



Municipality of Princeton

Community Development Block Grant Program
Citizen Participation Plan
Drafted September 1, 2020

Introduction

The Municipality of Princeton was designated as an Entitlement Community in 2020, allowing it to receive funds annually from the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant Program. All Entitlement Communities are required by law to have a detailed Citizen Participation Plan that contains the Municipality's policies and procedures for public involvement in the Consolidated Plan process and the use of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.

Citizen participation is a vital part of the Consolidated Plan process. Citizens, non-profit organizations and other interested parties must be afforded adequate opportunity to participate in the planning process. This includes:

- Access to meetings;
- Access to information;
- Technical assistance as required;
- Public hearings to identify housing and community development needs and review of proposed uses of funds; and
- Timely response to complaints and grievances.

The following describes the guiding principles for citizen participation by the Municipality of Princeton in the planning and implementation of the HUD Consolidated Plan.

Encouraging Public Participation

The law requires the Citizen Participation Plan provides for and encourages public participation, emphasizing involvement by low- and moderate-income people—especially those living in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. Also, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) expects the Municipality of Princeton to take whatever actions are appropriate to encourage participation of minorities, people who do not speak English, and people with disabilities.

Copies of this Citizen Participation Plan, as well as summaries of basic information about CDBG Planning process will be made available in the languages of residents who comprise a significant portion of the low and moderate income population. Currently, the Municipality of Princeton has materials in English only. Residents needing materials in other languages are encouraged to contact Municipality staff.

The Role of Low-Income People

The primary purpose of the programs covered by this Citizen Participation Plan is to improve communities by providing: decent housing, a suitable living environment, and growing economic opportunities—all principally for low and moderate income people.

Because the amount of federal CDBG funds the Municipality of Princeton receives each year is mostly based upon the severity of both poverty and substandard housing conditions in Princeton, it is necessary

that public participation genuinely involve low income residents who experience these conditions. Genuine involvement by low income people must take place at all stages of the process, including:

- Identifying needs.
- Setting priorities among these needs, deciding how much money should be allocated to each high-priority need, and suggesting the types of programs to meet high-priority needs.
- Overseeing the way in which programs are carried out.

The Various Stages of the Consolidated Plan Process

The policies and procedures in this Citizen Participation Plan relate to several stages of action mentioned in law or regulation. In general, these stages or events include:

- Identification of housing and community development needs.
- Preparation of a draft use of funds for the upcoming year called the proposed Annual Action Plan or the development of a proposed new 5-Year Strategic Plan.
- Formal approval by elected officials of a final Annual Action Plan or 5-Year Strategic Plan.
- On occasion during the year, it might be necessary to change the use of the money already budgeted in an Annual Action Plan, or to change the priorities established in the 5-Year Strategic Plan. In that case, a formal Substantial Amendment will be proposed, considered, and acted upon.
- After a program year is complete, an Annual Performance Report must be drafted for public review and comment and then sent to HUD.

The Program Year

The program year chosen by Municipality of Princeton is October 1 through September 30.

Municipality of Princeton Citizen Participation Activities

The Municipality of Princeton Citizen Participation activities will include:

- Advertisements;
- Community Outreach;
- Public Hearings;
- Access to Information;
- Technical Assistance; and
- Timely Response to Complaints and Grievances.

Community Outreach

In order to assure that all citizens have the opportunity to participate in the planning process, the Municipality of Princeton will conduct community outreach on the development of the strategic plan. The objectives of outreach will be to:

- Obtain views of citizen, public agencies and other interested parties;
- Announce the availability of technical assistance and funds;
- Respond to proposals and comments at all stages of the Consolidated Plan submission process, including:
- Identifying housing and community development needs,

- Reviewing proposed uses of funds, and
- Reviewing program performance.

Public Hearings

The Municipality of Princeton will host two (2) public hearings each year. Typically, these hearings may consist of either: 1) a meeting to gather public input and funding priorities for current program year; 2) a meeting to review a draft of the Five-Year Plan and/or One-Year Plan to the general public. Public hearings will be conveniently timed and located for people who will benefit from the program funds and will be accessible to persons with special needs.

Access to Information

Citizens, public agencies and other interest parties, including those most affected, will have the opportunity to receive information, review and submit comments on any proposed submission concerning any of the following documents:

- The proposed and final Annual Action Plans.
- The proposed and final 5-Year Strategic Plan (the “Consolidated Plan”).
- Proposed and final Substantial Amendments to either and Annual Action Plan or the Multi-Year Strategic Plan.
- Annual Performance Reports.
- The Citizen Participation Plan.

Interested parties may access these documents at no cost by the Internet, at the Municipality of Princeton website (<https://www.princetonnj.gov/176/Community-Development-Block-Grant-CDBG-P>); at the Princeton Library; or by contacting Municipality staff. These materials will be available in a form accessible to persons with disabilities and in a style for individuals that do not speak English, when requested.

Citizens will be provided 15 days to comment on the Municipality’s annual performance report, prior to HUD submittal on or about September 15th of each year.

Technical Assistance

Municipality staff will work with organizations and individuals and representatives of low and moderate-income people who are interested in submitting a proposal to obtain funding for an activity. All potential applicants for funding are encouraged to contact Municipality staff for technical assistance before completing a proposal form. Additionally, Municipality staff will work with individuals and organizations receiving Consolidated Plan monies to ensure that funds are being spent for their intended purpose and within the rules and regulations of the federal government.

Timely Response to Complaints and Grievances

Municipality staff will provide timely, written responses to written complaints and grievances within thirty (30) days of receipt, where practical.

Substantial Amendments

Prior to the submission of any substantial change in the proposed use of funds, citizens will have thirty (30) days notice and the opportunity to comment on the proposed amendment using the citizen participation methods outlined in the plan and/or methods that result in effective notice and comment.

A substantial amendment to the consolidated Plan is when one of the following decisions is to be made:

1. A change in the use of CDBG funds from one activity to another, and a change to increase or decrease funding or cost of an activity, project or program by more than 20% of the funds that were originally allocated for that activity, project or program. This does not include activities, projects or programs that are completed under budget by more than 20%. The unspent balance may go to new activities, but citizens will need opportunity to comment on that activity.
2. The elimination of an activity originally described in the Annual Action Plan
3. The addition of an activity not originally described in the Annual Action Plan.
4. A change in the purpose of an activity, such as a change in the type of activity or its ultimate objective – for example, a change in a construction project from housing to commercial.
5. A meaningful change in the location of an activity.

Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES)

In accordance with the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) and in similar emergency circumstances where social distancing is necessary, in-person public hearings are not required. The Municipality will make a good faith effort to provide an opportunity for the public to participate using whatever means are available, including electronic communications and virtual meetings. The Municipality may meet public hearing requirements with virtual public hearings if: 1) national/local health authorities recommend social distancing and limiting public gatherings for public health reasons; and 2) virtual hearings provide reasonable notification and access for citizens in accordance with the grantee's certifications, timely responses from local officials to all citizen questions and issues, and public access to all questions and responses.

Citizens will be provided with reasonable notice and opportunity to comment on proposed amendments. This will be accomplished through notification of a public hearing in the legal section of with general circulation within the Municipality and notification on the Municipality's website. These notices will be published at least two weeks prior to the hearing. However, in accordance with the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), in emergency circumstances, expedited procedures must include at least (5) five days' notice prior to the hearing and reasonable opportunity to comment of no less than (5) five days. The 5-day period can run concurrently for comments on the action plan amendment and amended citizen participation plans. This authority is in effect through the end of the 2020 program year.

*For more information regarding the Consolidated Planning process or to submit your comments please address them to:
Maureen Fullaway, Affordable Housing Manager (mfullaway@princetonnj.gov)*
