

**MONTANA'S  
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN  
(April 1, 2006 - March 31, 2007)**

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**INTRODUCTION**

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) consolidated several formula grant programs in 1994. The programs include the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Home Investment Partnerships (HOME), Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG), and Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA) Programs. The first three programs are currently utilized in Montana and are covered by the Consolidated Plan.

While not directly covered by the Consolidated Plan, the state is the recipient of a three-year HOPWA Grant, covering Montana and North and South Dakota, funded through a competitive grant, which is administered by the Intergovernmental Human Services Bureau of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (MDPHHS). The funds are part of competitively awarded grants for housing, services and technical assistance, primarily for new programs in rural areas that do not qualify for federal block grant funding.

The Consolidated Plan brings together the planning, application, reporting, and citizen participation components for the three formula programs. The purpose of this narrative is to present the Citizen Participation Plan prepared by the Montana Department of Commerce (MDOC), Housing Division, a fundamental piece of the consolidated planning process.

The objectives of the plan are to ensure that the citizens of Montana, particularly low- and moderate-income persons, low-income households living in slum and blight areas, units of local government, public housing agencies, and other interested parties are provided the opportunity to and are encouraged to participate in the planning and preparation of the Five-Year Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan, including amendments to the plan, and the Annual Performance Report. In doing so, this narrative lays out the general guidelines around which the Consolidated Plan will be developed, sets dates and milestones along which the process will proceed, and outlines methods for citizens to guide and assist the state in formulating the plan.

**THE CONSOLIDATED PLAN**

The Consolidated Plan combines the planning, application, public involvement, and reporting requirements of the formula grant programs into one complete process. It promotes unifying opportunities for units of local government, the state, and others, thus laying the foundation for development of cohesive, attractive, safe, and economically

vibrant communities. The consolidated planning process encourages all citizens, especially low-income residents, to take part in shaping their own future.

The Consolidated Plan will provide the following information to citizens, public agencies, and other interested parties:

- the amount of federal funding and other assistance the state expects to receive during the upcoming plan year;
- the range of activities that may be undertaken; and
- the general program activities that will be planned in addressing the priority needs outlined in the plan.

The plan presents details on analysis and evaluation of priority needs for housing, economic development, and other community development statewide. In addition, it offers guidance on providing affordable housing, economic development, and other community development. The plan also contains HUD-mandated certifications that statutory guidelines have been followed.

## THE PLANNING PROCESS

The Consolidated Plan is developed through public input solicited at meetings throughout the state. Some meetings occur before development of the draft report, thereby collecting distinct issue input and aiding policy formation. Others will be held after releasing the draft report, allowing interested parties an opportunity to review how the strategy has been designed and presented. These meetings will be scheduled at times and locations that will encourage broad citizen participation. To encourage participation by as many groups and individuals as possible, meetings may be held in the evening or during the lunch hour. The scheduling caters to citizens and organizations whose primary job may not be directly related to creating such a plan. Evening and lunch-time public participation meetings are intended to solicit the input of low- and moderate-income residents who may be unable to



attend daytime meetings due to work conflicts. If a METNet videoconference meeting is scheduled, it will be held during normal business hours. The METNet meeting is also open to the public and offers additional opportunities for participation in the development of the Consolidated Plan to units of local government and other organizational representatives. Meetings may also be held in conjunction with other scheduled meetings, workshops, or conferences being held by the Housing Division and other organizations.

All citizens are encouraged to participate, including minorities and non-English speaking persons, as well as persons with disabilities. Upon request, the state will make all necessary accommodations to further the participation of these individuals. All public meetings are held in facilities that are accessible to persons with disabilities. HUD's formula programs, alone and with other HUD-funded programs, have three basic goals pertinent to the Consolidated Plan: to provide decent housing; to provide a suitable living environment;

and to expand economic opportunities. Providing decent housing may involve increasing the availability of permanent affordable housing for low-income households (without discrimination), assisting homeless people in obtaining appropriate housing, maintaining the affordable housing stock, and increasing supportive housing to assist persons with special needs. Providing a suitable living environment means improving the safety and livability of neighborhoods; deconcentrating housing opportunities and revitalizing neighborhoods; restoring and preserving natural and physical features with historic, architectural, and aesthetic value; and conserving energy resources. To expand economic opportunities, the comprehensive approach emphasizes the creation of accessible jobs, access to credit for community development, and assistance to low-income persons to achieve self-sufficiency in federally-assisted and public housing.

Within our society, the complexity of development problems has risen significantly. Assessing and solving the difficulties has outgrown what is offered by narrow, functional programs. Montana's priority need problems demand links between human, economic, physical, environmental, and design concerns to build communities of opportunity. In order to gain this comprehension of development complexities, the consolidated planning process must collect the knowledge that exists in the community from citizens, local governments, private business, community-based organizations, and universities.

## **PUBLIC INPUT TO THE PLAN**

Several opportunities for citizen input will be encouraged and provided during the development of the draft Annual Action Plan for April 2006 through March 2007. A notice will be sent to local governments, public agencies, member organizations, and citizens throughout Montana encouraging participation in the Consolidated Planning process. A minimum of two public input meetings will be held for the express purpose of receiving comments on housing and community development needs before the release of the Consolidated Plan. Notification of the meetings will consist of, but is not limited to:

- posting dates, times and locations on the *Discovering Montana* Calendar of Events at: <http://app.discoveringmontana.com/webapps/cal/event>;
- posting dates, times and locations of the public meetings on the MDOC Housing Consolidated Plan website at: <http://app.mt.gov/cal/event>;
- publishing display ads in newspapers in and around location towns;
- sending personal invitation letters to public officials and other interested parties in and around location towns using the Consolidated Plan mailing list.

Staff from the Housing Division may provide an opportunity for citizen participation at yearly conventions for the Montana Association of Counties and the League of Cities and Towns, time and budgets permitting. Staff will also attend other conferences and meetings held throughout the state that provide a forum for additional public input on the Consolidated Plan.

The need for updated or additional information will be assessed to determine if further analysis is needed. If warranted, the new or updated information will be incorporated into

current resource documents for use by applicants to the CDBG, HOME, and ESG programs.

The Annual Performance Report, for the program year covering April 1 through March 31, will be released to the public for review and comment. This report evaluates program activities performed during the program year. The public will be given an opportunity to examine the contents of the report for a minimum of 15 days.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT ON THE DRAFT PLAN**

After the draft of the Annual Action Plan for the year ending March 31, 2007 is released in the fall, the plan will be available for public review and comment for a minimum of 30 days. The public will be notified through public notices printed in newspapers of general circulation. The newspaper notices will summarize the contents and purpose of the plan and contain a list of places where the full document is available. The phone number, including the TDD number, and address of the Housing Division, MDOC, will be included to assist those persons otherwise unable to locate complete copies of the draft Annual Action Plan. An Executive Summary, including information on how to obtain the full document, will be sent to all individuals, organizations, and agencies on the Consolidated Plan mailing list. The Internet will be used as a ready access to the Consolidated Plan documents.



A minimum of two public review meetings on the draft Annual Action Plan for the year ending March 31, 2007 will be held. Technical assistance will be available to groups representing persons of very low- and low- income who request such assistance in developing proposals for funding assistance under programs covered by the Consolidated Plan. The level and type of assistance that is appropriate will be determined by MDOC based on ability to provide or arrange for such assistance, the cost of providing assistance, and other relevant factors.

## **RELEASE OF THE CONSOLIDATED PLAN**

Citizens, public agencies, and other interested parties will be notified of the availability of the Annual Action Plan as adopted, amendments to the plan, and the Annual Performance Report. Citizens will be given the opportunity to examine the contents of these reports for a minimum of 30 days for the Annual Action Plan and 15 days for the Annual Performance Report.

When practicable, written complaints regarding the Consolidated Plan, plan amendments, and Annual Performance Report will be responded to within 15 working days. A suitable response to those received by December 15, 2005 will be made by December 31. For those who wish to lodge a complaint about any of the documents, a letter is to be submitted

to Leslie Edgcomb, Consolidated Plan Coordinator, Montana Department of Commerce, P.O. Box 200545, Helena, Montana 59620-0545.

## OTHER CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Citizen participation responsibilities are also placed on program applicants and recipients at the local level. Applicants must provide citizens, especially low and moderate-income residents, adequate notice and opportunity for meaningful involvement in the planning and development of applications. All hearings must be held at times and locations convenient to potential beneficiaries and in facilities that are physically accessible for persons with disabilities.



### CDBG Program Requirements:

Unless re-applying for the same CDBG project submitted unsuccessfully in the previous year, the applicant must hold a minimum of two public hearings; one before preparing the application and one before passage of a resolution by the governing body authorizing the submission of the application. The first public hearing should be held not more than twelve months before the date of application. The second public hearing should be held not more than three months before the date of application. A record of the required hearings must be submitted with the application for CDBG funds, along with copies of the public notices for the hearings or affidavits of publication for the notices. A verbatim record is not necessary; a list of the names of persons who attended and a summary of comments by local officials and citizens is sufficient.

Applicants reapplying for the same project submitted unsuccessfully in the previous year must hold at least one public hearing before passage of a resolution by the governing body authorizing the submission of the application. The public hearing should be held not more than three months before the date of application.

The purpose of the first hearing is to give citizens an opportunity to identify and discuss their community's overall community development and housing needs and priorities, including the needs of low-and moderate-income persons, and to propose possible projects before the local government makes a decision regarding what project it will seek CDBG assistance for. The first hearing should also cover the estimated amount of state CDBG funds available and provide a description of the activities eligible for CDBG assistance.

The purpose of the second hearing is to give citizens and other potential beneficiaries (especially low-and moderate-income persons) or residents of the proposed project area adequate opportunity to consider the potential impacts and benefits of the community's proposed project and to comment on it before it is submitted.

## HOME Program Requirements:

HOME Program applicants must provide citizens adequate notice and opportunity for involvement in the planning and development of HOME applications. Applicants must:

- Hold a minimum of one public hearing or meeting before submission of the application. The purpose of the public hearing or meeting is to solicit public comment on community housing needs and priorities and to discuss the HOME program as a potential source of funding. A public hearing gives citizens and potential beneficiaries of the proposed project adequate opportunity to review and comment on the community's HOME application before it is submitted. The Applicant should give due consideration to all comments before the determination of a proposed project. The public hearing must be held within two months of the deadline date of application.
- Submit a record of any public hearings or meetings and copies of the public notices for the hearings or affidavits of publication for the notices, held in relation to the application for HOME funds. A verbatim record is not necessary; the names of persons who attended and a summary of comments by local officials and citizens are sufficient.

## ESG Program requirements:

Prior citizen participation is not required.

## **AMENDING THE CONSOLIDATED PLAN**

Possible amendments include changes in use of funds from one eligible activity to another, changes in the method of distribution of such funds, new activities, or alteration of the existing activities or budget. MDOC will make a determination as to whether the change is substantial enough to necessitate issuing an amendment to the plan. If so, MDOC will conduct a public review process with a minimum of one public review meeting and following the guidelines set forth above, present the amendment to the public for their review and comment. Other specific issues related to individual program guidelines are to be presented in the respective program application guidelines.

**Alternative accessible formats of this document will be provided upon request. If you need this document in an alternative format such as large print, Braille, audiotape, or computer diskette, please contact the Montana Department of Commerce Housing Division at (406) 841-2820, TDD (406) 841-2702 or the Montana Relay Services number, 711.**