Massachusetts CDBG Program Resource Library Narrative: Community Engagement

Why? Community Engagement → Shared Decision-Making → Equitable Outcomes

The need: to support municipalities' compliance with Title 1 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. To comply with Title I, applicants and grantees must provide for wide citizen participation in conducting their planning, implementation, and completion of CDBG-funded programs.

The goal: to provide municipalities with a set of accessible resources and tools to promote stronger community engagement efforts in particular for low-and moderate-income persons/groups to meet CDBG national objectives.

The resource library is designed to help Massachusetts CDBG applicants, grantees, teams, organizations, and individuals establish and maintain robust engagement with community stakeholders. The tools and approaches outlined in this resource library are helpful for both new and experienced community engagement practitioners. They can be used as-is or adapted to meet the specific needs of your community.

Successful community engagement is an iterative process that requires continuous adaptation to meet the changing needs and strengths of the community. This resource library provides approaches and tools to help you get started with community engagement and grow your efforts over time.

What is Community Engagement?

When community members feel like they have a say in decisions that affect them, they are more likely to be satisfied with the outcome. This is because they feel like their voices are being heard and that they are part of the process. Genuine influence is achieved when community members' opinions, priorities, and input are incorporated into the decision-making process. This can be done by holding community meetings, conducting surveys, and creating opportunities for people to provide feedback.

Community engagement processes are ongoing relationships between stakeholders, community-based organizations, consumers, residents, local government, providers, and more. Different levels of community engagement can be most appropriate for different proposed projects and steps in the decision-making process based on goals, needs, resources, and other important factors. This is why true community or public engagement is a continuum.

Community engagement is not a method to determine community support for a proposed activity or project; rather to ensure stakeholders and the community at-large are appropriately engaged.

As a grantee, the potential influence on the decision or action you can provide to the public is critical to the design and ultimate success of creating citizen participation and equitable engagement. Clear expectations should be set about the public's level and methods of influence. Since transparency is key to developing long-term, trusting relationships, how the grantee will communicate and collaborate with communities should be clearly explained throughout the process.

If residents or stakeholders perceive or are told that they will be directly making a decision, or at least have significant input in it, but in the end do not, they will be dissatisfied with the outcome and potentially feel less trusting of the government. In general, the greater the degree of genuine influence community members have on a decision, the greater the benefits will be. Genuine influence, however, is not achieved just through holding events and listening to people. Genuine influence occurs when residents' or community stakeholders' opinions, priorities, and input are incorporated into the program, or any aspect that might make the program more responsive to community needs. Not only is there a greater chance that CDBG national objectives will be met, but there will also be more satisfaction with the outcomes.

Effective Community Engagement will:

- **Increase the likelihood that projects or solutions will be widely accepted**.
  - o Citizens who participate in these processes show significant commitment to help make the projects happen.
- **Create more effective solutions.**
  - o Drawing local knowledge from diverse sources creates more practical and effective solutions.
- **Improve citizens' knowledge and skills in problem-solving.**
  - o Participants who learn more about the issues will be able to see multiple sides of the problem, allowing them to practice communication and decision-making skills.
- **Empower and integrate people from different backgrounds.**
  - o Groups that have previously not been included can gain greater control over their lives and their community. When people from different areas of the community work together, they often find that they have common goals.
- **Create local networks of community members.**
  - o The more people who know what is going on and who are willing to work toward their goals, the more likely a community is to be successful in reaching them.
- **Create multiple opportunities for discussing concerns.**
  - o Regular, ongoing discussions allow people to express concerns before problems become too big.
- **Increase trust in community organizations and local governance.**
  - o Working together improves communication and understanding, and knowing what local government and community leaders can and cannot do may reduce future conflict.
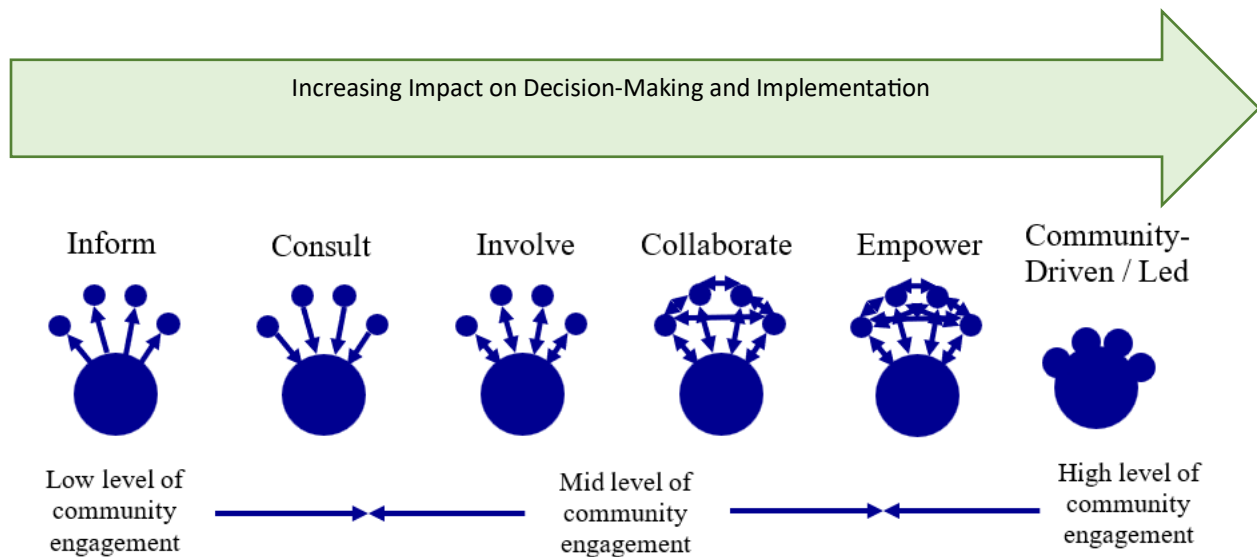
Lifecycle of Community Engagement

Community engagement is not something that just occurs during the development of your Consolidated Plan and Action Plan. Effective engagement takes place throughout the course of the program year and aims to go beyond. While we highlight a lifecycle for a HUD grantee, we hope this toolkit can support ongoing engagement for anyone.

1. Initial Planning
Planning begins months before the Action Plan is due to gather feedback on community needs and potential activity ideas. During this period, grantees generally engage with key stakeholders and community members through outreach and community meetings as outlined in their Citizen Participation Plan.

2. Plan Development
Using information gathered during the planning phase, grantees develop the draft Action Plan or Consolidated Plan. Grantees may continue to seek input from stakeholders and community representatives. Grantees will also publish a draft copy of the Plan for stakeholder input.

3. Plan Finalization
At the end of the comment period, grantees will generally conduct a hearing to receive additional comments and finalize the plan based on written and verbal comments received on the Plan.

4. Program Launch
At the start of the program year, grantees will launch the activities outlined in the Action Plan. Launching an activity generally requires engagement with the public to ensure the program design aligns with the community needs and that community members are aware of the upcoming program.

5. Implementation
When implementing a public service, economic development or housing program, the program often needs to be adjusted based on lessons learned and experiences. Program implementers should regularly engage with program users and stakeholders to ensure that the implementation methods not only meet the needs of residents, but help to uplift and empower their communities.

6. Evaluation
At the end of the program year (and as an ongoing practice), grantees should consult with stakeholders, program operators and program users to gather feedback on what worked well, what didn't, and what could be done differently in the future.

TOOLKIT INTRODUCTION · Community Engagement Toolkit · U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development · Page 10

(Page 10 from HUD Community Engagement Toolkit: Building Purpose and Participation https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Community-Engagement-Toolkit.pdf)

How to Use

This resource library provides tools and approaches to help you engage with community stakeholders. The resources can be used as-is or adapted to meet the specific needs of your community. Successful community engagement is an iterative process that requires continuous adaptation to meet the changing needs and strengths of the community.

There are six categories in the **Massachusetts Community Engagement Continuum** - as shortcuts for navigation:

1. Inform
2. Consult
3. Involve
4. Collaborate
5. Empower
6. Community Driven/Led

Increasing Impact on Decision-Making and Implementation

Inform · Consult · Involve · Collaborate · Empower · Community-Driven / Led

Low level of community engagement · Mid level of community engagement · High level of community engagement

The following table from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Massachusetts Community Engagement Standards for Community Health Planning Guideline, illustrates the continuum of community engagement, ranging from no opportunity to influence (inform) to total influence over the outcome (community-driven/led). Although informing may not provide a robust engagement opportunity, it remains a crucial aspect of the process. In general, the higher the level of engagement along the continuum, the more successful the CDBG program is likely to be.

Table 1: Massachusetts Continuum of Community Engagement

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Delegate	Community Driven/ -led
Community Participation Goal	To provide the community with balanced & objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities &/or solutions	To obtain community feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or solutions	To work directly with community throughout the process to ensure their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives & identification of the preferred solution	To place the decision-making in the hands of the community	To support the actions of community initiated, driven and/or led processes
Promise to the community	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to & acknowledge concerns, aspirations, & provide feedback on how community input influenced decisions	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns & aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how that input influenced decisions	We will look to you for advice & innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice & recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide, or follow your lead generally on the way forward	We will provide the needed support to see your ideas succeed
Examples	•Fact sheets •Web sites •Open Houses	•Public comments •Focus groups •Surveys •Community meetings	•Workshops •Deliberative polling •Advisory bodies	Advisory groups •Consensus building Participatory decision making	Advisor bodies •Volunteer/ stipend •Ballots •Delegated decision	•Community supported processes •Advisory bodies •Stipend roles for community •Funding for community

4

*(Adapted from MDPH Massachusetts Community Engagement Standards for Community Health Planning Guideline, January 2017 https://www.mass.gov/doc/community-engagement-guidelines-for-community-health-planning-ms-word-doc/download)

The spreadsheet includes four content tabs with information such as source, type of resource or tool, descriptions, continuum of community engagement, keywords, and URLs.

Four areas of content of the resource library include:

HUD Exchange	Tools and resources from the online platform for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). It provides information, guidance, services, and tools to HUD's community partners. The website provides a one-stop shop for resources, updates, and information related to all HUD programs.
State Resources	Commonwealth offices, agencies, organizations, articles, funding opportunities, and resources that offer municipal-level information to assist in CDBG activities, as well as potential stakeholders to consult or involve in local community engagement initiatives and capacity building.
National Resources	National organizations that offer information, resources, research, and funding opportunities, to be adapted on a municipal level to support local community engagement efforts.
Citizen Engagement and Translation Management Software*	Listing of web-based platforms that connect citizens with government agencies to share information, solicit feedback, and provide transparency into decisions and operations. Listing of vendors that provide interpretation and translation services.

* MA CDBG Program does not endorse vendors or software. Listings are suggestions and are available upon consultation and contracting directly with software providers.

The resource library's content is organized into the four categories above and aligned with the following eight key focus areas of the 2023 Massachusetts Community Engagement Assessment, facilitating easy navigation to specific areas of interest.

The eight key focus areas are color-coded:

Housing Production Plan
Communication and Outreach
Community Engagement
Engagement Strategies
Information Dissemination
Inspiration and Collaboration

CDBG Citizen Advisory Committee
Resource Library

Listed below are some of the most engaging and/or informative resources from the spreadsheet:

- EOHLC, Massachusetts Community Development Block Grant Program:
  https://www.mass.gov/info-details/community-development-block-grant-cdbg
- Join the HUD mailing list to receive HUD policy guidance, training opportunities, resources, critical deadlines, program support, and more:
  https://www.hudexchange.info/mailinglist/subscribe/
- 10 Community Engagement Tips for Local Government by Social PinPoint:
  https://www.socialpinpoint.com/10-community-engagement-tips-for-local-government/
- HUD Exchange, Community Engagement Toolkit: Building Purpose and Participation:
  https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/community-engagement-toolkit/
- HUD Exchange, Community Engagement Toolkit: Building Purpose and Participation, Section 3: Building a Community Advisory Team, *Visualizing Where the Community Advisory Team Fits In*:
  https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Community-Engagement-Toolkit-Visualizing-Where-the-Community-Advisory-Team-Fits-In.pdf
- HUD Exchange, Community Engagement Toolkit: Building Purpose and Participation, Section 3: Building a Community Advisory Team, *Questions for Building a Community Advisory Team*:
  https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Community-Engagement-Toolkit-Questions-for-Building-a-Community-Advisory-Team.pdf

Recommendations for Future Use/Adaptation

- This Resource Library is intended to support new and ongoing community engagement efforts and active, adaptive advocacy by applicants and grantees. As a result, it is expected to be a "living" resource library/listing that new resources may be added to (subtracted from) based on their relevance and usefulness.
- Depending on the goal of participation and the level of influence, grantees can then identify the appropriate strategy for engagement. Is the intent to inform, consult, collaborate with, or share decision-making with the public?
- When determining engagement strategies, remember that not all people or communities are the same. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to engagement.

Context

This material is based upon research, in whole or in part, by the Massachusetts CDBG Program's Temporary One Year Program Representative, Dimple Rana. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. Neither the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, nor any of its employees, makes any warranty, express or implied, or assumes any legal liability or responsibility for the accuracy, completeness, or usefulness of any information, apparatus, product, or process disclosed, or represents that its use would not infringe privately-owned rights. Reference herein to any individuals, agencies, companies, products, process, services, service by trade name, trademark, manufacturer, or otherwise does not constitute or imply an endorsement, recommendation, or favoring by the author(s),

contributor(s), the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or any agency thereof. Opinions contained herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official position of, or a position that is endorsed by, HUD or any Federal agency or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

References:

1. Lifecycle of Community Engagement, Page 10 from HUD Community Engagement Toolkit: Building Purpose and Participation
   https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Community-Engagement-Toolkit.pdf
2. MDPH Massachusetts Community Engagement Standards for Community Health Planning Guideline, January 2017 https://www.mass.gov/doc/community-engagement-guidelines-for-community-health-planning-ms-word-doc/download