

OPERATION PORT UNITY PROGRAM

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I. Executive Summary

Operation Port Unity Program (Op.PortUnity Program) application is for the Economic Recovery Corps Fellows Program. The Op.PortUnity Program provides 45 fellows to support economic development in 17 states, 30 waterways, 100 ports and 2,250 communities. The Network Operator will be a coalition of organizations representing Public Ports and Waterway Associations. The Fellows will be embedded with the Host Entities (Ports and Waterways Associations) to provide capacity to facilitate the expansion of communities serviced by these Economic Engines. The goal of this Program is to develop a National Economic Development Strategic Plan (NEDS Plan) for the Mississippi River Basin. The objectives of the Fellows are to assist in the development and implementation of the NEDS Plan, with a focus on assisting underserved communities. The anticipated results are a stronger National Transportation System and expanded economic development opportunities throughout the Nation.

Our Mission is to create opportunity in economic depressed regions of our nation by strengthening the Nation's Transportation System through strategic planning of economic development along the waterways.

Utilization of the Ports to expand and strengthen the economic opportunities by developing a Pilot Program to:

- Identification of stakeholders and regional cargo movement throughout the Mississippi River Basin.
- Collect/assess conditions along the waterways
- Coordinate with existing economic development organizations
- Development of strategic plans for entire waterway systems incorporating existing port plans, private facilities and State & Local Planning.
- Champion the efforts to implement the NEDS Plan by conducting meetings and encouraging regional infrastructure grant applications.
- Assist with identifying and securing grants to assist underserved communities' projects.
- Be proactive in addressing Environmental Justice.
- Promote climate initiatives projects to reduce the environmental impact of our Industries as joint ventures between Ports as mitigating offsets.
- Establish open lines of communication and coordination between the various Port to better response to Crisis Management (i.e., weather, disease, military conflict).

The Op.PortUnity Program will have an advisory board established by a coalition of Port and Waterway Associations. The Advisory Board will be responsible for hiring personnel to operate the Program and verify compliance with federal funds received.

Fellow will work with communities to determine each region's role in the movement of cargo across our nation. The Fellows will assist and solicit input to develop a NEDS Plan that will provide the foundation for regional applications. The Fellow will promote and work with existing regional economic development programs with preparing, training and implementation of regional infrastructure development based on cargo movement.

The Partnership with the Port Industry will facilitate the ability to evaluate current as well as future needs in transportation. The development of the NEDS Plan utilizing a collection of existing master plans from local municipalities, Ports, Waterways, and States into one document will be impactful on our Nation.

The Op.PortUnity Program will combine the knowledge and strengths of Ports with the Program's goals of developing a Network of Fellows to champion the message of economic prosperity through Strategic Planning of the Nation's Ports System.

II. Project Narrative

Op.PortUnity Program has been created to strengthen the Nation's Waterway Systems by serving as a Multijurisdictional advocate organization to promote economic development in underserved communities located within the Mississippi River Basin through Public Port's utilizing infrastructure to create economic opportunities by addressing the nation's transportation needs in an environmentally responsible manner.

The Program places Fellows throughout the Mississippi River Basin to serve as Champions of the Port Industry. The Fellows are funded to promote collaboration and develop relationships between various economic development agencies and industry economic drivers (Port, industrial Parks, Industry) to strengthen and expand economic opportunities in areas historically adversely affected by rivers. The Fellows are trained personnel in consensus building, strategic planning, economic development, and funding specialist to assist their Host Entities with having a greater radius of influence on the communities which it serves. The Fellows will facilitate an aggressive approach for solution-based projects to address the national supply chain issues, by providing personnel to assist independent organizations (Build Back Better Regional Challenge, Building Resilient Economies to Coal Communities, Good Jobs Challenge, Indigenous Communities, Economic Development Districts, Technology-Based Economic Development Districts, etc.) to collaborate with a historically restrictive/inclusive Industry (Ports)

The Fellows will serve communities, Ports, and economic development organizations designated along a specific waterway. The Fellows will gather information (assess assets and incorporate underserved communities into existing strategic plans) to develop a NEDS Plan. The proposed application encourages independent facilities to strengthen their bonds by collaborating on developing a NEDS Plan for the entire Mississippi River Basin. The assignment of 45 Fellows to work with underserved communities and economic organizations to collaborate on economic development projects associated with infrastructure to develop the nation's waterways system. The majority of the nations underserved communities are located within the Mississippi Rivers Basin. The Fellows will champion the need for improvements with the national supply chain, address and work to reduce the climate impact of projects, assist with cybersecurity development, as well as be proactive with addressing Environmental Justice. Assisting communities' grant applications for addressing Federal Initiatives which strengthen the waterways system and creating a pathway to break the generational cycle of poverty with sustainable environmentally responsible growth. Regional infrastructure development will create opportunities in these communities by pooling an abundance of needs with scarce resources to generate both long- and short-term economic growth for these communities.

The Program will be implemented by 45 Fellows with the support of their 45 Entity Hosts Ports as well as numerous Ports, Waterway Associations and State Agencies which will participate in the Program to achieve the following goals:

- The focus on infrastructure will support and enhance the organization's ability to work with various economic development groups. All economic development has an

infrastructure component (a Program Goal) to collaborate with each participant to address and strengthen the overall transportation network.

- Promote regional infrastructure development by identifying, organizing and educating stakeholders on the benefits of sustainable long-term investments in infrastructure as a major economic development practice.
- Educational awareness of funding sources will be performed along with the limitation and requirements for applications. Identification of available funding is only beneficial if the stakeholders have a plan of action and suitable project.
- Ports are and will continue to be an enormous economic engine which will barge our Nation's economy into the next century. The proposed program collaboration between the federal government and the Port Industry is envisioned to have a significant impact on how future waterborne transportation funding programs are administered.
- The development of a written NEDS Plan for the development of the Mississippi River Basin transportation system is overdue and will chart a new prosperity for our Nation.
- The ability to focus the various Ports and States transportation departments towards the development and implementation of a NEDS Plan is a key component of this Program.
- The Program will address deficiencies in the transportation system as well as chart new opportunities for Port to focus on 'Outside the Fence' Projects as well as identify and support underserved communities adversely affected by flooding along the river system.
- Address and implement the current Federal Initiative which currently include Environmental Justice, Climate Concerns, and promote the utilization of green energy as well as the need to reduce carbon emissions throughout the Transportation System.
- Crisis Management, assist facilities by providing fellows to strengthen communications and collaborative efforts throughout the Transportation Network. No matter what the crisis, the ability to communicate and established relationships to effectively work together are fundamental steps to resolving most issues.

The Program's will partner Fellows with Public Ports to strengthen communities' participation with economic development within a region of the state. While the Port historically have been leaders in economic development in their respective communities the goal of this program is to have more impact 'Outside the Fence' economic development as well as increasing port tonnage through planning and infrastructure investments to strengthen the overall transportation system.

The Ports are stepping up in a time of need to assist with the necessary capacity building and strategic planning necessary to assist the country, setting aside our competitive nature to work together for a solution to strengthen both the economy and transportation system of our nation.

The proposed program was designed to help accelerate economic recovery in underserved communities by building and launching a Program that provides economic development organizations with subject matter expertise, strategic relationships, and coordination through Fellow embedded in the Ports across the nation to enable communities and regions to recover with more equitable, resilient and future-focused economies and industry clusters.

Accepted economic development practice requires a strategic plan. The Nation currently has no economic development plan for the utilization of the Nation waterways. While States and individual Entities have plans none address the waterways collectively and certainly little effort is afforded to planning support for underserved communities. The billions of federal funds being spent on the Nation Waterway System is being spent without an existing Plan that looks at economic development of the waterways system in its entirety. The Program will achieve its' goal of improving our Nation's economy through the development of infrastructure. The Pandemic like the crisis before will be followed by yet another crisis to impact our Nation's economy. The Silver Bullet requested for the economic recovery will not be found in any Program that reacts to the Crisis at hand, but with a Program that develops and maintains a network of Public Entities (Ports) with the ability to respond collectively to the current Crisis Du Jour utilizing numerous facilities with established communication, capabilities, and response planning to efficiently implement the demands of the Nation.

The Fellows will be recruited with assistance from the Host Entities, recruitment of the Fellows will be regional, the goal of hiring from the port industry or existing economic developers to strengthen the core of the group which will comprise mostly of recent college graduates. Even though the Program is only funded for 5 years, working with the Ports should lend to job security as well as a training program for subsequent port personnel. Training will be accomplished by developing a specific training course that all participates in the Program must attend. Additional training will be provided by Host Entities as well as the Network Operator. The Fellows will reflect the communities for which they are attended to serve and will comprise of individuals representing various ethnicity with the goal of diversification. The Port industry as a whole is in need of diversification and the Program should provide pathways to careers in the Port Industry for minorities and women.

The Network Operator's selection criteria and vision for the staffing of the 45 Fellows will be:

- 22 men & 23 Women
- Ethnicity groups shall not be greater than 50%
- Fellows from underserved communities should make up 50% of the Team
- College degreed individuals with an economic development background.
- College educated, no experience, strong computer and technology skills
- Retired Port Industry Personnel
- Experienced Economic Developers with no formal education and limited Port Experience
- The Fellows will be located throughout the 17 states represented in this program, with a focus on diversification and hiring individuals within the regions to be served.
- The Fellows will work from the Host Entity facility, the Host Entity will assist with managing the coordinated efforts of the Program as well as assist with training and guidance with providing economic development 'Outside the Fence' of the Port. The Host Entity will also provide office space, office equipment and supplies as part of the In-kind Match for the Program.
- The staff of the Network Operator will be assigned a Host Entity to work from.

- The Fellows will be paid the national average for Economic Developers, they will be able to participate in their Host Entity system for benefits, payroll and expenses. One of the strengths of this program is the Fellows Program will become a training program for the Ports to strengthen their staff.
- The proposal complements existing organizations through active participation by the Transportation Industry.
- While the Network Operator and Host Entities may not have extensive expertise in building a fellowship model, real world application and knowledge of what required to create economic opportunity should be weighted accordingly. Most Ports have a proven success record of economic development. The Network Operator's staff will be experienced in Port Development as well as economic development training and background with working with underserved communities.
- The Program structure has been proposed to minimize staffing requirements and utilize Host Entity to actively participate in the management of the Fellows Program. The feasibility of the Program is to ensure the majority of the funding is spent on the Fellows to provide services under the direction and guidance of experienced local economic developers.
- Host Entity will be strategically selected to strengthen the training and ability of the Fellow to service a region. The plan is to utilize Ports located in global hubs and regional facilities to have the greatest networking impact on the Program, as well as being near targeted underserve communities.
- All Ports will be expected to work with and assist the fellows with coordinating efforts and assisting the Program with reaching the underserve communities within their region.
- The fellows will set an example of cooperation and communication between Communities, Ports and Economic Development Organizations that collectively, as a nation, we can rise above any crisis working together.

Network Operator will

- Design and implement a training strategy to ensure fellow have appropriate skills in grant writing, funding opportunities, communications, community engagement, and strategic planning.
- Develop a Program handbook for the Fellows which will expand on the outline of this application. The handbook will have stated objectives, procedures to accomplish those objectives, as well as defined milestones to chart the success of the Program.
- The use of Network Operator's staff and Fellows to supplement and assist the Host Entity with the goals and mission of the Program. With a focus to serve underserved communities and support other economic development organizations. Boots on the ground approach both for the community as well as the Ports.
- Utilize all resources available from national resource institutes and industry leaders.
- Follow existing EDA guidelines and BMP for developing the Fellows training programs.
- Expand on existing CEDs developed by Regional Planning Organizations and State Transportation Plans to develop a NEDS Plan for the Mississippi River Basin.

- The Organization chart accounts for the need for guidance and development of standard practices to ensure effective service. The utilization of Host Entity and Network Operator's coordinators will provide the necessary daily oversight to ensure success.

Fellow

- Work Closely with Host Entity to implement regional economic development projects developed as part of the CEDS
- Modernize economic development tools and insights to increase knowledge sharing and collaboration with technology.
- Provide technical assistance with project development, grant writing, performing feasibility studies and impact analyses.
- Foster a better working relationship between the various Entities, as to strengthen the bonds of the individual Ports in preparation of the next Crisis.
- Provide training on economic resilience, addressing systemic barriers in development, environmental justice and integrating impacts of climate change.
- Create links across a broad set of planning efforts, such as regional economic development plans, metropolitan transportation plans, land use plans, and local fair housing plans, as appropriate to advance economic development.
- Partner with EDA University Centers to take knowledge gained through research and education and tailor it to specific underserved community's needs.
- Create and integrate a NEDS Plan with regional and state CEDs into a coordinated or holistic strategy, and provide training to stakeholders to implement a NEDS Plan as guidance for the Mississippi River Basin.
- Coordinate high-level advisory groups comprised of local business, government and community members.
- Connect local government or non-profit partners to local businesses to collaborate on workforce development. The Program can champion the development of a training and certification facility for the barge industry as well as for the port operations.
- Evaluation of the utilization of the Mississippi River Basin and its Port's facilities to be readily available to assist with National Crisis, including the need for National Defense.

The Program will target underserve communities by selecting Host Entity in or near underserved communities. The 45 selected Host Entities sites will be selected and placed in a regional plan to serve the Ports and the surrounding communities. One fellow will be assigned a waterway system and be responsible for assisting those communities along each waterway. It is anticipated that each fellow will be able to work with as many as 4 ports and 70 communities within a waterway. Additional Fellows will be assigned to regions with greater areas of poverty and larger waterways. The Network Operator will utilize as a model for the Fellows, the Red River Waterway Commission (RRWC). The RRWC's has an Economic Developer who is responsible for working with each of Communities and Ports along the river to assist with developing a variety of projects (transportation, recreational, and tourism). The proposed Program utilization of this model of servicing communities along a waterway should maximize the 45 Fellows ability to support the maximum number of underserved communities (estimated 2,250).

Global and Regional Transportation Hubs will be selected for Host Entities to provide oversight and assist Fellows with understanding the industry. The other Host Entities will be selected based on the Waterway System they Serve and the States they will be assigned. Host Entities will be those willing to assist with In-kind Match for the Program. Some Host Entities may pay extra to supplement the salaries of the Fellows in markets with elevated salaries. The Host Entities will also be responsible for providing Management, Guidance, Office space, Office supplies and equipment for the Fellows. The Host Entities unique existing relationships with regional economic development organizations and local communities as well as an understanding of the region's economy provides the fellows with a platform from which to be successful. The Network Operator will provide each Host Entity with a payroll stipend of \$ 50,000 and up to an additional \$10,000 for travel and work-related expenses for 1 Fellow.

The Host Entities selection process will be to have the Network Operator's Main Office Headquarters in Louisiana with 45 offices throughout the Mississippi River Basin. Fellows will have Host Entities in each of the seventeen states. The number of host entities will vary by state based on the number of waterways and participating partners, however as a minimum each state will have 1 fellow, with some of the more active waterways and underserved states receiving additional staffing.

The final process for selecting the Host Entities based on the established goals of distribution with maximum impact coupled with their ability to provide the necessary match and personnel to ensure the fellows are successful. The areas of greatest need (underserved communities) will be the primary selection criteria for the remaining Offices within each waterway system. The Fellows will be placed through a series of training seminars which will ensure consistency throughout the Program. These training seminars will include but not be limited to:

- Op.PortUnity Program's Economic Development Guidance Program
- Technical & Grant Writing
- Environmental Justice/Climate Awareness
- Strategic Planning
- Public Speaking
- Web site design and maintenance

The Op.PortUnity Program will have a dedicated individual to overseeing the training. The Network Operator will assign an individual that will be responsible for training the Fellows and to oversee the implementation of the Program. The Fellows will also receive daily support from the Host Entities, essentially becoming a member of their team with a specific mission to work with underserve communities through the development and implementation of a NEDS Plan for the Mississippi River Basin. The Network Operator's will provide program oversight and ensure continuity between the Fellows and the Host Entities. The Host Entities will serve as a mentor and perform daily oversight for the Fellows. The Fellows by absorbing the existing procedures and working programs utilized by the Host Entities (Ports) and Regional Economic Development Organizations will be able to provide underserved communities with these same tools and experiences to assist with developing economic opportunities. The Network Operator and the

Host Entities will serve as an advisor (with several seasoned professionals) to support the Fellows with their projects.

The EDA's investment priorities will be served by the development and implementation of a NEDS Plan. The proposed federal funds dedicated to infrastructure through the Program will allow for more underserved communities to submit applications and work to strengthen regional economic development growth through infrastructure. The potential of rural communities to participate in the planning process associated with the Global and Regional Market Place will provide opportunities. How can most of the underserved communities in our nation be located on one of our country's major natural assets? The issue must be looked at in its entirety with a sensible solution to plan for the economic development of this natural asset. The ability to facilitate the movement of goods and provide services to the transportation industry will have a lasting effect on the majority of the underserved communities.

The strengthening of the Waterway System will benefit all within the 32 states that make up the Mississippi River Basin. The development and implementation of a NEDS Plan for the waterway system will identify potential regional projects which will include underserved communities. The Program aims to correct the inherent bias of infrastructure grant applications with underserve communities by allowing these communities the opportunity to participate in regional transportation infrastructure development.

The Fellows will be tasked with working with existing economic development organizations serving these areas to identify regional projects with infrastructure components to assist with regional planning and grant applications for projects that meet the criteria of the NEDS Plan. The Fellows, through the process of developing the NEDS Plan, will be able to implement the Plans utilizing state and federal grants to pursue economic opportunities by investing in infrastructure development.

The unity of the entire Mississippi River Basin existing Ports and Economic Development community towards the develop a NEDS Plan will be impactful on every community. The information will be available for those that develop policy and perform research. The implementation of the Plan will be most effective in the last two years of the program but will assist with underserved community's ability to submit grant applications.

The funding of the Op.PortUnity Program will incentivize the Port Industry and various existing economic development organizations to take responsibility for planning and implementing an inclusive strategic plan to address both regional and global economic challenges. With the majority of the Nation's global economy moving through Ports any agenda which does not include Port's is starting too far downstream. The Op.PortUnity Program is a way for our Nation's Global Economy Leaders (Ports) to assist with developing an innovative and successful program to lead the federal economic development agenda.

The Columbia Port Commission along with the Port Association of Louisiana will develop the Network Operator which will be a coalition of organizations governed by a Board of Directors selected from the participating Waterways Associations and Ports. The Columbia Port Commission as well as the Port Association of Louisiana has limited expertise in the

management of a fellowship program. However, the created Network Operator will be staffed to provide the expertise and experience to implement the fellowship program.

The Network Operator staff will reflect the board of directors' goals of providing trained individuals to work with the Host Entities. The Network Operator shares the training and guidance responsibilities with the Host Entities for the Fellows. The success of our Program will be rooted in the ability of our Fellows to become extensions of the Host Entity's staff of seasoned economic developers in their respective communities. The Program's Training Curriculum will be essential for preparing the Fellows to accomplish the established goals, coupled with the expertise of the Host Entities to mentor the fellows will strengthen their ability to support the targeted communities. The Program, by budgeting a full-time Trainer, is assigning a significant portion of the Network Operator administrative budget to support the Fellows with the necessary training and technical support on a daily basis. In addition to assigning a trainer for the program to monitor the fellows, an outside consultant International Association of Maritime and Port Executives (IAMPE) which currently provides training for the maritime industry has agreed to assist the Network Operator with the development and implement the Fellow's training curriculum and certification program.

Each fellow will be responsible for assisting with a minimum of 10 grants each year. It should be noted that first year of the Program grants will more than likely just be fellows assisting with existing grant applications since the NEDS Plan will not be completed however once the plan is implemented the development of grants directly related to the efforts of the Fellows should see an increase.

Program outputs and outcomes:

Increased connectivity – The development of a network of Fellows to connect the 17 states and numerous public and private ports within the Mississippi River Basin. This task will be established during the Preparation Phase and should strengthen over the course of the Program. The connectivity of the Host Entities, economic development organizations and communities through the Program will be the most tangible milestone to be completed early in the project with the likelihood to spur economic opportunities.

Increase awareness and participation in grants and programs – The Fellows with support of the Network Operator and the Host Entities will actively pursue underserved communities associated with a particular waterway system to participate in the NEDS Plan process. The Fellows will be instrumental in gathering regional support for grant applications in underserved communities. The Program's vision for engaging with underserved communities will be to expand the activities currently being used by the Host Entities to service the communities within their jurisdiction. These tasks should be completed during the Implementation Phase of the Project.

Accelerated Job creation - The utilization of a NEDS Plan to increase the effectiveness of waterways infrastructure development to create economic opportunity will be measured in jobs created. Due to the nature of grant preparation and timelines for submittal, the Program anticipates a minimum of 12 months before underserved communities' projects could be funded to demonstrate the creation of Jobs. As important as Job Creation is the Program will focus on

capacity and implementation to provide for long-term sustainable growth within each waterway. The fellows will assist underserved communities with grant for ongoing projects during the Preparation Phase of the Program, while during the Implementation Phase of the Program the fellows will implement the NEDS Plan.

Increase community engagement, the Fellows will hold and participate in community meetings to facilitate participation and develop grant proposals. The Host Entities with the support of the Fellows will be able to incorporate more underserved communities to participate with ongoing outreach programs.

Increase Capacity, the Fellows will facilitate the development of regional grant proposals for federal funded economic development initiatives/grants including those that are traditionally underserved. The placement of 45 Fellows throughout 17 states to support ongoing economic development organizations and Host Entities efforts to improve transportation services and create jobs will have an exponentially effect on the capacity of the Program to impact the targeted communities due to the synergy created by these Entities working collectively.

Proactive Approach for Federal Initiatives. The Fellows will be addressing Environmental Justice, Climate Concerns, reduction of Carbon emission, transition to green energy, as well as other Initiatives that the Federal Government establishes during the course of the 5 years of the program.

Preparation Phase – (0 to 6 months) January 2023 thru June 2023 Preparation Phase:

Identification of the participating waterway association and Ports which will serve as Host Entities. An Advisory Committee selected from the Host Entities will serve as the Board of Directors for the Program and be tasked with implementing the Program which includes hiring and confirming interim staff. The Advisory Board and Staff will then identify and finalize the various handbooks and training manual for implementation of this proposal. We anticipate to be able to identify a headquarters and 45 field offices for the Fellows required to implement the Program. The Network Operator's staff and the local Host Entity will be tasks with hiring Fellows. Hiring and training will be done in phases during the Preparation Phase. Prior to Implementation, regional meetings will be held to introduce the Program to the various stakeholders and solicit support for the development of a NEDS Plan for the Mississippi River Basin.

Implementation Phase (6 to 18 months) June 2023 thru January 2025, The Program will rollout June 2023 with the 45 Fellows conducting local meeting throughout the 17 participating states to outline the Program and to solicit stakeholders' input into the proposed plan. The Fellows will be tasked with ensuring all stakeholders and their information is presented within the data gathered for the Plan. The Proposed plan must be completed within the Implementation Phase. Identification of regional project to support with grant applications in the Spring of 2024 is a crucial milestone in this project. The Fellows, during the Implementation Phase will also conduct grant funding opportunity meetings which will generate opportunities for the Fellows to assist with grant application submittals. The majority of these Implementation Phase grant submittals are anticipated to be from previously submitted projects which have merit but did not

receive funding for whatever reason. The Fellows will assist these communities' applications by strengthening the context and compliance of their application to ensure that the project is evaluated on an equal bases with grants from non-underserved communities. The development of the NEDS Plan will be completed by June 2024 to serve as the catalyst for grant submittals during the last six months of this phase. The process of gathering information for the plan should provide opportunities to work with underserved communities on components which will strengthen to goals of the Program. Utilizing the model of the Red River Waterway Commission, the fellows will assist underserved communities with a variety of grant application which can and will include all aspects of utilizing the waterway system which includes recreation and tourism. Communities without waterways will also be included within the outreach program because cargo has a start as well as a destination. The inclusion and evaluation of each step of the cargo's journey will improving our transportation system which ultimately create jobs and economic growth.

Scaling Phase (18 to 54 months) with the NEDS Plan the fellows will push hard to develop grant applications with regional and state support to strengthen the nation's transportation system. During the scaling period, based on availability of funding the Program should expanded to the nation's remaining waterways not included in the original application. The Scaling Phase will also be the most active with grant awareness and submittal since most grant applications require a year of planning and design prior to submittal. The NEDS Plan will serve as a guide for grant opportunities, providing targeted underserve communities with a document to demonstrate how their application supports the Nation's Interest. The Program anticipates the Fellows being able to initiate grants to assist underserved communities as well as the existing Ports with projects with include:

- Environmentally responsible projects which create green power and carbon offsets by collaboration between underserved communities and Ports with limited available options.
- Regional Crisis Management Facility utilizing Port facilities as communication and marshalling areas to response to a variety of National Concerns.
- Development and expansion of regional Port's based on logistic and cargo to service underserved communities which currently do not have the ability to participate in the grant process.
- Connectivity of Tonnage and the necessary transportation system to ensure access to global markets in the most unintrusive, competitive, and environmentally friendly manner possible.

The Handbook will outline a pathway for the Op.PortUnity Program to shift its funding source from a 70% federal funded program to a self-sustained program with funding coming from the various stakeholders and ports.

The Port Industry has a good working relationship with both the Federal Project Manager and Federal Project Management Team. The Network Operator will utilize and strengthen those relationships to simplify the implementation of EDA's Initiatives through the network of Fellows to expand EDA's reach.

The development of a Network Operator as a management team of economic development professionals with both Port industry experience as well as experience with providing rural communities with governmental services is critical to the success of the program. The Network Operator must be able to walk the walk with the Ports as well as be able to talk the talk with the various economic development organizations and governmental agencies. The challenge of building a team of Fellows to assist targeted communities by incorporating Host Entities which are in nature a collection of highly successful competitive independent Entities will require the marketing of the Op.PortUnity Program as a benefit to the entire Port Industry as well as a necessity for the transportation needs of our Nation. Port economic development jobs are highly sought throughout the Nation. An individual's ability to work with and learn from the Ports will be a marketing advantage in hiring and maintaining Fellows. A potential issue with attrition will be poaching of trained and experienced Fellows from other economic development organizations as well as the Port Industry itself. The Program prefers to view issues with attrition as a strength in the Op.PortUnity Program not as a weakness. Individual success of the Fellows will be a testament to the merit of the Program's management and training. While the Program's Fellows' salary will be commensurate with the national averages, the success of the Program will provide opportunities for individual advancements for some Fellows. Fellows which demonstrate exceptional aptitude must rely on the Entities Host for supplemental salary to maintain continuity at their facility.

The Network Operator's staff will be responsible for developing and implementing the Mission Statement for the Fellows. Through the course of the five-year Program the Network Operator will seek out alliances and partnerships to strengthen the goals of the Program. Op.PortUnity Program will actively seek collaborative efforts with all potential partners both state and federal agencies. The potential for support from EDA's Research and National Technical Assistance (RNTA) program award recipients to assist with development and implementation of a NEDS Plans for the Mississippi River Basin will be welcomed. The Network Operator hopes to utilize existing EDA grantees and organizations to assist with broadening boundaries of economic focus to address systematic issues to solve local problems. These groups will also be instrumental in assisting Fellows with addressing current initiatives climate change, environmental justice and cybersecurity as well as potential looming initiatives/crises which may arise within the next 5 years. (i.e., Should the nation go to war in the coming years, what is the strategic defense plan for the Mississippi River Basin and has the Port system been aligned to implement any plans throughout a national emergency?)

The Entity Hosts are very familiar with and work on a regular basis with both Regional Economic Development Districts and University Centers near their facilities. The Program's Fellow should provide capacity to expand and strengthen our common bond of public service for communities between Public Ports and Economic Development Organizations.

The Program's Network Operator will have coordinators which will work closely with state and federal regional economic development offices to ensure a strong partnership with these groups. The Fellows will serve to assist EDA's staff with educating and training communities on navigating the federal grant process. The Network Operator will be responsible for providing

Fellows with the information and tools necessary to soliciting community participation in Funding Opportunities.

EDA funded programs are generally regional areas within a state or zones with a specific targeted demographics. EDA programs are generally broad in scope of work. The Program targets infrastructure development on an entire Waterways system to improve the economic development opportunities which has not been attempted. The compiling of various individual state, MPOs and port plans should assist the Program with providing insights to assist with economic development activities as well as to focus on future economic development to ensure regional and global competitive advantages. The Fellows will be advocates of the Waterways for the implementation of EDA Initiatives.

The Program will be successful in its ability to staff 45 fellows at various Host Entities throughout the Mississippi River Basin. The development of a NEDS Plan for the Mississippi River Basin within the first year of the Program and implementing the NEDS Plan within the initial funding. The success of the program will be in the Op.PortUnity Program's ability to achieve 100 percent self-funding at the end of the 5 years. The concept, if proven, will be expandable to other waterways throughout the nation as well as with Fellows located in Global Transportation Hub throughout the world.

Ports work well with entities within the boundaries of their jurisdiction. The Program provides an opportunity for these Host Entities to utilize Fellows to assist with expanding the 'Outside the Fence' community service. The Port Industry has a proven track record of working with federal funds on successful economic development projects.

The collaboration between this Program and Ports provides tremendous opportunity for taking successful economic engines and expanding their impact.

The development of a NEDS Plan for the Mississippi River Basin will be developed into an active website with the ability for individual Stakeholders to update data annually. Federal and State funds are currently being used to fund a variety of strategic transportation plans. With the establishment of a NEDS Plan, the necessary updates could be performed as a pre-requisite for federal funding that the information will be updated into the NEDS Plan format.

The Host Entities and communities should realize a benefit from the efforts of the Fellows during the initial funding period. Op.PortUnity Program believes that the subsequent funding for the Fellows will be the individual communities which have benefited by these individuals. The Fellows will become permeant fixtures in the Ports and communities' structure for economic development with the benefits realized by each entity greater than the cost of the services. The Network Operator's role would require to be reflective of available funding raised through membership by Stakeholders and Host Entities, with the hope that an existing Waterways Association would at the completion of EDA's financial support incorporate the Op.PortUnity Program.

The NEDS Plan for the Mississippi River Basin will serve as a model for understanding how the system works and what areas could be improved to strengthen the Waterway System. The

Op.PortUnity Program will outlast the 5-year program and chart a new course for collaboration between Ports and other stakeholders throughout the Nation. The NEDS Plan has the potential to be the reference plan for economic development grant application as it pertains to transportation. Currently, EDA grant applications request information pertaining to MPOs, ambivalence to the fact that Economic Development District and CEDS Plans very seldomly address transportation in the underserved communities.

III. APPLICANT CAPACITY AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The Op.PortUnity Program has assembled an Interim Staff capable of developing the Program, which must be confirmed or replaced once an Advisory Board representing the Host Entities has been established. The Interim Staff represents 3 Port Directors with over 75 years of experience recruiting, training and managing employees; 1 Public Administrator with over 30 year of grant writing experience; The Interim Director of the Op.PortUnity Program is Mr. Gary LaGrange, with over 40 years of experience as Port Director in both shallow (West St. Mary) and deep draft (South Louisiana, Gulfport, New Orleans) Ports. Gary has a national reputation as a leader in the Maritime Industry and has served on almost every waterway association board in the Nation. Gary and his years of working throughout the Nation with various Ports and Waterway Associations will be instrumental in recruitment of Host Entities. The Fellows will be well served, as have so many current Port Directors throughout the Nations to be mentored by an icon in the industry who enjoys mentoring the next generation of Port Professionals.

Interim Deputy Director Randy Walter has served as Port Director in Lake Providence Louisiana (one of the most underserved communities in the Nation for 10 years), Economic Developer for the Red River Waterways Commission (15 years), and the East Carol Police Jury (8 years). The ambition of duplicating the success of the Red River Waterways Commission is strengthened by Randy. Randy insight of how to connect Ports and Communities to work collectively was demonstrated by his success with projects on the Red River. Randy will position the Op.PortUnity Program in the best position to duplicate that success by assisting with developing the Program Handbook and Training procedures to support the Fellows. Randy will also be able to work with the Host Entities to look at the development of the entire waterway to strengthen their facilities.

Interim Deputy Director (government affairs) Michael C. Knobloch has served as administrator of Economic Development Organization (3 years), Director of Grants and Human Resources for municipality (7 years), and owner of a grant consulting firm (20 years). Michael focus will be preparing the Program to assist the Fellows with support underserve communities with grant submittals. Michael insights to grant writing and economic development organizations will strengthen the Program Handbook and training of the Fellows. Michael past experience with Human Resources, Economic Development Organizations and Grant submittals makes him the logic selection for developing relationships with both Federal (EDA's various partners) and States agencies. The knowledge and experience Michael has will allow him to capture the essence of the Grant from these economic development agencies and provide insight and guidance to the fellows to support the underserved communities.

Interim Website Designer Scott Mercer has been a web developer and a full stack developer for the past five years and has worked with the Columbia Port Commission as our web manager for the past year. Scott will assist with developing and maintaining the website for the Program and the NEDS Plan. The utilization of technology is viewed as an essential element of success of this Program.

Interim Communication Officer Jennifer L. Marusak is the executive director of the Port Association of Louisiana with over 25 years of experience as a communication specialist in the Private and Government sector, lobbyist, consultant and has served as a director for both the Pilot Association and the Louisiana State Medical Society. Jennifer has agreed to assist with the startup of the Op.PortUnity Program. Jennifer role as Communication Officer will be to promote the development of the Program and assist with identifying stakeholders, Ports, Waterway Associations and State officials to participate in the Program. The support of the Port Association of Louisiana as well as the 32 member Ports strengthens the Program and is greatly appreciated.

Interim Office Administrator Candance Griffin is the Executive administrator of the Port Association of Louisiana with over 10 years of experience working with the Port Industry. Candance has agreed to assist with the startup of the Op.PortUnity Program. Candance role will be to assist with the development of the Op.PortUnity Handbook specifically to ensure compliance with the guidelines of the EDA Economic Recovery Corps Program. Candance will also assist with establishing the office administration procedures for the Staff, Fellows and Host entities. Candance experience with the Port Association of Louisiana and handling all Port Directors in the State of Louisiana will strength by ensuring the Program is supported and managed properly.

Interim Accountant -- Laura Hartt is the Accountant for the Columbia Port Commission and will serve as the interim accountant for the Op.PortUnity Program. Laura will be responsible for providing the necessary accounting services for the program, with the exception of Auditing which will be contracted to third party.

Interim Fellows Coordinator - Greg Richardson is an environmental engineer and with over 23 years of experience as the Port Director for the Columbia Port Commission, an underserved community which has struggled for 20 years to make a difference in our community. The possibilities of Port's working collectively to make a difference is more than a concept, the Port Association of Louisiana members came to the aid of our Port and the transformation has been inspiring. When the opportunity came for me to witness to the possibilities a Fellows Program to support other underserved communities utilizing Ports and waterway associations the application wrote itself. As the writer of the Grant Application, I have agreed to help with the startup of the Program. Greg role will be to assist with the development of the Program Handbook and the Training program for the Fellows from the prospective of the underserved communities. Greg will handle the recruiting of the Fellows, but the responsibility of the hiring will be the Director of the Program and the Host Entities. Greg will also assist the Directors and Deputy Directors with the promotion of the program and development of the Fellows and the Host Entities. Greg will also with the support of the staff commence compiling the gathering data and Strategic plans from the Fellows to assist with the completion of National Economic Development Plan. The Fellows Coordinator will be responsible for monthly visits to monitor and assist the Fellows, Host Entities, and Economic Development Organization to provide consistent support to the underserve communities.

IV. BUDGET NARRATIVE AND STAFFING PLAN

The Budget for the Op.PortUnity Program is \$5,090,000 for a total of \$25,450,000 for the five (5) year program. The Program has been developed to ensure the majority of the funds are spent on the Fellows and the goals of this application. The Network Operator has been staffed to provide sufficient oversight and guidance for the Program. As an application from a small Port on an Inland River in an underserved community the objects of Op.PortUnity Program is to install Fellows in underserve communities and provide them with the maximum amount of support to accomplish the tasks which have been outlined at the minimal cost to operate/manage the program. The reasonableness of the budget is grounded in the utilization of public Ports as Entity Hosts to provide the daily guidance and expertise that the Fellows will need to be successful. The majority of the administration cost for the Program will come from the In-Kind Match from the Entity Host. The Network Operator will provide expertise and continuity for the Entity Hosts and Fellows as well as provide the necessary administration requirements for managing federal funds.

Budget Breakdown

	Labor	Office	Training	Expenses	Total
Network	\$ 644,000	\$ 2,400		\$ 70,200	\$716,600
Entity Hosts	\$ 832,000	\$590,000		\$ 13,600	\$1,435,600 (In- Kind)
Fellows	\$2,250,000		\$297,500	\$390,300	\$2,937,800
TOTALS	\$3,726,000	\$592,400	\$297,500	\$474,100	\$5,090,000

The Program utilizing the In-Kind Match of the Entity Hosts makes the project a 70 percent Federal and 30 percent Non-Federal Match. The Fellows payroll and associated expenses is 80% of the Federal funds which demonstrates the Program ability to place the emphasis on the Fellows and the communities the program is designed to serve. The Program utilizes only 20% for the Network Operator.

SCHEDULE

Award in Sept 2022

Sign Agreement in December 2022

Preparation Phase January 2023 through June 2023, The Columbia Port Commission and the Port Association of Louisiana's Staff will perform the identification of the Program's Advisory Board which will consist of 17 Ports and Waterways Associations representing the various states and waterways. The Advisory Board will confirm and complete the hiring of the proposed Network Operator which will be the Op.PortUnity Program Staff. The staff will identify and contract with the 45 Ports and Waterway Associations which will be necessary to serve as Entity Host Sites. The Entity Host and the Op.PortUnity Program's staff will hire 45 Fellows.

- Create the Op.PortUnity Program Advisory Board

- Hire Staff for Network Operator which will become the Op.PortUnity Program
- Identify the 45 Entity Hosts
- Hire 45 Fellows
- Staff with approval of the Advisory Board and input from the Entity Host and EDA, will prepare a written Handbook from the outline of this Application for the Op.PortUnity Program. The handbook will be used to develop a training certification program for the Fellows which will be performed in the Implementation Phase of the Project.
- Identification of Economic Development Organizations and Agencies in the various states and communities targeted by this Program.
- Development a Grant awareness and participation program from the Op.PortUnity Program Handbook.
- Regional Training Certification of Fellows.

Implementation Phase July 2023 through December 2024

- Regional Meeting to introduce the Op.PortUnity Program in each of 17 states.
- Fellows execute Op.PortUnity Program Handbook and develop relationships with the various entities within their assigned waterway.
- Fellows will assist with the gathering of data for the development of the NEDS Plan.
- A NEDS Plan will be completed prior to December 2023.
- Assist communities with grants applications as well as implementing the NEDS Plan.
- Fellows will be tasked with addressing Environmental Justice and Climate Issues within their assigned regions and working collectively to address and standardize responses to national initiatives and crisis.
- Fellows will work with the various agencies to identify Crisis Management Procedures and Protocol.

Scaling Phase January 2025 through December 2027

- Annual updates to NEDS Plan
- Implementation of NEDS Plan, prepare grants which address weaknesses in the Waterways System, utilize underserved communities to assist with combating Carbon Issues as well as the promotion of Green Energy.
- Expand Op.PortUnity Program to other Waterways Systems in the Nation.
- Initiate steps to have the Op.PortUnity Program to be Self Sufficient by having the Entity Hosts and Waterway Associations gradually absorb the Fellows salaries and expenses.
- The success of the Program will be measured by the number of grants underserved communities were assisted and demonstrating the success of economic development project funded within the Mississippi River Basin utilizing the NEDS Plan.

The Op.PortUnity Program's plan for securing the proposed Match will be from the participating Ports and Waterway Associations. The Host Entities which accept a Fellow will be responsible for managing the Fellow's daily activities like any other Port Employee. The Host Entity will also provide office support for the Fellows including office space, supplies and equipment. The

Network Operator will provide each Host Entities with \$50,000 for the salary with an allocation of \$10,000 to cover expenses per Fellow. Should the Host Entities for whatever reason elect to pay Fellows more, those funds will come from the Host Entity. Host Entities which do not house a Fellows but assigned one that works the region will also be responsible for providing work space and assist with setting up local contacts to assist with the Programs Agenda. As the Program develops and proves successful opportunities will arise to increase the number of Fellows. The expansion of the Program is anticipated to come from non-federal funding sources such as state agencies, waterways association, private industry and International Ports which value the services and have a desire to participate in the Program.

The Federal Funds will be used to develop the Op.PortUnity Program to manage and coordinate 45 Fellows across 17 states. The annual budget is approximately \$5.09 million with the EDA Federal Fund Share \$3.65 million and the Non-Federal Funding \$1.435 million (29% in-kind match which includes Labor and Materials). The Budget Breakdown \$3.726 million in labor, \$.592 million in office expenses, \$0.297 million in training & study expenses, and \$0.474 million in expenses.

Cost Category

Federal Share (EDA)	\$3,654,400	
Non-Federal Matching Share	\$1,435,600	
Total Project Cost	\$5,090,000	
Federal Grant Rate	72%	
Personnel	\$3,726,000	(Labor, federal 78% nonfederal 22%)
Fringe Benefits	\$ 141,900	(phone and meals, federal 100%)
Travel	\$ 257,200	(Mileage, federal 95%, nonfederal 5%)
Supplies	\$ 592,400	(Office Space, Office Supplies & Equipment, Federal 1% and 99% nonFederal)
Other	\$ 372,500	(Conferences, training course, website, NEDS Plan and Marketing Material, Federal 100%)
Total Direct Charges		
Total Project Budget	\$5,090,000	

Director – Individual with experience with managing economic development organizations. The Director must have a college degree with over 20 years of experience as a Port Director with both shallow and deep draft Ports. (Salary range \$145,600, 100% Federal, full time 40hrs/week)

Deputy Director Ports -- Individual with experience with the Port Industry and working with waterway commissions, US Coast Guard, Homeland Security, and US Corps of Engineers. (Salary Range \$104,000, 100% Federal, full time 40hrs/week)

Deputy Director Government Affairs -- Individual with experience with working with various governmental economic development organizations at both the State and Federal level. Experience with managing grants. (Salary Range \$104,000, 100% Federal, Full time 40hrs/week)

Office Administrator -- Executive Secretary responsible for the day-to-day operation of the office and assist with human resource management and grant management (Salary range \$52,000, 100% Federal, full time 40hrs/week)

Accounting -- In house individual to assist with payroll, expenses, and grant management. Audit will be handled by third party. (Salary range \$62,400, 100% federal, full time 40hrs/week)

Web Designer/Communications officer -- Individual be proficient with computers and cybersecurity, experience managing a website as well as producing monthly newsletters. (Salary range \$72,800, 100% Federal, full time 40hrs/week or 2 part time 20hrs/week)

Fellows Coordinator -- Individual experience with training and marketing of the Fellows and preparing grants at both state and federal level will be responsible for keeping up with grants and assisting fellows with grant development. (Salary range \$83,200, 100% federal, full time 40 hrs./week)

Host Entity -- Individual of mentor the Fellows, (Salary range of \$40/hour for 8 hours per week per 52 weeks for 45 host entities for \$832,000, 100% NonFederal, 8 hours per week per Host Entity).

45 Fellows -- Hired by Entity Hosts and approved by Program (Salary Range \$50,000 per fellow total \$2,250,000, 100% Federal, full time 40 hrs./week)

Host Entities/Fellows Breakdown by State/Waterways

Alabama	3	Minnesota	1	Texas	3
Arkansas	2	Mississippi	4	West Va.	1
Illinois	3	Missouri	4	Wisconsin	1
Indiana	1	Ohio	4		
Iowa	2	Oklahoma	1		
Kentucky	2	Penn	2		
Louisiana	10	Tn.	2		

V. SCHEDULE OF MAJOR MILESTONES AND DELIVERABLES

Applications must include a schedule detailing the expected start and end date of all major milestones and deliverables (e.g., what data points, what analysis) described in the Project Narrative. The schedule should be outlined in months (one month from award) such that an evaluator could easily discern in how many months the applicant could start the project and how many months each key milestone, deliverables and completion. Not to exceed 54 months.

September 2022	Award of Grant
October 2022	Establish Entity Host Participants
November 2022	Official Meeting of Network Operator's Board of Directors
December 2022	Sign Agreement for Grant
January 2023	Start of Preparation Phase (6 months), complete hiring of Network operator's Staff by the Board of Directors
February 2023	Complete development of the Op.PortUnity Program Handbook, complete contracting with the 45 Host Entities.
March 2023	Start hiring process for the 45 Fellows, Network Operator's staff develops relationships with various economic development organizations, waterway associations, federal & state entities and non-Host Entity ports.
April 2023	Complete Certification Training Course outline for Fellows
May 2023	Complete hiring of the 45 fellows
June 2023	Conducts Op.PortUnity Program Certification Training Course for the fellows, prepares for regional meetings in the 17 states to introduce the Op.PortUnity Program and the fellows. Completes Preparation Phase.
July 2023	Start of Implementation Phase (18 months), Regional Meeting to Introduce the Op.PortUnity Program in each of 17 states.
August 2023	Fellows execute Op.PortUnity Program Handbook and develop relationships with the various entities within their assigned waterway. Fellows will assist with the gathering of data for the development of NEDS Plan.
December 2023	NEDS Plan will be completed. Submittal of Annual Report of Program to EDA.
January 2024	Assessment of Impact of Program's Fellows on Grant submittals for 2023, Op.PortUnity Program Conference and Annual meeting of Fellows and Host Entities. Annual Program will include a Training Certification Update for Fellows and Host Entities which will address Performance survey recommendation. The Annual

	Op.PortUnity Program Conference will be held to assist with generating revenue for the Program.
February 2024	Fellows conduct regional meeting with communities to implement the NEDS Plan and develop grants for 2024 applications.
June 2024	Fellows will be required to demonstrate that over the course of the year (June 2023 to June 2024) they have established a relationship with 25 underserved communities within their assigned region and provided direct support for at least 10 grant applications.
July 2024	Network Operator will evaluate Program and make modification to Handbook based on impact of first year of Implementation.
December 2024	Survey will be performed for Program with Stakeholders, Host Entities and Fellows seeking input on ways to improve the Op.PortUnity Program. Submittal the Program's Annual Report to EDA. Completion of the Implementation Phase.
January 2025	Start of Scaling Phase (January 2025 thru December 2027) Assessment of Impact of Program's Fellows on Grant submittals for 2024, Op.PortUnity Program annual meeting of Fellows and Host Entities. Annual Program will include a Training Certification Update for fellows and Host Entities which will address Performance survey recommendation. The Annual Op.PortUnity Program Conference will be held to assist with generating revenue for the Program.
February 2025	Annual updates to NEDS Plan. Expanded push by Fellow's for the Implementation of NEDS Plan specifically the submittal of grants to address weaknesses in the Waterways System as well as ensuring that Federal Initiative items are included in this year's Grant Submittals.
April 2025	Expand Op.PortUnity Program to other Waterways Systems in the Nation by developing a business plan to make Op.PortUnity Program self-sustaining.
June 2025	Fellows will be required to demonstrate that over the course of the year (June 2024 to June 2025) they have maintained a relationship with 25 underserved communities and added an additional 25 communities within their assigned region and provided direct support at least 20 grant applications. The Fellows will be required to perform a grant review to evaluate the number of successful grants awarded. Poor performance reviews will be evaluated and the Network Operator reserves the authority to replace the Fellow or the Host Entity to ensure adequate performance.

July 2025	Network Operator will evaluate Program and make modification to Handbook. The Op.PortUnity Program will offer it's Fellows Certification Training Program to the public to assist with generating revenue.
October 2025	Op.PortUnity Program will obtain a 2-year commitment from the Host Entities to cover their Fellow's salary commencing in January 2028. Host Entities unable or unwilling to comply with the request will have their Fellows relocated to a Host Entity willing to commit funding for the program after federal funding has been reduced or eliminated. The relocation of these Fellows to Host Entities will be in January of 2026.
December 2025	Survey will be performed for Program with Stakeholders, Host Entities and Fellows seeking input on ways improve the Op.PortUnity Program. Submittal the Program's Annual Report to EDA.
January 2026	Assessment of Impact of Program's Fellows on Grant submittals for 2025, Op.PortUnity Program annual meeting of Fellows and Host Entities. Annual Program will include a Training Certification Update for fellows and Host Entities which will address Performance survey recommendation. All Host Entities have entered into an agreement committing funds to cover the salaries and expenses of the Fellows through December 2029. The Network Operator will need to evaluate various options for securing funding as well as defined its role in the Program after December of 2027. The Annual Op.PortUnity Program Conference will be held to assist with generating revenue for the Program.
February 2026	Annual updates to NEDS Plan. Continued focus of Fellow's towards the implementation of NEDS Plan specifically the submittal of grants to address weaknesses in the Waterways System as well as ensuring that Federal Initiative items are included in this year's Grant Submittals. The Network Operator will implement internal grant applications to address Crisis Management for the Mississippi River Basin through the development of the Op.PortUnity Program and Ports.
April 2026	Op.PortUnity Program places Fellows in the Nation's remaining waterway systems with participating Host Entities willing to pay the Fellows Salaries.

May 2026	Op.PortUnity Program develops a pilot program for the incorporation of Fellows within International Ports to be funded by these Host Entities. The International Pilot Program should assist with generate funds to continue the Network Operator till December 2029.
June 2026	Fellows will be required to demonstrate that over the course of the year (June 2025 to June 2026) they have maintained a relationship with 50 underserved communities and added an additional 20 communities within their assigned region and provided direct support at least 40 grant applications.
July 2026	Network Operator will evaluate Program and make modification to Handbook. The Op.PortUnity Program will offer it's Fellows Certification Training Program to the public to assist with generating revenue.
December 2026	Survey will be performed for Program with Stakeholders, Host Entities and Fellows seeking input on ways improve the Op.PortUnity Program. Submittal of the Program's Annual Report to EDA.
January 2027	Assessment of Impact of Program's Fellows on Grant submittals for 2026, Op.PortUnity Program annual meeting of Fellows and Host Entities. Annual Program will include a Training Certification Update for fellows and Host Entities which will address Performance survey recommendation. The Annual Op.PortUnity Program Conference will be held to assist with generating revenue for the Program.
February 2027	Annual updates to NEDS Plan. Continued focus of Fellow's to Implementation of NEDS Plan specifically the submittal of grants to address weaknesses in the Waterways System as well as ensuring that Federal Initiative items are included in this year's Grant Submittals. The Network Operator will implement internal grant applications to address Carbon Reduction and Green Power for the Mississippi River Basin through the development of the Op.PortUnity Program and Ports.
June 2027	Fellows will be required to demonstrate that over the course of the year (June 2026 to June 2027) they have maintained a relationship with 70 underserved communities and added an additional remaining community within their assigned region and provided direct support at least 40 grant applications.

July 2027	Network Operator will evaluate Program and make modification to Handbook. The Handbook will also address the management structure (Network Operator) after federal funding has been reduced/eliminated in December of 2027. The Op.PortUnity Program will offer it's Fellows Certification Training Program to the public to assist with generating revenue.
September 2027	Survey will be performed for Program with Stakeholders, Host Entities and Fellows seeking input for the final Report on the Op.PortUnity Program.
December 2027	Op.PortUnity Program Final Report will be submitted to EDA outlining the success and failures of the Program. Completion of Scaling Phase of the Program.

VI. RESUMES OF KEY PERSONNEL

Director -- Gary LaGrange, Consultant for the Columbia Port Commission

Office Administrator – Candance Griffin

Deputy Director (Ports) -- Randy Walters

Deputy Director (Gov. Affairs) -- Michael Knobloch

Web Designer/Communications officer -- Scott Mercer / Jennifer Marusak

Fellows Coordinator -- Greg Richardson

Accounting -- Laura Hartt

VII. MATCHING SHARE DOCUMENTATION

Op.PortUnity Program has provided a support letter from the Port Association of Louisiana which represents Louisiana's 32 ports and their willingness to participate in the Program. While the response has been favorable from other Waterway Associations and Ports, no matching share documentation is provided with this application. However, the In-Kind match from the Hosts Entities should not be a problem, since it will not require modification to their existing budgets. An attempt to secure Hosts Entities' Matching Share Documentation was deemed premature prior to funding of the Program due to issues associated with contracting with public Entities.