

State of Maine Citizen Participation Plan

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has consolidated the planning, application, reporting and citizen participation processes of four formula grant programs: Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), Home Investment Partnerships (HOME), Emergency Shelter Grants (ESG) and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA). The single planning process is intended to fulfill three basic goals: to provide decent housing, to provide a suitable living environment, and to expand economic opportunities.

The Maine State Housing Authority (MaineHousing) and the State of Maine Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) encourage Maine citizens, especially those earning low and moderate incomes, to participate in the development of the State of Maine Consolidated Housing and Community Development Plan (“Consolidated Plan”). This Citizen Participation Plan outlines the responsibilities of MaineHousing and DECD for obtaining citizen participation in the process of preparing, amending, and updating the Five-Year Consolidated Plan, the Annual Action Plan, and the Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation Report (CAPER).

THE CONSOLIDATED PLAN AND THE ANNUAL ACTION PLAN

The Consolidated Plan examines the current housing situation, explores the housing and community development needs of the state, and sets priorities for spending HUD grant funds. MaineHousing and DECD encourage local government, public and private agency, and citizen participation in collaboratively identifying housing and community development needs. In order to provide varied opportunities for participation in the planning and preparation of the Consolidated Plan, MaineHousing and DECD will undertake the following actions:

Consultation

Prior to the development of the draft Consolidated Plan, MaineHousing and DECD will solicit information about housing and community development needs throughout the state. This solicitation may take the form of one or more of the following:

1. Consultation with local public agencies that assist low income persons and areas, including state and federal agencies, local governments and regional councils of government.
2. Consultation with private agencies, including public and private housing developers, local not-for-profit service providers, local public housing authorities, homeless service providers, not for-profit housing developers, community action agencies, social service agencies and advocates.
3. Focus group discussions for specific consumer groups, (such as persons with disabilities, elderly and/or homeless individuals), municipal infrastructure needs, and economic development needs.
4. Information collection at statewide affordable housing and homeless conferences, with established entities such as the Statewide Homeless Council and the Continuums of Care, and with professional associations.
5. Partner and client blogs.
6. Public Forums.

Participation of Citizens

MaineHousing and DECD intend to provide for and encourage citizens to participate in the development of the Consolidated Plan, and all annual performance evaluations and reports in the

interim. MaineHousing and DECD will take whatever actions are appropriate to encourage the participation of all Maine citizens, including minorities and non-English speaking persons, as well as persons with disabilities.

Citizen participation will be accomplished through one or more of the following means as appropriate:

1. Online Citizen Survey
 - An online survey of housing needs and priorities may be provided via the MaineHousing and DECD websites.
 - The availability of the online survey will be communicated through email or mail. Partner organizations will be encouraged to notify low income clients of its availability.
2. Telephone Survey
 - A citizen telephone survey of housing needs and priorities may be conducted, or a telephone town hall may be held.
3. Focus Groups
 - One or more focus groups with organizations that advocate for low income Maine citizens may be conducted.
4. Public Hearings/Forums
 - Public hearings will be scheduled at times and locations that are convenient to potential and actual beneficiaries.
 - Hearing sites will accommodate persons with mobility impairments, and special communication accommodations will be arranged if requested prior to the hearing date.

To the greatest extent practicable, MaineHousing and DECD may employ electronic means of communication and consultation, to include e-committees, online discussion forums and blogs, videoconferencing, online surveys, or similar methods.

Public Notice

Reasonable notice will be given to announce the availability of the draft Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan. Availability of the draft Plan or Annual Action Plan will be announced on both the MaineHousing and DECD websites.

Public Hearings

At least two public hearings will be held before the publication of the final Consolidated Plan. The purpose of the first public hearing will be to gather citizen input on housing and community development needs and the proposed Consolidated Plan before it is published for comment.

The second public hearing will be held during the Consolidated Plan 30 day public comment period. The purpose of this public hearing will be to gather citizen input on the Consolidated Plan draft.

Citizens will be notified of the public hearings at least two weeks before they are held. Public hearings will be announced in at least one Maine newspaper, by email, and on the MaineHousing and DECD websites.

CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

A public comment period of at least 30 days will be provided prior to the adoption of the Consolidated Plan or implementation of any substantial amendments. MaineHousing and DECD staff will prepare a summary of all comments received in writing, and in cases where citizens' views are not accepted, provide reasons for the decision.

CONSOLIDATED ANNUAL PERFORMANCE AND EVALUATION REPORTS

Before MaineHousing and DECD submit a Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) to HUD, the proposed CAPER will be made available to those interested for a comment period of no less than 15 days. Citizens will be notified of the CAPER's availability through a notice appearing in at least one newspaper circulated throughout the State.

The CAPER will be available on both the MaineHousing and DECD websites during the 15-day public comment period. Hard copies will be provided upon request.

Any comments from individuals or groups received verbally or in writing will be considered. A summary of the comments, and of the responses, will be included in the final CAPER.

SUBSTANTIAL AMENDMENTS

A substantial amendment is defined as a proposed change in a planned or actual activity after the official adoption of the Consolidated Plan that affects 10 percent or more of the State's annual allocation of CDBG, HOME, ESG, or HOPWA funds. A substantial amendment may also be required to carry out an activity not previously described in the action plan.

Substantial amendments to the approved Consolidated Plan will be made public by public notices in newspapers and notices on the MaineHousing and DECD websites.

MaineHousing and DECD will receive and consider comments on substantial amendments to the Consolidated Plan for 30 days before implementing those amendments.

CITIZEN COMPLAINTS

MaineHousing and DECD will provide a substantive written response to all written citizen complaints related to the Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan, Substantial Amendments, and the CAPER within 15 working days of receiving the complaint.

PUBLIC ACCESS

Availability of Documents

The final Consolidated Plan, any substantial amendments, and annual performance reports will be made available to the public. Copies will be available in printed form or electronic means.

Access to Records

MaineHousing and DECD will provide all interested parties with access to information and records related to the Consolidated Plan during the preceding five years. The public will be provided reasonable access to housing assistance records, subject to laws regarding privacy and obligations of confidentiality.

Effective with the 2016 Annual Action Plan – November 2015