**Section 296.55 Prescreening of Grant Applications by the Office**

The Office will conduct a prescreening of all grant applications received by the deadline to identify applicants with the greatest need as determined under this Section. The steps of this prescreening are provided in this Section.

a) The Office will evaluate whether each application was received by the deadline, whether the applicant has met the eligibility requirements of Section 296.30 as of the application deadline date, and whether the applicant has fully completed all sections of the application. Only those applicants that meet these eligibility requirements will receive further consideration.

b) To assist the Committee in making final determinations of grant awards, the Office will then rank complete applications of eligible applicants using the following criteria:

1) The Office will use information provided by the applicant on its operating budget, square miles served and population served in developing a ranking of financial need.

2) The Office will divide each applicant's budget by the square miles served to determine the applicant's budget per square mile and will rank the applicants lowest to highest.

3) The Office will divide each applicant's budget by the population served to determine the applicant's budget per person and will rank the applicants lowest to highest.

4) The Office will then average the two rankings of each applicant to reach an overall ranking.

c) Applicants that have previously received a grant from the Office under this program will be ranked against each other according to the criteria in subsection (b), but this group of applicants will be ranked below all applicants that have not previously received a grant under this program.

d) Using the ranking criteria identified in subsections (b) and (c), the Office will rank the applications. Based upon the grant amount requested by each applicant, the Office will provide the Committee with complete application information for the top ranked applications totaling at least 1½ times the amount of available appropriations for the Committee's determination for that grant cycle.