

Plan On It

A Dutchess County Planning Federation eNewsletter

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Community Development Block Grants 101: *Creating Successful CDBG Applications*

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Dutchess County currently receives \$1.2 million dollars annually through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant Program, affectionately known as CDBG. In the past, CDBG funds have been used in a variety of projects including: cleaning up a brownfield site for affordable housing; building a bridge to a redeveloped industrial park; installing sidewalks to improve pedestrian access; water system improvements; and numerous handicapped accessibility improvements in parks and public facilities.



Constructing a new parking lot in the Village of Millerton to create parking for local businesses and the rail trail.



New handicapped accessible playground equipment and walkways in Fairview Park in the Town of Poughkeepsie.

A majority of these funds are awarded to local municipalities through a competitive annual application cycle that is administered through the County Department of Planning and Development. Applications are generally released in July and are due September/October. Each year we get a number of great applications but we also get some that are ineligible or don't meet local priorities. Some municipalities may be frustrated by their inability to secure CDBG funds, not only because they want to complete the proposed project, but also because they often incur consultant costs to complete the application.

We've developed this primer to help communities put together more competitive applications. Below are nine key considerations when applying for CDBG funds:

1 Project Must Meet HUD Eligibility Criteria

This may seem obvious, but every year we get one or two ineligible applications. Communities can always review the guidelines, but the best way to confirm eligibility is to [contact the Community Development \(CD\) Administrator](#) directly. In addition to checking your project against the HUD criteria and local priorities, the CD Administrator can even provide you with the census data needed for the application.

2 Project Must Benefit Low and Moderate Income Populations

Communities may have varying ideas about what the term “community development” means, but the CDBG has a very specific focus – low and moderate income persons/households. There are three ways to prove a project benefits such populations:

a) The project is located in an area defined by the US Census Bureau as low and moderate income. Please contact the CD Administrator to confirm eligible areas in your community.

b) The project benefits a limited clientele whom HUD presumes are low and moderate income. These populations include: abused children, victims of domestic violence, elderly persons, severely disabled persons, homeless persons, illiterate adults, persons living with AIDS, and migrant farm workers.



Installation of handicapped accessible sidewalks in the Village of Pawling.

c) Complete an income survey – If your project doesn’t meet one of the first two criteria but you think the area is low and moderate income, you can conduct an income survey of the area. Surveys can be done by mail, phone or in person. Please contact the County for guidance prior to conducting a survey. Most importantly, the completed survey results must be submitted with the application, so a survey can’t be left until the last minute.

3 Project Must Meet One or More Consolidated Plan Priorities

In addition to HUD criteria, the County has local priorities which are outlined in the [Consolidated Plan](#). The more Consolidated Plan priorities a project addresses, the higher it will rank. While we have always included a narrative outlining the priorities, this year’s application will have a checklist to help communities easily identify the current priorities.

4 Review Your Local Plans for Potential Projects

Some communities have capital plans that list and prioritize future projects. If your community doesn’t have one, think about completing one. A capital plan may

sound daunting but it can be as simple as creating a list and prioritizing. This is the first step to a real capital plan. Another value is that this list can be passed on to future leaders so that important projects don't get lost as administrations change over time.

5 Start Considering Your Application Today, Not After Labor Day

Due to federal deadlines, the County releases its application in early July with a deadline of early October. We realize this timing is not ideal as many people are on vacation through the summer and some boards have fewer meetings. The truth is that many boards and their consultants don't focus on the CDBG application until after Labor Day, which leaves little time for thoughtful consideration. Communities should start thinking about CDBG during the spring and then use the summer months to prepare the application.

6 Rely on Us and Your Community Rather Than Consultants

For a variety of reasons it seems that consultants are often the drivers behind identifying projects. Unfortunately, they may not know your community the best. We recommend that you do outreach to local boards and committees (planning board, recreation committee, etc.) before the summer begins to help identify potential projects.



Handicapped accessible Challenger baseball field in the Town of Wappinger.

7 Clearly State Intended Use of Funds

It has been our experience that it is sometimes unclear exactly what the CDBG funds are being requested for. This is particularly true if the request is part of a larger project. If a consultant is writing the application, supervisors and mayors should take a moment to review the application prior to submission to insure they are accurately describing your project. To help with this issue, the County will also be simplifying the application starting in 2013.

8 CDBG Project Must Result in a Clear Benefit

Sometimes communities ask for CDBG funds for one phase of a larger project. This is fine, but there needs to be a usable component of the larger project after the expenditure of the CDBG funds. For example, a municipality may ask the County to fund handicapped bathrooms for a new park. This is eligible, but some meaningful component of the park, say a ball field, must be developed prior to or along with the bathroom. The County cannot fund handicapped bathrooms with the promise or hope that other components will be built at a future date. To paraphrase a famous saying, we can't build bathrooms to nowhere.

9 Project Actually Accomplishes Community Development

Maintaining our existing infrastructure and facilities is important, and sometimes that is the best choice based on the program's eligibility requirements. But the best and most competitive community development projects are those that add to a community's existing assets, opening up new opportunities and improving residents' quality of life. Some examples might include extending a sidewalk from a residential area to a nearby train station or shopping area, or running a water line for a new affordable housing development.

We hope this overview will help your community identify competitive applications for the next round of CDBG funding this summer. Remember, communities are welcome to [contact the CD Administrator](#) at any point during the year for advice on applications.

More Information

[Dutchess County 2013–2017 Draft Consolidated Plan](#)

Information about [CDBG, US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development](#)

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This newsletter was developed by the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development, in conjunction with the Dutchess County Planning Federation.

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