

State of Maine Citizen Participation Plan 2020

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has consolidated the planning, application, reporting and citizen participation processes of formula grant programs: Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), Home Investment Partnerships (HOME), Emergency Shelter Grants (ESG) and Housing Trust Fund (HTF). The Consolidated Plan is designed to help states and local jurisdictions to assess their affordable housing and community development needs and market conditions, and to make data-driven, place-based investment decisions. The consolidated planning process serves as the framework for a community-wide dialogue to identify housing and community development priorities that align and focus funding from the formula block grant programs.

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).

Citizen Participation Requirements

Given the need to expedite actions to respond to COVID-19, HUD has waived the 30-day public comment period and the reasonable notice and opportunity requirements for substantial amendments to the Consolidated Plan or Annual Acton Plan through the end of the 2020 program year (12/31/2020).

Consistent with this waiver, the citizen participation period for a substantial amendment will be 5 days in program year 2020. The public will be notified of the substantial amendment on the MaineHousing and DEDC websites and via MaineHousing’s mass email list which includes advocacy groups, local governments, State Departments, Public and Indian Housing Authorities, housing developers, lending institutions and real estate agents. Any comments from individuals or groups received verbally or in writing will be considered. One on-line public hearing will be held to collect citizen input on the substantial amendment. Citizens will be notified of the public hearing at least one week before it is held.

Substantial Amendments pertaining only to ESG COVID funding will omit the public participation and consultation requirements as allowed by the CAREs Act. MaineHousing will publish how it will use the allocation to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus pandemic.

Plan/Report	Frequency	Due Date	Citizen Participation Period (in calendar days)	Public Hearings (minimum)
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Consolidated Plan	Every 5 years	November 15	30 days	2
Annual Action Plan	Every year	November 15	30 days	2
<i>Amendments to Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan</i>	<i>As needed</i>		<i>5 days</i>	<i>1 (on-line)</i>
<i>Amendments to Consolidated Plan or Annual Action Plan for ESG COVID Funding</i>	<i>As needed</i>			<i>N/A</i>
Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation Report (CAPER)	Every year	March 31	15 days	N/A

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 with specific consumer groups (such as persons with disabilities, elderly and/or homeless individuals) regarding housing, 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 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:

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.
 - 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. To encourage citizen comment and attendance at public hearings/forums, notices will be emailed via MaineHousing's mass email list which includes advocacy groups, local governments, State Departments, Public and Indian Housing Authorities, housing developers, lending institutions and real estate agents.

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 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. Notice will also be emailed via MaineHousing's mass email list.

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

Any changes in the distribution of funds caused by changes in federal funding allocations after the Consolidated Plan/Annual Action Plan's draft comment period has expired will not be considered a substantial amendment.

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

MaineHousing and DECD will receive and consider comments on substantial amendments to the Consolidated Plan during the 5 day comment period, 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 for program year 2020