

## Attachment II

### Project AGUA Program Guidelines

#### I. INTRODUCTION

**Project AGUA:** Project AGUA is a San Antonio Water System (SAWS) program that provides utility assistance credits to low-income, qualifying ratepayers in order to help them restore SAWS services or prevent imminent disconnection from SAWS services. The program is funded by SAWS, trust investment income and through corporate and private donations.

SAWS determines the amount of assistance available for the program on an annual basis. **Project AGUA is sometimes referred to herein as the “Program.”**

#### II. RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THIS PROGRAM

##### **A. Joint:**

- (1) SAWS and the City of San Antonio, through its Department of Human Services (DHS) shall administer the Program jointly, and cooperatively develop all plans, documents, and other materials required for development, implementation, and oversight over the Program.
- (2) **Outreach:** A concerted effort will be made to inform as many potential participants as possible about the Program. The parties will fully utilize local media outlets for public service announcements and electronic media options. The breadth of outreach via the media will be dependent on the annual scope of the applicable program. Where feasible, outreach activities will be conducted in both English and Spanish.
- (3) **Information Technology:** The parties will make every reasonable effort to identify and implement information technology solutions that support the outreach, intake, eligibility determination, certification, case management, monitoring, reporting, evaluation and communication activities necessary to implement the Program. The goal is to achieve automated data, processing, and communications capabilities.

##### **B. The City of San Antonio, through DHS shall be responsible for:**

- (1) Conducting ratepayer intakes, accepting and processing applications. Applications will be taken by DHS staff at DHS offices. These offices are dispersed throughout the city and will afford citizens the opportunity to submit applications at a site convenient to their residence.
- (2) Determining ratepayer eligibility based upon applicable Program guidelines
- (3) Conducting outreach utilizing the social service delivery network, DHS subcontractors, nutrition sites, literacy centers, etc.

- (4) Providing SAWS with a certification listing of program eligible ratepayers that will, at a minimum, contain the following information (if available) for each eligible ratepayer to assist SAWS in crediting / discounting client accounts:
  - a. Name, address, and SAWS account number
  - b. Amount (AGUA credit) pledged
  - c. Household size
  - d. Household income
  - e. Date applicant certified eligible
  - f. Other information in accordance with existing SAWS-DHS agreements
- (5) Providing a list of clients credited for Project AGUA weekly
- (6) Maintaining case folders, files and records
- (7) Developing and managing ratepayer eligibility program databases
- (8) Performing program analysis (ratepayer eligibility perspective)
- (9) Coordinating all Project AGUA Program operations with SAWS

**C. SAWS** shall be responsible for:

- (1) All program funding related to ratepayer credits / discounts
- (2) For Project AGUA, fundraising and trust and investment income management, including establishing an account to receive Project Agua contributions, investment income, and donations
- (3) Coordination and implementation of outreach operations for the Program consistent with the intent of the applicable program goals and as outlined in agreements between the City and SAWS. SAWS will include bill inserts and print and distribute program brochures, informing ratepayers of the available assistance.
- (4) Providing space on monthly utility bills for the designation of ratepayer contributions to Project AGUA
- (5) Processing Project AGUA certification lists and associated credits / discounts as applicable
- (6) Providing DHS with a monthly data summary of all ratepayers who have received AGUA credits in the past 30 days
- (7) Coordinating all Project AGUA operations with DHS
- (8) Developing quarterly and annual program fiscal summaries

### **III. ELIGIBILITY FOR ASSISTANCE UNDER PROGRAM**

In order to qualify for assistance, applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- A. SAWS Ratepayer:** Applicants for the program must have a SAWS statement in their name or in their spouse's name. If an applicant household's bill is not in their name, the applicant must initiate a name change on the SAWS account prior to assistance being rendered. Failure to do so will result in the denial or rescission of utility

assistance.

**B. Income:** Eligibility will be based on a ratepayer's family size and gross income as a percentage of the then current Federal Poverty Level (FPL) guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) at the time of the application. For eligibility purposes, DHS will follow guidelines from the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs to calculate a household's income. Applicants must have a total household income at or below 125% of the FPL in place at the time of the application. For a point of reference, as of February 2016, 125% of the FPL has been established as follows:

FAMILY SIZE*	YEARLY INCOME**
1	\$14,850
2	\$20,025
3	\$25,200
4	\$30,375
5	\$35,550
6	\$40,725
7	\$45,913
8	\$51,113

\* For family units with more than eight (8) members, add \$5,200 for each additional family member to the guidelines.

Eligible applicants' gross income may be adjusted by providing proof of medical expenses such as prescription medications, dietary supplements, and doctor visits. These expenses must have occurred within 30 days of the request for assistance. Household income may be adjusted downward per existing DHS policies to take into consideration recurring medical prescription cost for seniors. The total amount of these qualifying medical expenses can then be deducted from the applicant's monthly gross income. The resulting adjusted gross income will be used to determine eligibility based on the current gross income guidelines as cited above.

#### **IV. AGUA SPECIFIC PROGRAM GUIDELINES**

The scope and level of assistance will be determined by eligibility guidelines that are established and reviewed annually by SAWS and DHS. These guidelines may include, but are not limited to, funds availability, ratepayer income, family size, degree of financial crisis, and other factors such as age and disability.

**A. Assistance Priority:** Priority will be given to income eligible ratepayers that meet one or more of the following criteria:

(1) household member age 60 years or older;

- (2) household member age 18 years or younger;
- (3) disabled household member (requires medical documentation of disability); or
- (4) household member that requires continuous water service for life-sustaining medical equipment (requires medical documentation).

**B. Assistance Limit:** Applicants are eligible for assistance up to **\$115.00** annually. Assistance may only be used for, or applied to, the eligible applicant's residential SAWS account. The assistance cannot be used for returned check fees or deposits. **The following exceptions apply:**

- (1) Homeless clients establishing permanent housing and needing assistance with their initial SAWS security deposit;

**C. Case Management:** Depending on the availability of funds in any given year, the City may subcontract processing of applications and case management to local, non-profit agencies for the benefit of SAWS ratepayers. The City shall require that the assisting agencies adhere to current Project AGUA criteria and application processing guidelines in the distribution of credits. Agencies shall bear their own administrative costs related to the distribution of Project AGUA assistance credits.

**D. Waivers (generally):** The DHS Director or her designees may grant special waivers for one or more of the eligibility criteria and program requirements (except for the requirement that the applicant be a SAWS ratepayer) in cases of extreme hardship or other emergencies in order to restore utility services or to prevent the disruption or termination of SAWS services. Assistance may not exceed the \$115.00 maximum per year to one household without the approval of the DHS Director or her designees.

**E. Appeals:** In order to provide equitable services to all Project Agua program applicants, those who have been denied assistance will have the following rights upon request to DHS:

- (1) The right to be informed in writing of the reason(s) for denial of assistance
- (2) The right of appeal to the DHS Casework Supervisor, Program Manager, and/or the DHS Director or her designee in succession
- (3) The right to a prompt resolution of the appeal
- (4) In all appeal cases, the determination by the DHS-Director or her designee will be final.

**F. Special Provisions for Disaster Relief Victims:** The following special provisions are incorporated to provide relief to disaster victims and their host "families."

- (1) For new residential accounts, security deposits will be waived. The account will be monitored for possible future payment assistance through Project Agua.
- (2) Current SAWS customers who are hosting victims may qualify for payment assistance through Project Agua.

The following will be applicable to accounts identified as above:

- Assistance amount will vary and will be based on need.
- DHS caseworker and the SAWS-designated employee will jointly determine the assistance amount.
- Amount will not exceed the already established cap of **\$115.00** annually, without the approval of the DHS Program Manager or designee and the SAWS-designated employee.
- SAWS will waive any late fees applied to the identified accounts for the duration of the subject crisis
- SAWS will suspend collections for the identified accounts for the duration of the subject crisis.
- SAWS will offer payment arrangements
- The time frame for the assistance will be for the duration of the subject crisis (variable up to 12 months maximum).