

## **15.2 Citizen Participation**

MDA-DRD will employ public information strategies designed to inform and invite citizen participation through traditional media, an updated and detailed website, and publication of the Action Plan and any modifications, with clearly defined means for public commentary. Public meetings will also be held to solicit citizen input into the proposed program design.

### **15.2.1 Outreach and Engagement**

MDA-DRD will rely on its established practices of collaboration and outreach to citizens by consulting with local governments, planning groups, non-profits and an array of community service and advocacy organizations. These relationships and partner groups will remain in place and will be expanded through program implementation and robust outreach.

### **15.2.2 Public Website**

MDA-DRD's Comprehensive Website Policy may be found in Chapter 13 of this Policy Manual. This policy is also available on MDA-DRD's website at <https://msdisasterrecovery.com/>

### **15.2.3 Subrecipient Citizen Participation Plans**

It is important that the public have an opportunity to participate in the development and evaluation of CDBG-DR projects.

MDA-DRD may require each subrecipient, prior to submission of any application for CDBG-DR funds, to develop a Citizen Participation Plan (CPP). The CPP is a document prepared by the subrecipient that describes the process the community will follow to involve the public of the CDBG program. As part of this process, each subrecipient may also be required to hold public hearings at certain stages of the process to obtain public input on community development needs and proposed CDBG-DR activities. See Program Implementation Manual for further guidance.

### **15.2.4 Requirements of the Citizen Participation Plan**

MDA-DRD's CPP will follow the requirements for citizen participation found in the applicable Federal Register notice.

MDA-DRD will post its CPP on the MDA-DRD website for public review.

A CPP must meet the following requirements:

- All notices of public hearings will be published in specified newspaper(s) of general local circulation at least 7 days prior to any public hearing. The CPP must describe other methods, in addition to notices in newspapers, by which the community will encourage participation by residents of areas where CDBG-DR activities are proposed.

- All public meetings concerning the CDBG-DR program must be held at times and locations convenient to citizens, particularly to those who are the potential or actual beneficiaries. In addition, the location of such meetings must be accessible to disabled citizens.
- The CPP must identify how the needs of non-English speaking residents will be met in the case of public hearings where a significant number of non-English speaking residents can be reasonably expected to participate.
- Prior to making any substantial change in a CDBG-DR funded project, one or more public hearings must be held to inform citizens, particularly those who might be affected, of the proposed change and solicit public comment.
- The CPP must provide for a timely, written answer to written complaints and grievances, within 15 working days (where practical). The CPP must state the name, address and phone number of the person to whom written grievances are to be delivered and the procedures by which grievances will be handled, including any appeals process. A proposed response to any grievance which involves State law or policy, State CDBG-DR program guidelines, or Federal regulations governing the CDBG-DR program, must be provided to MDA-DRD for review and approval of the response.
- The CPP must also provide for the appeal of any written grievance to MDA-DRD. It should also indicate that after the appeal process has been exhausted, the complainant may seek relief in the appropriate court of law.
- Citizens will be provided with reasonable access to records concerning any project undertaken with CDBG-DR funds. Confidential information normally protected under the State and Federal Freedom of Information Acts (FOIA) may not be made available for public review. For example, data concerning personal or business financial statements, earnings or sources of income.

### **15.2.8 Citizen Participation Recordkeeping and Retention**

MDA-DRD and subrecipients, when required, must keep appropriate records, such as newspaper notices of hearings, minutes of its public hearings and responses to inquiries to demonstrate that it is following its CPP. The CPP and all related records must be retained for at least 3 years following final close out of overall grant.