, pamphlets, bulletins, reports, and the media.

(2) Use your best methods.

(3) Try to use radio and television, especially in emergencies. Employees can go on commercially sponsored broadcasts as representatives of Rural Development. Make sure that it is clear that their appearance is not an endorsement of the sponsors of their products.

(4) Builders and others involved in Rural Development programs can make a reference to the agency in their own advertising. Their advertising must be good, true and factual. Advertisements must not make promises which the company cannot keep, such as that the company can get the borrower a Rural Development loan.

§ 2015.55 Clearance.

(a) Materials requiring clearance by the Director of LAPAS. This information material must be given clearance in advance:

(1) Material about any nationwide or regional plan or program for which a formal announcement of Rural Development policy has not been made.

(2) Field reports on areas under the jurisdiction of two or more State Offices.

(3) Public information material prepared at all levels for duplication by print.

(4) Public information material prepared in the National Office for duplication by processing.

(b) Materials requiring clearance by State Directors. Local and Area Office employees get clearance from the proper State Director and/or PIC for:

(1) Material about any local or statewide plan or program for which the State Director has not made a formal announcement of Rural Development policy.

(2) Material about any local or statewide plan or program with other Federal agencies for which a formal announcement of the joint policy has not been made at the state level.

(3) Material prepared for duplication by processing.

(c) Routines.

(1) Obtaining clearance from LAPAS and OC. For National Office, the St. Louis, Missouri, Office, and State Office material, which needs clearance, obtain clearance from LAPAS before release. All written material must be sent to the Director of LAPAS. For emergencies, clearance can be obtained by telephone.

(2) Obtaining clearance from the State Director. For Local and Area Office material, which needs clearance, obtain clearance the State Director before release. All written material must be sent to the State Director. If clearance is needed from a particular administrator, the State Director will send the material to that administrator. For emergencies, clearance can be obtained by telephone.

§ 2015.56 Reports on information needs.

Administrators, through regular channels, need to be notified of significant developments, problems and special needs for information from Rural Development.

§ 2015.57 Action concerning investigations and audits.

(a) During investigation. No investigative agency will make a comment on an investigation in progress. It will not give the agency's sources or methods of investigation for a completed report.

(1) Local, Area, and State office employees will send inquiries about investigations and audits to the State Office. The State Director, upon concurrence by LAPAS, can give confirmation if a matter was sent to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) for investigation and if the investigation has started.

(2) Neither OIG nor Rural Development can give the identities of individuals under investigation. No details of the investigation can be released. Inquirers who want more information can be forwarded to OIG. Inquirers can be informed that OIG has restrictions, like those in Rural Development, on the release of information.

(3) Rural Development personnel have no basis for comment until all administrative action is completed. OIG will not send an inquirer to Rural Development for information about an investigation or audit which is not complete.

(b) Administrative action. OIG reports are the property of OIG. An agency can use them for administrative action. Only OIG can give out or make a report of information in them. OIG gives Rural Development a final report for administrative action. Completion of the OIG report does not change the restrictions on giving out information. All questions shall be sent to the Director, Program Evaluation Staff. Until administrative action by Rural Development is completed, the case is "under consideration," and no information on it can be given out by OIG or Rural Development.

§ 2015.57 (Con.)

(c) Public disclosures. If there is interest in audits or investigations in Rural Development, the Director of LAPAS, in consultation with OC and the Under Secretary, can authorize a brief statement after all administrative actions are taken. No statement can be issued until all Fiscal, Personnel, Civil Rights, Criminal and Civil issues involving Rural Development employees, and programs are closed. All inquiries about getting investigative or audit information shall be sent to the Director, Program Evaluation Staff.

§ 2015.58 Other information guidelines.

(a) For the use of the Freedom of Information Act for Rural Development, see Subpart F of Part 2018. The general concept is that all information is available except that which is: (1) specifically required by Executive Order to be kept secret; (2) used only for internal personnel rules and practices of Rural Development; (3) specifically stopped from being given out by law (confidential information personal income, 18 U.S.C. 1905); (4) privileged or confidential trade secrets and commercial or financial information; (5) agency memoranda or letters available only to an agency in litigation with Rural Development; (6) files of which disclosure is an invasion of privacy; and (7) investigation files except those available by law to a party other than an agency. A request for a list of names of Rural Development borrowers and their interest rates must be acknowledged and sent up to the National Office, Attention: Freedom of Information Officer (FOIO).

(b) Subpart A of Part 2015, State Office Information Operations Allowances for Supplies and Equipment.

(c) Subpart C of Part 2015, Announcement of Approval of Loans. Grants, or Guaranteed Loans for Rural Projects.

§§ 2015.59 - 2015.100 [Reserved]

Attachment: Exhibit A

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NEWS COVERAGE OF EMERGENCY LOAN SITUATIONS

I Presidential declarations. Give press releases to the media when there is a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration. The National Office tells which counties are involved in a declaration. The proper State, Local, and Area Offices get clearance from the disaster coordinator and tell the citizens about the available help and the locations of the Rural Development offices serving them.

II Secretarial designations. The Department of Agriculture issues news releases when a natural disaster designation is made. If there is no publicity in the state or county within one day of the announcement, release form news stories about the situation. If special coverage is needed, write news stories.

III News releases. The National Office issues all national announcements in conjunction with OC and provides guidance to state offices on local releases.

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