

Citizen Participation Plan

1. Background

The primary goal of the Citizen Participation Plan is to provide citizens, especially low and moderate income citizens of the community where CDBG-DR funded activities will take place, an opportunity to participate in an advisory role in the planning, implementation, and assessment of the programs and projects. The State of Florida Action Plan for Disaster Recovery includes the Citizen Participation guidelines outlined below.

2. Time for Citizen Comment

Notice of public comment period for the original Action Plan was provided by publication on the Department of Economic Opportunity disaster recovery website, in addition to targeted State outreach to stakeholders. The State will provide notice and open the citizen comment period for the following time frames per action:

- Comment period for the original Action Plan will take place for 14 days after the publication of the Action Plan.
- Comment period for Substantial Amendments will take place for no less than 14 days after the publication of the Substantial Amendment.

In addition to posting on the official website, <http://floridajobs.org/news-center/public-notice>, DEO will publish a notice of substantial amendment in the Florida Administrative Register (FAR). DEO will incorporate and address citizen comments received during public comment periods.

3. Website

DEO has a public website providing access to information and programs administered by the State. DEO has a separate and distinct webpage on its website entitled “Disaster Recovery Programs” that includes information on disaster recovery activities assisted with CDBG-DR funds due to 2016 Hurricanes Hermine and Matthew. The creation and maintenance of the public website is one component of HUD’s certification that DEO has proficient financial controls and procurement processes as required in the Register.

The Disaster Recovery Programs’ webpage will include links to action plans, action plan amendments, citizen participation requirements, and activity/program information for activities described in the action plan, including details of all contracts and ongoing procurement policies. It will also store every HUD Quarterly Performance Report (QPR), with information accounting for how funds are being used and managed.

Information pertaining to recovery from the 2016 Hurricanes Hermine and Matthew posted to the webpage includes, but is not limited, to program design and reporting, the citizen participation plan, procurement, executed CDBG-DR contracts, and their statuses. Program announcements and details of activities will also be posted on DEO's website on an ongoing basis along with program guidebooks and

manuals in English and made available in other languages for limited English proficiency audiences, as applicable.

4. Consultation

Federal Register volume 81, Number 224 dated November 21, 2016, streamlines citizen participation requirements and does not mandate public hearings but does require providing a reasonable opportunity (at least 14 days) for citizen comment and ongoing citizen access to information about the use of grant funds. DEO consulted with local governments in the creation of the Action plan, and maintains the following requirements as outlined in the Plan:

Local Efforts

Counties and other units of local government eligible to receive funds must coordinate to consider the needs of all municipalities (and Federally Recognized Indian Tribes) within the incorporated as well as unincorporated area of the county (and reservations contiguous to the county). Eligible units of government should also consult with local housing providers regarding funding for affordable rental housing needs related to the storms. Applicants for funding must provide the Department with documentation that all parties were allowed an opportunity to discuss unmet needs and the best use of the funding.

Applicants are required to conduct at least one public hearing or meeting to receive comments from residents of the community. Applicants will be required to post a public notice in a newspaper of general circulation and to their website, that states the types of projects to be undertaken, the source and amount of funding available for the activities, a date by which public comments must be made, and who to contact for a copy of the proposed application (i.e., name or office and telephone number). This notice, which must provide for a 14-day comment period, must be published prior to the submission of their application. A compilation of the public comments received must be included as an appendix to the application.

Additionally, applicants are required to conduct outreach to vulnerable populations and are required to have at least one outreach session in an area or areas targeting different special needs populations throughout the County or municipality to ensure best efforts to maximize community outreach are achieved and documented. Since certain areas throughout the State have bilingual and multi-lingual populations, there should be at least a Spanish translation of all relevant documentation available for the public. It would be helpful, if applicable, to have a Spanish translator available during public meetings. This could also be applicable for disabled individuals that may be hearing-impaired or blind.

Applicants for funding must allow their citizens access to grant information pursuant to Florida's Government in the Sunshine Law as well as federal requirements. Records should be made available for public inspection during normal business hours. In addition, if possible, information should be posted to websites. Upon request, information must be provided in a format accessible to persons with disabilities. Retention of records must meet existing public record requirements.

5. Accessibility

The Plan was made available in English and Spanish, and was posted on the DEO website, which has embedded technology to provide accessibility to the visually impaired.

6. Substantial Amendment

DEO will engage citizens throughout the disaster recovery program to maximize the opportunity for input on proposed program changes that result in a substantial amendment. Program changes result in a substantial amendment when there is:

- a change in program benefit or eligibility criteria;
- the addition or deletion of an activity; or
- the allocation or reallocation of more than 10 percent of the original appropriation (approximately \$5.8 million).

Citizens will be provided with no less than 14 days to review and provide comments on proposed substantial changes. A summary of all comments received will be included in the final Substantial Amendment submitted to HUD for approval.

DEO will notify HUD, but is not required to undertake public comment, when it makes any plan amendment that is not substantial. HUD will be notified at least five business days before the amendment becomes effective.

Every amendment to the action plan (substantial and non-substantial) will be numbered and posted on the DEO website.

7. Summary of Public Comments

A summary of public comments submitted on the draft Action Plan, as well as DEO's response to each comment, are included in the formal submittal to HUD.

8. Citizen Complaints

The State of Florida will handle citizen complaints received by the State, its subrecipients, vendors, and/or other program sources by conducting:

1. Investigations as necessary;
2. Resolution; or
3. Follow-up actions.

The goal of the State is to provide an opportunity to resolve complaints in a timely manner, usually within 15 business days as expected by HUD, if practicable, and to provide the right to participate in the process and appeal a decision when there is reason for an applicant to believe its application was not handled according to program policies. All applications, guidelines, and websites will include details on the right to file a complaint or appeal, and the process for filing a complaint or beginning an appeal.

Applicants are allowed to appeal program decisions related to one of the following activities:

1. A program eligibility determination;
2. A program assistance award calculation; and
3. A program decision concerning housing unit damage and the resulting program outcome.

Citizens may file a written complaint or appeal through the Disaster Recovery email at CDBG-DR@deo.myflorida.com or submit by postal mail to the following address:

Attention: Chief, Bureau of Small Cities and Rural Communities
Florida Department of Economic Opportunity
107 East Madison Street
The Caldwell Building, MSC 160
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

If the complainant is not satisfied by the subrecipient determination or DEO response, the complainant may file a written appeal by following the instructions issued in the letter of response. If at the conclusion of the appeals process the complainant has not been satisfied with the response, a formal complaint may then be addressed directly to the regional Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) at:

Department of Housing & Urban Development
Charles E. Bennett Federal Building
400 West Bay Street, Suite 1015
Jacksonville, FL 32202

The Florida Disaster Recovery Program operates in Accordance with the Federal Fair Housing Law (The Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988). Anyone who feels he or she has been discriminated against may file a complaint of housing discrimination: 1-800-669-9777 (Toll Free) 1-800-927-9275 (TTY) www.hud.gov/fairhousing