

Citizen Participation Plan

Community Development Block Grant—Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR)

Richland County, South Carolina

Background and Purpose

Richland County, South Carolina, is the recipient of a CDBG-DR grant in accordance with the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act, 2016 (Public Law 114-113). These funds are made available through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to assist remaining disaster recovery needs in response to the October 2015 severe storms and flooding events. Federal Register Notice 5938-N-01, which sets the framework for this funding contains waivers and alternative requirements to streamline the funding process, including waivers that permit changes to Richland County's Consolidated Plan Citizen Participation Plan.

The contents of this document constitute the Citizen Participation Plan for the CDBG-DR program. This Plan is an essential element of the County's community development and recovery process. It has been developed to comply with the regulations and requirements of Section 104(a) of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended. The CDBG-DR program is administered by the Richland County Department of Community Development. This document will be made publicly available for ease of access and review.

The Citizen Participation Plan is a way for all citizens to influence decisions that affect their communities, neighborhoods, and way of life. The primary goal of the Richland County CDBG-DR Citizen Participation Plan is to provide all Richland County citizens with an opportunity to participate in the planning, implementation, and assessment of Richland's CDBG-DR program(s). The County actively encourages widespread citizen participation, with a special emphasis on efforts to encourage participation from the following populations:

- Low- and moderate-income persons
- Residents of slums, blighted areas, and predominately low- and moderate-income areas
- Non-English speaking persons
- Persons with disabilities
- Public housing residents and other low-income residents of targeted revitalization areas

The Plan sets forth policies and procedures for citizen participation, which are designed to maximize the opportunity for citizen involvement in the community development process. The County also encourages the participation of statewide and regional institutions and other organizations (including businesses, developers, and community and faith-based organizations) that are involved with or affected by the programs or activities covered by the Action Plan.

Citizens are encouraged to participate in all phases of the CDBG-DR program(s) and will be provided full access to program information. However, the final responsibility and authority for the development and implementation of CDBG-DR program(s) rest with Richland County.

Citizen Participation Contact

The Department of Community Development, County Council, County Administration, and Long-term Recovery Manager will coordinate with the County's Public Information Officer to disseminate information concerning public meetings, proposed projects and project status through press releases and publication to County-run social media and web-based resources.

Amendments to the Citizen Participation Plan

The County may, from time to time, modify the provisions in this Citizen Participation Plan through amendment. It will be the policy of the Department of Community Development, in coordination with County Administration, to periodically review and discuss the effectiveness of this Plan. Amendments will be made as necessary and the most current version of the Plan will be publicly available through the flood recovery website.

Technical Assistance

Richland County will provide technical assistance to individuals and representatives of groups of low and moderate income persons who request such assistance. Technical assistance may include the provision of information on CDBG-DR programs and services; interpreting CDBG-DR program rules, regulations, procedures and/or requirements; and, assisting low and moderate income citizens, or any individual requiring extra assistance, to develop statements of views, and identify their needs.

Public Hearing

Unlike the Citizen Participation Plan for the Consolidated Plan, there is no requirement for public hearing relative to the CDBG-DR Action Plan. However, alternative requirements have been set forth, as described throughout the rest of this plan. The County's Citizen Participation Plan will ensure that there is reasonable and timely access to information for appraisal, examination and comment on the activities proposed for the use of CDBG-DR grant funds. This may include publication for comment and/or public hearings or meetings where such can be arranged.

All general public meetings will be held at times and in locations convenient to residents, particularly those affected citizens who are potential beneficiaries of the programs. General meetings will be held on or after 5:00 p.m. on weekdays.

Public Notice and Comment Period

Consistent with the County's Consolidated Plan, all notices of public hearing (where hearings are scheduled) will be published in *The State* newspaper (Legal section) at least ten (10) days prior to the public hearing. Notices may also be published in other local newspapers. Additional notices will be provided through neighborhood-based forums, civic and community service organizations. Finally, notices will also be published on the County's website (www.rcgov.us) as well as the flood recovery website (www.rcgov.us/floodrecovery), when such notices pertain to the CDBG-DR funding.

The County may waive hearing notice requirements in cases where County rules allow.

In accordance with the requirements in Federal Register Notice 5938-N-01, Richland County has developed and will maintain a comprehensive website regarding all disaster recovery activities associated with these funds. The website address is www.rcgov.us/floodrecovery. The County will post all Action Plans and amendments on this website to provide citizens with an opportunity to read the plan and to submit comment(s).

Paper copies of the Action Plan will be available at the following address:

Richland County Department of Community Development
2020 Hampton Street
Suite 3063
Columbia, SC 29204

A comment period of at least fourteen (14) days, as required by HUD, shall be provided for citizen comment and ongoing citizen access to information about the use of grant funds. Publication of the Action Plan and all substantial amendments prior to County adoption will afford citizens, affected local governments, and other interested parties a reasonable opportunity to examine the plan or amendment's contents and provide comment. The County will issue press releases and public service announcements for print media, local radio and television stations to advertise the public comment period. Further, the County will work with community organizations to publicize the publication of and comment period for the Action plan.

Comments may be submitted as follows:

- Electronically by submitting comments to the email address recovery@rcgov.us
- Written comments may be mailed to or dropped off in person at:

Richland County Department of Community Development

2020 Hampton Street
Suite 3063B
Columbia, SC 29204

- By telephone by contacting 803-576-1543 or 803-576-2063.
- Using TDD 803-576-2045.
- By text by sending a message to 803-760-4296.

Response to Comments

At the close of the comment period, all comments will be reviewed and a County response will be prepared for each. Note that similar comments may be aggregated with one response addressing all similar comments. All comments and responses will be posted to the County's flood recovery website. A summary of the comments and the County's responses will be incorporated into the Action plan and submitted to HUD.

Accessibility to Low and Moderate Income Persons

The procedures outlined in this document are designed to promote participation by low and moderate income citizens, as well as residents of blighted neighborhoods and CDBG-DR project areas. Local officials may take additional steps to further promote participation by such groups, or to target program information to these persons should officials feel that such persons may otherwise be excluded or should additional action be deemed necessary. Activities to promote additional participation may include, but is not limited to posting notices in places frequented by low and moderate income persons. The County may also hold public meetings in low and moderate income neighborhoods or areas of proposed CDBG-DR project activities. Further, County officials may connect with local public service organizations to publicize public meetings and events.

Individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

To ensure that all citizens have equal access to information about the CDBG-DR programs, the County will make program information available in non-English languages identified within the LEP plan. Based on LEP data within the impacted areas, the Action Plan will be translated into Spanish and Korean. The County will accept comments in English, Spanish and Korean and will make every possible effort to translate and consider comments submitted in any other language.

Persons with Disabilities

Printed copies of the Action Plan will be available in larger print format at the location listed above, upon notification of need. Persons requiring special accommodations or auxiliary services at public meetings must notify the Community Development Department at least two (2) business days prior to the public meeting in order for County staff members to meet that need.

Richland County has a Telecommunication Device for the Deaf (TDD). The number is 803-576-2045. Additionally, persons requiring accommodation or auxiliary services may text accommodation requests to 803-760-4296.

Reaching the Digitally Disconnected

An assessment of Richland County in 2013 found that many residents lack broadband Internet access in their homes. Additionally, many of households do not have cable television. The reason this is a major problem for public awareness efforts became increasingly more evident in October 2015 when Richland County experienced a devastating rain and flood event. The lack of broadband and cable access means the digital media platforms (website, social media, government access channel, etc.) that the County's Public Information Office (PIO) uses to inform residents were not beneficial in reaching those who were not online or subscribed to a cable provider.

It is vital in the aftermath of the flood that traditional methods of public outreach be engaged as well. Richland County is taking steps to bridge the digital divide, and efforts will be taken to inform all persons, regardless of their accessibility to digital platforms, about the help and programs available to help them recover from the flood event.

To do this, the County PIO staff will work with other County staff to organize meetings at key gathering places in the targeted county areas and provide printed recovery program information and registration forms for recovery programs. Such locations may include religious organizations, local governmental offices, libraries, schools, etc.

The goals of reaching the digitally disconnected will be twofold. First, County staff will educate the organizations and leave recovery print material behind with contact information so that the organizations can continue to reach their members. Second, County staff will conduct public meetings and workshops to educate the citizens at well publicized recovery events.

Action Plan Planning Process

The Richland County Government has encouraged citizens, with particular emphasis on persons of low-to-moderate income, to submit their views regarding community recovery, development and housing needs resulting from the flooding of October 2015. Richland County has employed

diverse methods to encourage on-going participation from residents, community service providers, and existing and potential community development partners. The participation process for the Needs Assessment and Action Plan included: a series of community meetings; public notices; stakeholder forums, etc. In addition, there will be a minimum fourteen (14) day public comment period and continued consultation with non-profits, County staff members, elected officials and housing providers.

The County has conducted ten (10) public outreach meetings across the County to inform the public about the CDBG-DR funding, it's possible uses, and to receive feedback regarding remaining need. In addition, the County has conducted four (4) stakeholder meetings to inform constituencies about the CDBG-DR funding, it's possible uses, and to receive feedback regarding remaining need. These meetings were coordinated with Lexington County and the City of Columbia, as well as local service and housing provider organizations, govern officials and County department staff.

Public Meetings that have been held to inform the Action Plan process included a discussion of the following topics:

- Development of housing and community needs assessment
- Amount of funding available
- Eligible uses of funds
- Proposed method of distribution of funds based on needs identified to date

Final HUD-Approved Action Plan

The final, approved version of the Action Plan and any substantial amendments will be posted to the County's recovery website. Printed versions will also be made available upon request.

Action Plan Amendments

All amendments to the Action Plan will be numbered sequentially and posted to the County's recovery website.

Amendments to the Action Plan are either non-substantial or substantial. Non-substantial amendments will be made with prior notification to HUD, but without public comment. Substantial amendments will be published for a minimum of fourteen (14) days for public comment, prior to submission to HUD.

Substantial amendments occur when there is a(n):

- 1) Change in program benefit or eligibility criteria;
- 2) Addition or deletion of a planned and previously approved activity; or

- 3) Allocation or reallocation of more than one (1) million dollars.

Performance Reports

HUD has waived the requirements for submission of a Performance Evaluation Report (PER) for the CDBG-DR program, but has instituted the alternative requirement for the County's Action Plan to be entered into HUD's Disaster Recovery Grant Reporting (DRGR) system. The County must submit Quarterly Performance Reports (QPRs) as prescribed by HUD no later than thirty (30) days following the end of each quarter. QPR requirements begin after the first full calendar quarter after the grant is awarded and continues until all funds have been expended and all expenditures and accomplishments have been reported. Each QPR will be posted to the recovery website within ten business (10) days following HUD approval.

Each QPR will include information about the uses of funds in activities identified in the Action Plan as entered in the DRGR reporting system. This includes, but is not limited to: project name, activity, location, and national objective; funds budgeted, obligated, drawn down, and expended; the funding source and total amount of any non-CDBG-DR funds to be expended on each activity; beginning and actual completion dates of completed activities; achieved performance outcomes such as number of housing units complete or number of low and moderate income persons benefiting; and the race and ethnicity of persons assisted under direct-benefit activities. Efforts made by the County to affirmatively further fair housing will also be included in the QPR.

Response to Citizen Complaints

The County will accept written citizen complaints from citizens related to the disaster recovery programs, the Action Plan, substantial amendments, or quarterly performance reports. Written complaints should be submitted via email to RichlandCountyCDBGDR@sites.tetrattech.com or be mailed to:

Richland County Department of Community Development
2020 Hampton Street
Suite 3063B
Columbia, SC 29204
Attention: CDBG-DR Program Manager

The County shall provide a written response to every complaint relative to the CDBG-DR grant within fifteen (15) business days of receipt when practicable. The County will make every effort to meet this response timeframe and will provide an expected date of response in the event that the response period is insufficient to address the complaint.