



Citizen Participation Plan for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funds

Prepared by:
Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments
5790 Casper Padgett Way
North Charleston, SC 29406



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I. STATEMENT OF INTENT

This plan describes how Berkeley County will provide for participation by its citizens in the planning and implementation of community revitalization and economic development projects which involve Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. The CDBG program provides US Department of Housing and Urban Development funds to small cities from the SC Department of Commerce. These funds must be used for projects which address one of three national objectives: benefit to low- and moderate-income persons, aid in the elimination of slums or blight, or meet an urgent community need, i.e. an imminent health threat. The program is intended to assist in undertaking community revitalization and economic development projects. The CDBG guidelines give ultimate responsibility for the design and implementation of projects to the local elected officials and also require that citizens be given an opportunity to serve in an advisory role to these elected officials.

II. SCOPE OF CITIZENS PARTICIPATION

Citizens will be given the opportunity to participate in all phases of the CDBG program, including the development of applications, project implementation and assessment of performance, and the design of the citizen participation plan. The general methods for involvement are public hearings, ad hoc neighborhood committees, and individual citizen efforts in the form of comments, complaints or inquiries submitted directly to the County Administrator's Office.

III. PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Participation in the planning and development of an application will take the form of two public hearings, open to the entire county which will be held during the pre-application and application development process. The first hearing will be held at the beginning of the project planning period and the second will be held prior to the submission of the final application.

The First hearing will be a "Needs Assessment/Citizen Participation" hearing and will provide an opportunity for citizens to provide input on identified community and economic development and housing needs, especially those of low- and moderate-income persons. Citizens will also be invited to propose projects and assist in the development of an overall CDBG strategy for Berkeley County. The County will present information concerning the CDBG program, including the amount of CDBG funds available, state funding guidelines and the range of activities which may be undertaken with such funds, particularly in relation to identified community and economic development needs. The hearing will also be used to solicit comments on the proposed citizen participation plan. Written copies of the plan will be available for citizen review and comment.

A Second hearing will be held to review and solicit public comment on proposed activities prior to submission of the application to the SC Department of Commerce. Citizen input regarding the application will receive a timely response. If submitted in writing to the County, a written response will be provided within 15 working days. Every effort will be made to respond to all proposals prior to the submission of the application.

Informal, individual contact with citizens, initiated either by citizens or County officials, will also provide input to the application. Individuals may contact the Administrator's Office, to request consideration of a special project. Likewise, County officials may seek the opinion of local business persons and residents as to special needs in the community.

County officials will also be available to advise citizens of the procedures for filing objections to the approval of the application with the SC Department of Commerce, based on the grounds for objections that are acceptable to that office.

IV. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Citizen participation in a project's implementation phase will occur through individual community contact, and any ad hoc neighborhood committee established. An ad hoc committee would be made up of appointed community members for the project target neighborhood, as applicable. The Committee would serve as liaison in the neighborhood, dispersing project activity information to the residents and communicating residents' inquiries and complaints to the County. When appropriate, the County will provide information about project progress, proposed changes, etc., for publication in a newspaper of general circulation. A public hearing will be held prior to making any substantial change in a CDBG funded project. All citizens, especially those who might be affected by the proposed changes, will be informed of the proposed changes and given an opportunity to comment.

V. ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE

When all activities are complete, and prior to project close-out, the County will hold at least one public hearing to review program performance and accomplishments. Public comment will be sought in evaluating the overall program effectiveness.

VI. COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES

As part of the process for evaluating performance, citizens will be invited to submit comments on all aspects of project performance throughout the grant period. Complaints should be submitted in writing to the Berkeley County Supervisor's Office, P.O. Box 6122 Moncks Corner, SC 29461. A response will be made within 15 working days. If the response is unsatisfactory the complainant may write his/her appeal directly to County Council, who shall respond within 15 working days. Prior to any response to a written grievance which involves state law or policy, state CDBG program guidelines, or federal regulations governing the CDBG program, the County will provide the written grievance and its proposed response to the SC Department of Commerce which will review and approve the response. If the complainant is dissatisfied with responses from the Administrator's Office and County Council, a final appeal may be made to the SC Department of Commerce, 1201 Main Street, Suite 1600, Columbia, SC 29201. However, the SC Department of Commerce will deny those appeals which involve the consistent application of the community's local program policies. After the appeal process is exhausted, the complainant may seek relief in the appropriate court of law.

VII. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Technical assistance will be provided to individuals, citizen organizations, and groups of low- and moderate-income persons upon request to the County. Such assistance will support citizen efforts to develop proposals, define policy, and organize for the implementation of projects. The County will provide copies of program guidelines and other written information as relevant. Assistance will also be available in the form of group meetings with technical assistance staff from the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments or representatives from the SC Department of Commerce as it pertains to the specific assistance required. The County will provide technical assistance only for requests concerning proposal whose activities are consistent with identified community development, economic development and housing needs and meet with State CDBG guidelines. The County will also require that there be available CDBG funding for the proposed activities, and that, in certain cases, the County Council first approve the request for technical assistance where provision of that assistance would require possible fees for consultants or major County staff time.

As part of on-going assistance to the Community, citizens will be provided with reasonable access to records concerning any project undertaken with CDBG funds. Records are generally kept at the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments offices, located at 5790 Casper Padgett Way, North Charleston, SC 29406. Requests for information must be made to the County in writing and a response will be made within 15 working days of receipt of the request. Confidential information normally protected under the State and Federal Freedom of Information Acts will not be made available for public review.

VIII. PUBLIC NOTICE

Notices for all public hearings will be published in a newspaper of general circulation. The notice will appear as a display ad and will be published at least seven days prior to the date of the public hearing.

Public hearings will be held in locations easily accessible to the handicapped. Berkeley County does not discriminate on the basis of handicapped status in the admission or access to, or treatment or employment in its federally assisted programs or activities. The Human Resources Director, Berkeley County Administration Building, 1003 Highway 52, Moncks Corner, SC 29461, 843-723-3800 or TDD-Relay # 711, has been designated to coordinate compliance with the non-discrimination requirements contained in the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's regulations implementing Section 504 (24 CFR Part 8, dated June 2, 1988).

IX. PARTICIPATION AND NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING PERSONS

According to the latest US Census Report published for Berkeley County, less than 10% of the County's residents do not speak English as the primary language. Local officials will undertake all reasonable actions necessary to allow those persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) to participate in the community development process. Such actions may include the provision of an interpreter and/or the provision of materials in the appropriate language or format for persons with LEP.