

Cobb County, Georgia

Citizen Participation Plan
PY2016-PY2020



Revised: January 1, 2016

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN

2016-2020

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The Consolidated Plan regulations require U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) local government grantees to adopt a Citizen Participation Plan. This Plan reflects Cobb County's compliance with the HUD requirements for citizen participation in all appropriate HUD grant programs. This Plan contains the required elements listed in the Consolidated Plan regulations at **24 CFR 91.105(b)**. The Cobb County CDBG Program Office conducts the planning and administration for the CDBG, HOME, NSP and ESG Programs. Cobb County also receives Housing Opportunities for Persons with Aids [HOPWA] funds through the City of Atlanta and as such, the HOPWA Planning and Administration functions are carried out by the City of Atlanta's Grants Management Department.

I. ENCOURAGEMENT OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION:

Residents of Cobb County and its participating cities (Marietta, Smyrna, Kennesaw, Acworth, Powder Springs, and Austell) are encouraged to provide input into all aspects of the County's consolidated planning activities which includes assessing needs and setting priorities for the CDBG, HOME, ESG, NSP, and CSBG programs. Cobb County makes a special effort to provide timely and accurate information about housing, community development, and human services program activities to all citizens of Cobb County and its participating cities.

Cobb County will continue to provide a forum for open communication with its residents, particularly low to moderate income persons regarding its HUD and the Georgia Department of Human Resources funded programs. This Citizen Participation Plan offers numerous opportunities for citizens to contribute information, ideas, and opinions about ways to provide decent housing, establish and maintain a suitable living environment, and expand economic opportunities, particularly for low- and moderate-income persons.

The County will take appropriate actions to encourage the participation of all of its citizens in developing its Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plans, Substantial Amendments, and CAPER including:

- Low and moderate-income persons, particularly those living in areas where federal funds are proposed to be used;
- Residents of predominantly low and moderate-income neighborhoods;
- Minorities;
- People with Limited English Proficiency;
- People with Disabilities;
- Residents of public and other assisted housing developments; and
- Local and regional institutions, the regional Continuum of Care and other organizations (including businesses, developers, nonprofit organizations, philanthropic organizations, and community-based and faith-based organizations).

Cobb County is committed to keeping all interested groups and individuals informed of each phase of the consolidated planning process, and of activities being proposed or undertaken under HUD entitlement programs. Opportunities to comment on or participate in planning community development and affordable housing activities and projects will be publicized and disseminated throughout Cobb County. Publications will include but not be limited to the Marietta Daily Journal, Mundo Hispanico, Georgia Voice, email distribution, Cobline, Commissioner newsletters and the County's website at www.cobbcounty.org/cdbg.

2. PUBLIC REVIEW MEETINGS:

Cobb County will conduct at least two Public Review Meetings each year to obtain citizens' views and to respond to acceptance of applications and comments for the annual or five-year funding plans. The Public Review Meetings will be held before the submission of the Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan, and CAPER. Public Review Meetings will take place at different stages of the consolidated planning process and together address:

- Housing and community development needs;
- Proposed use of program funds, and
- Program performance during the past year.

At least one Public Review Meeting will be held in the spring during the Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report process, to solicit feedback on the County's housing and community development needs and to review program performance during the past year. In addition, at least one Public Review Meeting will be held in the fall (usually in October) to solicit comments on the draft Consolidated Plan and/or Annual Action plans, which include the proposed use of CDBG, ESG and HOME funds. The information provided to the public on or before the Public Review Meeting will include:

- The amount of assistance the local government expects to receive (including grant funds and program income);
- The range of activities that may be undertaken;
- The estimated amount of funding that will benefit persons of low and moderate incomes
- The County's plan to minimize displacement of persons and to assist any person displaced, specifying the types and levels of assistance the County will make available (or require others to make available) to persons displaced, even if no displacement is expected to occur.

This information will be presented at the Public Review Meeting and is contained in the text of the Consolidated Plans and Annual Action Plans under review.

Cobb County will hold Public Review Meetings for the purpose of reviewing amendments or changes to Cobb County's Consolidated Plan or Action Plan. Public Review Meetings will be held at convenient times and locations to permit broad participation from the community. Reasonable accommodations will be granted by Cobb County for persons that request such assistance. The County will also provide translation services for clients with limited English proficiency upon request. In order to give adequate notice of Public Review Meetings, Cobb County will comply with the following requirements:

3. PUBLIC REVIEW MEETING NOTICES AND OUTREACH

Information about the time, location, and subject of each Public Review Meeting will be provided to citizens at least two weeks in advance by publication in a local newspaper (i.e. Marietta Daily Journal, Mundo Hispanico, Georgia Voice), via email distribution lists, Cobpline, Commissioner newsletters and via publication on the County's website at www.cobbcounty.org/cdbg.

Every effort will be made to ensure that Public Review Meetings are inclusive. Public Review Meetings will be held at convenient times and locations and in places where people most affected by proposed activities can attend. The County will utilize facilities that are accessible to persons with disabilities. If notice is given at least seven days before a Public Review Meeting date, the County will provide appropriate materials, equipment, and interpreting services to facilitate the participation of non-English speaking people and people with visual and/or hearing impairments. Interpreters will be provided at public hearings where a significant number of non-English speaking residents can be reasonably expected to participate.

4. PUBLICATION OF THE PROPOSED CONSOLIDATED PLAN AND ANNUAL ACTION PLANS

The County will publish proposed Consolidated Plans and Annual Action Plans in a manner that affords citizens, public agencies, and other interested parties a reasonable opportunity to examine its contents and submit comments. The proposed Consolidated Plan (or “public comment draft”) shall include:

- The amount of assistance the County expects to receive (including grant funds and program income); and
- The range of activities that may be undertaken, including the estimated amount that will benefit persons of low and moderate-incomes.

A summary of the proposed Consolidated Plan and/or Annual Action Plan will be published in one or more newspapers of general circulation at the beginning of the required public comment period. The summary will describe the contents and purpose of the plan (including a summary of specific objectives), and include a list of locations where copies of the entire proposed Consolidated Plan and/or Annual Action Plan may be obtained or examined. Copies of the public comment draft will be made available for inspection at the **CDBG Program Office located at 121 Haynes Street, Marietta, GA 30060.**

Citizens and groups may obtain a reasonable number of free copies of the proposed Consolidated Plan and/or Annual Action Plan by contacting the CDBG Program Office at (770) 528-1455 or pparton@cobbcountycdbg.com.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED CONSOLIDATED PLAN AND/OR ANNUAL ACTION PLAN

Cobb County will receive comments from citizens on its proposed Consolidated Plan and/or Annual Action Plan for a period not less than 30 days prior to submission of the Plan(s) to HUD. All comments or views of citizens received in writing or orally at Public Review Meetings will be considered in preparing the final Plan(s). A summary of these comments or views, and a summary of any comments or views not accepted and the reasons therefore shall be attached to the final Plan(s). Oral comments outside of the Public Review Meeting will not be considered, unless they are also provided directly to staff via email, letter, or other legible written form at the address provided in Section 3, above. The final version of the Consolidated Plan and/or Annual Action Plan as submitted to HUD will be posted on the County’s webpage at www.cobbcounty.org/cdbg.

6. AMENDING THE CONSOLIDATED PLAN AND THE ANNUAL ACTION PLAN:

HUD regulations at 24 CFR Part 91.505 require amendments to the Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plans whenever an entitlement jurisdiction:

- Makes a change in its allocation priorities or a change in the method of distributing funds;
- Becomes aware of HUD-imposed regulatory changes guiding planning, reporting, monitoring, and evaluation requirements;
- Carries out an activity, using funds from any program covered by the Consolidated Plan (including program income), not previously described in the Action Plan; or Citizen Participation Plan for Cobb County
- Changes the purpose, scope, location, or beneficiaries of an activity.

Some amendments will be considered substantial while others will be considered to be not substantial. All non-substantial amendments, including those required by HUD regulations, will be considered narrative changes to be completed by the Managing Director for the CDBG Program Office in consultation with County staff, and

will be published in the plans and online within a reasonable time after they are made. A proposed amendment is considered substantial when a proposed action or change that may create a significant community impact. A significant community impact requires public comment and is defined as either:

- Any federal grant-funded project or activity that results in a significant environmental impact as that term is defined pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. 4231 et seq); or
- Any federal grant-funded project or activity that generates relocation of at least 20 resident households and/or two existing businesses which are subject to the federal Uniform Relocation Act (42 U.S.C. 4601 et seq., 42 U.S.C. 4621 et seq., and 42 U.S.C. 4651 et seq.).
- Changes in the use of funds from one eligible activity category to another (for example, from housing to public services, or to any other broad category within CDBG funding).
- Changes in the allocation priorities or a change in the method of distribution of funds.
- Changes to the original intent and purpose of an activity which is no longer applicable.
- Changes to the location of an activity changes to the extent that it does not serve the target population as originally described in the Consolidated Plan.
- Changes to carry out an activity using funds from any program covered by the Consolidated Plan (including program income), **not previously described** in the Annual Action Plan.

The need to prepare a substantial amendment shall trigger use of the public participation requirements described below.

GRANT ALLOCATION AND REALLOCATION POLICY:

Annual Allocation of Funding

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development provides annual grants on a formula basis to Entitlement Communities as a means to support a wide range of community development and housing activities for low- and moderate-income households.

Generally in February of each year through the beginning of April, the County accepts applications from non-profit organizations for federal grant funds from the CDBG, HOME and ESG Programs. The County holds workshops prior to and during the grant application period to inform applicants about grant programs and applications processes. These workshops are open to new applicants and existing subrecipients. The County lists the application period on its website, sends an email community blast to all non-profits in its email directory, and provides notice in English and Spanish in the Marietta Daily Journal and Mundo Hispanico.

Typically, applications are due no later than the first week of April for funding in the following calendar year. The county estimates its annual allocation each year to include in its Annual Action Plan which is submitted to HUD each November. Because HUD does not publish its final allocation before the Annual Action Plan is due, the County estimates its annual allocation at 70% of the prior year's allocation. This estimated allocation allows the County to provide funding recommendations to county departments and local non-profit organizations that have submitted applications for funding. The County has chosen to estimate its funding at 70% as a safeguard against fluctuating grant allocations.

The grant applications are evaluated by the Applications Rating Committee consisting of CDBG Program Office personnel, County personnel and typically an independent representative selected from one of the cities or a non-profit not submitting an application. After the Committee rates the non-profit proposals, the CDBG

Program Office meets with the County Manager and Chairman to discuss the recommended funding allocations. These meetings with the County Manager and the Chairman typically occur in July or August.

The CDBG Program Office then advertises the recommended allocations for 30 days and conducts a public review meeting. After the 30 day comment period, the recommendations are submitted to the Board of Commissioners for approval usually during the Fall. In November of each year, the County, through the CDBG Program Office, must notify HUD of funding allocations for the following calendar year.

In the first quarter of the program calendar year, HUD releases grant allocations for the County. Generally, the County receives funding in excess of the 70% used to make the initial funding recommendations. The Applications Rating Committee reconvenes to make final funding recommendations. Additional funding above the 70% threshold may be awarded to organizations that have submitted for the current program year. These recommendations follow the same process of internal review, public notification and BOC approval as the original funding allocations.

Federal funding, although allocated to the County, is not generally available for drawdown by the County until May or June of the funding year. However, grant recipients may begin incurring reimbursable expenses as of January 1 for a funding year, provided that a signed agreement has been executed by all parties.

Reallocation of Grant Funds

Any unexpended CDBG, HOME, ESG funds that have been identified by the CDBG Program Office will be reprogrammed for use in the subsequent program year through the annual application cycle.

7. PUBLIC NOTICE OF AND PUBLIC COMMENT ON SUBSTANTIAL AMENDMENT

Once drafted, Cobb County makes the substantial amendment available for public comment and submits it to the Board of Commissioners for review, comment, and approval. Notice and opportunity to comment will be given to citizens through public notices in local newspapers (i.e. Marietta Daily Journal, Mundo Hispanico, Georgia Voice) and other appropriate means, such as the targeted distribution lists and posting to County's website described above in Section 3. A public comment period of not less than 30 days will be provided prior to implementing any substantial amendments to the Consolidated Plan and/or Annual Action Plan. CDBG Program Office staff will prepare a summary of all comments received.

A substantial change shall not include budget modifications within an approved budget for a project where there is an increase and/or a decrease of federal funds from one eligible activity budget line item to another eligible activity budget line item, within the same project or contract budget. This does not include the transfer of funds between different contracted projects. Citizen Participation Plan for the Cobb County and, in cases where any citizens' views are not accepted, provide reasons for the decision. This documentation will be attached to the substantial amendment, which will be available to the public and submitted to HUD.

8. CONSOLIDATED ANNUAL PERFORMANCE EVALUATION REPORT (CAPER):

Performance reports on programs covered by the Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan are to be prepared by the Cobb County for annual submission to HUD by March 31. Cobb County will provide a preliminary draft of the CAPER to the Board of Commissioners and publish a notice announcing that the public shall have no less than 15 days to review and comment on the document. The CAPER shall be placed for review at the same public places where the Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan shall be made available, and posted to the CDBG Program Office's website.

All public comments received orally at Public Review Meetings or submitted in writing regarding the CAPER will be considered and a summary of these comments or views and staff responses shall be attached to the document. The County encourages commissioners and members of the public to review the performance detailed in the CAPER during the Spring public hearing.

9. ACCESS TO RECORDS:

A reasonable number of free copies of the Cobb County's Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan, the Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER), as well as all amendments to the Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan will be available to citizens and groups requesting them. These documents shall be maintained for not less than 5 years at the CDBG Program Office and on the City's web site. Materials will also be made available in a form accessible to persons with disabilities and limited English proficiency upon request.

10. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO CITIZENS/AGENCIES:

The Cobb County CDBG Program Office will continue to provide technical assistance to Cobb County residents and agencies, particularly to those of very low and low income who request such assistance in developing project proposals, or who request other information (compliance requirements, program performance, funding information, etc.) outlined in the current Consolidated Plan. Project application forms are available and are distributed at no cost to all persons making a request. A "one-on-one" meeting will be arranged for individuals and groups representing such persons when necessary to explain the project eligibility, application and approval process and other implementation requirements. The Cobb County CDBG Program Office staff will also meet with various non-profit organizations and individuals to provide other specific technical assistance related to housing, community development and human services programs, as requested. In addition, the Cobb County CDBG Program Office will provide an annual technical assistance workshop for CDBG, HOME, ESG applicants to answer all questions and provide assistance in application preparation.

11. PROVISIONS FOR LIMITED-ENGLISH PROFICIENCY RESIDENTS:

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (LEP) POLICY

Cobb County will take reasonable steps to ensure that persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) have meaningful access and an equal opportunity to participate in our services, activities, programs and other benefits.

The County's LEP policy was established to ensure meaningful communication with persons that experience LEP and their authorized representatives. This policy also provides for communication of information contained in vital documents, including but not limited to, waivers of rights and consent forms.

All interpreters, translators and other aids needed to comply with this policy shall be provided without cost to the person being served. Language assistance will be provided through use of competent bilingual staff, staff interpreters, contracts or formal arrangements with organizations providing interpretation or translation services, or technology and telephonic interpretation services.

The Cobb County CDBG Program Office will retain copies of this policy and procedure, and may have direct contact with LEP individuals will be trained in effective communication techniques, including the effective use of an interpreter.

The Cobb County CDBG Program Office will conduct annual reviews of the language access needs of our service population, as well as update and monitor the implementation of this policy and these procedures, as necessary.

Implementation Procedures for Limited English Proficiency Residents

1. Identifying LEP Persons and their Language

The Cobb County CDBG Program Office will promptly identify the language and communication needs of the LEP person. If necessary, staff will use a language identification card (or "I speak cards") or posters to determine the language. In addition, when records are kept of past interactions with individuals or

their family members, the language used to communicate with the LEP person will be included as part of the record.

2. Obtaining a Qualified Interpreter

The Cobb County CDBG Program Office will be responsible for:

- (a) Maintaining an accurate and current list showing the name, language, phone number and hours of availability of bilingual contacts.
- (b) Contacting the appropriate bilingual staff member to interpret, in the event that an interpreter is needed, if an employee who speaks the needed language is available and is qualified to interpret;
- (c) Obtaining an outside interpreter if a bilingual staff or staff interpreter is not available or does not speak the needed language.

The Cobb County CDBG Program Office will allow LEP persons to refer or request to use a family member or friend as an interpreter. However, family members or friends of the LEP person will not be used as interpreters unless specifically requested by that individual and **after** the LEP person has understood that an offer of an interpreter at no charge to the person has been made by the department or agency. Such an offer and the response will be documented in the person's file. If the LEP person chooses to use a family member or friend as an interpreter, issues of competency of interpretation, confidentiality, privacy, and conflict of interest will be considered. If the family member or friend is not competent or appropriate for any of these reasons, competent interpreter services will be provided to the LEP person.

Children (e.g. persons under the age of 18) will **not** be used to interpret, in order to ensure confidentiality of information and accurate communication.

3. Providing Written Translations

- i. When translation of vital documents is needed, the Cobb County CDBG Program Office will submit documents for translation into frequently encountered languages. Original documents being submitted for translation will be in final, approved form.
- ii. The Cobb County CDBG Program Office will set benchmarks for translation of vital documents into additional languages over time.

4. Monitoring Language Needs and Implementation

On an annual basis, the Cobb County CDBG Program Office will assess changes in demographics, types of services or other needs that may require reevaluation of this policy and its procedures. In addition, the Cobb County CDBG Program Office will annually assess the efficacy of these procedures, including but not limited to mechanisms for securing interpreter services, equipment used for the delivery of language assistance, complaints filed by LEP persons, and feedback from the public and community organizations.

5. Provisions for Limited-English Proficiency and Hearing Impaired Residents

LEP or hearing impaired residents can contact the Cobb County CDBG Program Office by calling (770) 528-1455 or for hearing impaired (770) 419-9183 prior to any public meetings so that adequate arrangements can be made. Such requests should be made at least five (5) working days prior to the meeting date.

12. LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN

In compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000(d) and Executive Order 13166, Cobb County, as a recipients of federal funds, is responsible for ensuring meaningful access by persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP persons).

Cobb County, as a recipient of federal funds is obligated to reduce language barriers that can preclude meaningful access by LEP persons in regards to the County's federal grant programs, which includes the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, HOME Investment Partnerships Act (HOME) Program, Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Program, and the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP).

This Language Access Plan (LAP) will define the actions to be undertaken by the County to ensure meaningful access to agency services, programs, and activities on the part of persons who have limited English proficiency.

The Cobb County CDBG Program Office will conduct annual reviews of the language access needs of our service population, as well as update and monitor the implementation of this policy and these procedures, as necessary.

This Language Access Plan represents the County's administrative role in providing meaningful access to services, programs and activities on the part of LEP individuals. This Language Access Plan outlines the tasks the County will undertake to meet this objective.

If the need for access services is identified either by phone, email, or in person, Cobb County CDBG Program Office staff shall immediately take appropriate action to ensure meaningful communication through the methods described below:

- Contact interpreters and maintain a listing of identified staff members who are proficient in languages other than English and who are willing to assist in interpretation issues;
- Conduct regular translation of all public notices and planning documents;
- Utilize local community services such as law enforcement agencies, organizations, churches and /or schools that offer translators and interpreters. Examples include (but are not limited to): The Latin American Association, local school districts, and ecumenical organizations.

A. Staff Training

The Cobb County CDBG Program Office staff shall be trained in the LAP Protocols for implementation of this Language Access Plan in group workshop sessions. Trainings shall occur on an annual basis.

B. Notification

The Cobb County CDBG Program Office shall maintain notices on its website of the availability of translation and interpretation services. The Cobb County CDBG Program Office will monitor, maintain and update LEP requirements as required by HUD at least annually and/or as changes occur.

The Cobb County CDBG Program Office will ensure all grant subrecipients are provided technical assistance regarding their responsibilities to provide Language Access Services in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000(d) and Executive Order 13166.

C. Documentation

The Cobb County CDBG Program Office shall use its existing Subrecipient Database System to document all requests for reasonable accommodation and actions taken to address those requests.

13. NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY/COMPLAINT REVIEW PROCESS:

Cobb County shall accept written complaints and provide a substantive written response to any written citizen complaint within a reasonable period of time, not to exceed thirty (30) working days, when the complaint concerns the Consolidated Plan, Annual Action Plan, amendments thereto, and performance reports. Cobb County provides equal opportunity for services without regard to race, color, sex, age, national origin, religion, political affiliation, presence of handicap or disability, or familial status. Complaint, comments and questions should be directed to:

Kimberly Roberts, Managing Director
Cobb County CDBG Program Office
121 Haynes Street
Marietta, Georgia 30060

The complaint must contain the following information:

- (1) Name and address of the person(s) filing the complaint;
- (2) A description of the act or acts considered to be in violation;
- (3) Other available pertinent information which will assist in the review and resolution of the complaint.

Such complaints should be filed within thirty (30) days of the alleged discriminatory act. A written response as to the disposition of the complaint will be issued by the Managing Director no later than fifteen (15) working days following receipt of the complaint. A person who is dissatisfied with the response to complaint, or if the response is delayed more than fifteen (15) working days, may appeal in writing to:

Cobb County Government
100 Cherokee Street, Suite 300
Marietta, Georgia 30090-9605
Attn: Mr. David Hankerson, County Manager

A written response on the disposition of the complaint will be issued by the County Manager not later than thirty (30) working days following the receipt of the complaint. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response of the County Manager, he/she may submit the complaint, in writing, to:

United States Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Community Planning and Development
Five Points Plaza
40 Marietta Street, N. W., 15th Floor
Atlanta, GA 30303-9812

No person shall intimidate, threaten, coerce, or discriminate against any person because he/she has made a complaint, testified, assisted, or participated in any matter in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing related to a complaint.

The identity of complainants shall be kept confidential, except to the extent necessary to carry out or conduct investigations, hearings, or judicial proceedings in any matter in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing related to a complaint.