

The Governor's Office of Storm Recovery Transparency Plan 2021

I. Review of Agency/Authority's Current Public Engagement

- Steps taken to review agency policies and procedures on transparency.

HUD requires CDBG-DR grantees to submit an Action Plan and any amendments detailing the proposed use of funds, including criteria for eligibility and how the use of these funds will address disaster relief, long-term recovery, restoration of infrastructure and housing, and economic revitalization in the most impacted and distressed areas. Similarly, GOSR must submit a Quarterly Performance Report (QPR) no later than thirty days following the end of each calendar quarter. Each QPR includes information about the uses of funds in activities identified in the Action Plan and is posted on the GOSR website.

To ensure transparency and participation in the planning, implementation, and assessment of the State's CDBG-DR recovery programs, GOSR established the State Citizen Participation Plan. The Citizen Participation Plan sets forth policies and procedures designed to maximize the opportunity for citizen involvement in the community redevelopment process and is included in the State's Action Plan, meaning any changes to it are highlighted publicly in a submission to HUD and, depending on the nature of the changes, possibly subject to public notification and comment. Review of the Plan for accuracy and compliance is undertaken at critical junctures, such as when a recovery program proposes a change to its outreach policies or when HUD citizen participation requirements change.

- Review of how the agency interacts with the public.
 - What public meetings and hearings does the agency hold?

Action Plan Amendments which meet the definition of a Substantial Amendment are subject to public notification, public hearings and public comment procedures. Citizens and units of local government are provided with reasonable notice and no less than thirty days to review and comment on the proposed amendment, and the State holds one public hearing, at minimum, for each substantial amendment. Written minutes of the hearings and attendance rosters are kept for review and a summary of all comments received and responses are included in the submission to HUD and posted to GOSR's website.

Nearly all projects in the GOSR portfolio are entering construction, in construction, or complete, so most of the public meetings and hearings for planning and design purposes are complete.

The Community Reconstruction (CR) Program is a participatory recovery and resiliency initiative that started with a community-driven planning process. Altogether, more than 650 New Yorkers served on 66 CR planning committees across the State and have together proposed hundreds of projects inspired by the unique needs and assets of their regions. Collectively, CR committees have held 650 planning meetings and 250 large-scale public engagement events as they have worked to rebuild more sustainable communities, reinforce infrastructure, mitigate the risks of loss and damage associated with future disasters, and spur revitalization.

- What opportunities exist for the public to participate in agency decision-making?

The State Citizen Participation Plan ensures that there is reasonable and timely access for public notice and comment on the activities proposed for the use of CDBG-DR grant funds. For each substantial Action Plan Amendment, GOSR provides citizens and units of local government at least thirty days to review and comment and always holds at least one public hearing. GOSR also continues to coordinate outreach meetings with State entities, local governments, non-profits, private sector, and involved associations.

All projects in the \$625 million Community Reconstruction Program grew from a community planning process that engaged stakeholders through a planning committee process across all impacted communities. The program published Community Reconstruction plans that identified each committee's priorities for recovery and resiliency. Selected projects from those plans are now being implemented.

- What information does the agency make available on its website and in social media?

Information on the website includes but is not limited to: Program deadline announcements, policy and procedure manuals, program fact sheets, FAQs, a Quarterly Progress Report submitted to HUD on all expenditures, the Action Plan and all amendments, an interactive map identifying the location, budget, and status of all Community Reconstruction projects.

- What access does the public have to engaging with the agency leadership?

GOSR is committed to ensuring that all populations impacted by the storms are aware of the programs available to assist in the recovery from Hurricane Irene, Tropical Storm Lee, and Superstorm Sandy. Through in-person meetings, outreach events, online and traditional media, GOSR has publicized programs and conducted outreach efforts throughout the storm impacted areas. Further, during the term of the grant, GOSR provides citizens, affected local governments, and other interested parties with reasonable and timely access to information and records relating to the use of grant funds as well as contracts procured with CDBG-DR funding. This information is posted on GOSR's website and provided on request.

Agency leadership attends Action Plan Amendment hearings and engage with members of the public in coordination with the External Affairs team.

- What are the information requests most commonly sought from the agency?
 - As of 2021, construction updates on Community Reconstruction and Rebuild by Design projects.
 - From 2013-2018, updates on individual homeowner-led construction funding and disbursement
- What are the areas of greatest public interest in the agency's work?
 - The more than \$1 billion disbursed directly to Sandy-impacted homeowners to repair or elevate more than 11,000 homes.
 - The innovative approach to design and construction for the two Rebuild by Design competition winning projects Living Breakwaters (\$107m) and Living with the Bay (\$125m)
 - The implementation of \$625 million of grassroots planned Community Reconstruction projects
- What does the agency do to solicit input from the public?

As stated above, with each substantial Action Plan Amendment GOSR solicits public input through a 30-day public comment period and through at least one public hearing. All comments received are

summarized, responded to, and included in the submission to HUD and posted to GOSR's website.

Further, for both Rebuild by Design projects, GOSR developed Citizen Advisory Committees (CAC) to complement the public outreach required by the Citizen Participation Plan. Each CAC serves an advisory role and solicits public input at key points in the project development and environmental review process.

In addition to the initial planning process that conducted hundreds of public meetings to solicit input for Community Reconstruction projects, during design and construction, GOSR works with municipal and non-profit subrecipients to host public meetings and community board presentations to solicit feedback on design and implementation.

II. Proposed Plan to Expand Transparency and Expected Timeline

One area GOSR has identified for improved transparency and public accountability is in access to, timely compliance with and documenting FOIL requests. GOSR proposes to implement some of the suggestions proposed by the Governor's office as well as steps HCR plans improving the online portal. Below are proposed steps.

- (1) Post the results of completed FOIL requests online. This would allow the public to see what has already been released by the agency and eliminate the request for frequently asked documents.
- (2) A public directory of FOIL Officers, including email and phone.
- (3) Creation of a FOIL "library" of frequently requested records.
- (4) Posting response rates and length of time elapsed to encourage more timely responses.
- (5) An online system that would allow for tracking requests.

These proposed suggestions can be implemented by improving HCR/GOSR's current online FOIL request system. This would provide transparency into what type of FOIL request are being asked, remove the administrative burden of producing similar documents for multiple requests and thereby creating a more efficient FOIL process to serve the public.

III. Measures of Success and Long-term Monitoring

Review of the Citizen Participation Plan for accuracy and compliance is undertaken at critical junctures, such as when a recovery program proposes a change to its outreach policies or when HUD citizen participation requirements change. Further, GOSR ensures that any Units of General Local Government who receive funds have a Citizen Participation Plan that encourages citizen participation, provides access to meetings and information, and details a citizen complaint procedure. GOSR's subrecipient

monitoring includes reviews to ensure compliance with citizen participation requirements.

In terms of FOIL, an online system that would allow for tracking request, response rates and length of time elapsed, would serve as good measures of success and long-term monitoring.