

CITY OF SPOKANE ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY AND PROCEDURE	ADMIN 5200-14-03 LGL 2013-0016
TITLE: U-HELP PROGRAM EFFECTIVE DATE: September 11, 2013 REVISION EFFECTIVE DATE: March 19, 2014	

1.0 GENERAL

1.1 The City of Spokane provides financial assistance to qualified low-income customers, who are facing City utility shut-off. The program was begun in 1988 and is administered by an outside non-profit organization.

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2.0 DEPARTMENTS/DIVISIONS AFFECTED

This policy and procedure states the City of Spokane procedures for administration of its U-Help assistance program for qualifying low-income customers of City utilities who are facing utility shut-off.

3.0 REFERENCES

Chapter 13.09 SMC

4.0 DEFINITIONS

4.1 "Applicant" means any individual applying for a benefit, discount or attempting to qualify as a low-income customer.

4.2 "City" refers to the City of Spokane.

4.3 "Gross Income" includes any income that would be considered gross income under the Federal Internal Revenue Title 26, Subtitle A – Income Taxes, Chapter 1, Subchapter B, Part I, Section 61.

4.4 "Low-Income Customer" means a person whose gross income is less than one hundred twenty five percent (125%) of the current poverty level guidelines issued by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and is a current residential customer of the City of Spokane utilities.

5.0 POLICY

5.1 It is the policy of the City of Spokane to assist qualified current low-income customers who are facing City utility shut-off to the extent of available received City, public and City employee donations.

6.0 PROCEDURE

6.1 General Guidelines.

6.1.1 The program will be administered at no cost by an outside non-profit organization.

6.1.2 The payments will only be applied to City utilities.

6.1.3 The payments will only be applied to residential accounts, whether owners or renters.

6.1.4 Recipients may live outside the City limits, as long as their residence is billed for one (1) or more City utilities.

6.1.5 The City should attempt to use the program to avoid discontinuing service, but water shut-offs may still occur.

6.1.6 Funds may not be used for repairs, such as broken pipes, because funds will only be available for application to a utility account.

6.1.7 The recipients of the program are encouraged to repay any received monies, and the recipients may be asked to develop a budget plan in order to avoid reoccurrence of the need.

6.2 Eligibility Criteria For Customers To Receive Assistance.

- 6.2.1 To be eligible, customers' annual income shall be no more than fifty percent of the Area Median Income for Spokane as issued by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- 6.2.2 Each applicant is limited to one (1) U-Help assistance within a twelve (12) month period not to exceed the average monthly bill for residential customers within the City of Spokane. The average monthly bill includes fifteen thousand gallons a month of water consumption and a sixty eight gallon refuse cart.
- 6.2.4 An applicant must have been issued a final notice for his/her utility account, indicating that water services will be shut off. A final notice is mailed approximately ten (10) days after a delinquent notice is mailed if no payment or credit is received to bring the over sixty (60) day balance to zero. The final notice expires five (5) business days from the date of the notice, and the applicant could be on the shut off list at any time after that).
- 6.2.5 The U-Help contribution will be sufficient (by itself or with payments from the applicant and/or other agencies) to keep the applicant from shut off status until the next bill or to get the water turned on if it has already been turned off.

6.3 City Responsibilities.

- 6.3.1 Money is collected by the City of Spokane Utilities Billing Office from donations by its customers and others. Customers who wish to can contribute extra money when making their utility payment. There is also an employee donation program that allows City employees to donate directly out of their paychecks. Effective 2013, the City's utilities funds will transfer up to fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000.00) per year to match private contributions to the U-Help Assistance Fund.
- 6.3.2 The U-Help funds are held in a separate account at the City.
- 6.3.3 The Utilities Billing Office tracks the funds and advises the third party administrator when additional funds are available for applicants. (A memo will be sent by fax or e-mail to the third-party administrator allocating funds a minimum of once a month. The balance in the U-Help account determines the amount.)
- 6.3.4 Refer customer's needing utility assistance to the third-party administrator for U-Help application assistance.

- 6.3.5 Make adjustment on applicants' accounts upon receipt of voucher (verification) from the third party administrator.
 - 6.3.6 Provide all required vouchers to the third- party administrator and cover all related cost of producing and delivery of vouchers.
 - 6.3.7. Provide accounting of available funds for the next month's U-help assistance funding to the third party administrator by the third Friday of each month.
 - 6.3.8 Inform community, through media releases, information on customer bills and other communication avenues of the name, address and phone number of the third party administrator administering U-Help financial assistance.
 - 6.3.9 Maintain the U-Help contributions from public and private sources in a separate account within the City Utilities Billing Office.
- 6.4 Third Party Administrator Responsibilities.
- 6.4.1 Accept customer's phone calls requesting assistance at least one (1) day per week, as determined by the third party administrator.
 - 6.4.2 Conduct eligibility assessments for all persons identifying as City of Spokane utilities customers needing assistance. In order to be eligible for U-Help assistance, the applicant's gross monthly income is limited to below one hundred twenty five percent (125%) of the Federal Poverty Guidelines as set by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
 - 6.4.3 Meet with pre-screened customers within five (5) business days to verify eligibility requirements.
 - 6.4.4 Contact the City via phone to verify customer has met all qualifications required by the City for U-Help assistance and that the U-Help applicant has not received assistance within the last twelve (12) months.
 - 6.4.5 Once customer is approved for U-Help assistance, contact the City Utilities Billing Office via phone to make pledge on behalf of the client.
 - 6.4.6 Complete U-Help voucher for customer.
 - 6.4.7 Retain copy of completed U-Help vouchers in accordance with the third party administrator's record keeping protocols.

6.4.8 Provide the City's Utilities Billing Office, by Friday of each week, with a list of the week's pledges/vouchers granted..

6.4.9 Provide hard copies of all U-Help vouchers to the City on a weekly basis.

6.4.10 Track customer information and U-Help assistance utilization in an effort to monitor annual financial assistance requirement.

6.4.11 Manage spend down of U-Help funds at a programmatic level based on funding availability provided by the City.

6.4.12 Maintain the confidentiality of financial and other personal information provided by customers.

6.5 Disbursement Procedure.

6.5.1 The third party administrator notifies the Utilities Billing Office when funds are needed.

6.5.2 The Utilities Billing Office notifies the third party administrator how much money it is authorized to use.

6.5.3 The third party administrator completes a voucher for the customer it is helping and mails the voucher to the Utilities Billing Office.

6.5.4 The Utilities Billing Office transfers the money from the U-Help account to the designated customer account.


7.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

The Utilities Billing Office shall administer this policy and procedure.


8.0 APPENDICES

None

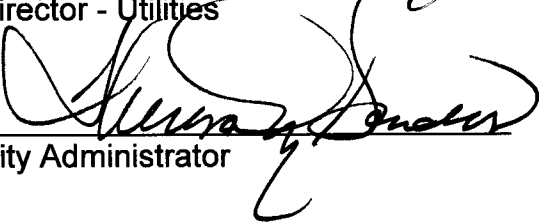
APPROVED BY:


City Attorney (ASST)

2-25-14
Date


Director - Utilities

2-25-14
Date


City Administrator

2/27/14
Date