

FY2014 Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grants NOFA Questions and Answers

Note: In accordance with the HUD Reform Act, HUD cannot provide a determination to questions that ask about a specific situation (e.g. whether something would be eligible or how it would be rated) outside of reviewing a submitted grant application during its formal review process. This Q&A is meant to provide general clarification to the NOFA language.

1. If a jurisdiction already has a neighborhood improvement plan, does it still need to apply for a Planning Grant or can it apply directly for an Implementation Grant?

Planning Grants are not required before receiving an Implementation Grant. Planning grants are meant to assist applicants that do not yet have the capacity to carry out a successful transformation project. If applicants have a plan in place or the planning process is well underway, they should considering applying for an Implementation Grant.

2. Can we apply for a Planning grant and an Implementation grant for the same housing site in the same competition cycle?

No. “Number of Applications and Public and/or Assisted Housing Projects” on page 19 of the NOFA states that: “you can apply ONLY for a FY2014 Implementation Grant or a FY2014 Planning Grant for the same public and/or assisted housing site and neighborhood, not both.”

3. The NOFA states that the same housing project that was the focus of a past Choice Neighborhoods grant cannot apply again. Can a different housing community but the same target neighborhood be the focus of a Planning Grant application?

Please refer to the “Relation to prior Choice Neighborhoods Grants” threshold requirement on page 20 of the NOFA: “Public and/or assisted housing projects and the neighborhoods in which they are located previously funded through a Choice Neighborhoods grant may not be the target housing and neighborhood of a Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant application.”

4. I understand from the FY2014 Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grants NOFA that HUD anticipates announcing awards under the NOFA approximately 5 months after the application due date. Does that mean it will be sometime in January 2015? If awarded, will the grant funds need to be implemented beginning in January 2015?

It appears your question stems from your reading of page 11 in the NOFA. Under “D. Period of Performance,” it shows the following:

Estimated Project Start Date: 01/01/15

Estimated Project End Date: 01/01/15

This estimated start and end date actually have to do with the anticipated award timeframe of 5 months from the application due date (i.e., January 2015). HUD is using a new software system to publish the NOFAs and the reason this looks that way has to do with this

system. The grant funds do not have to be all spent in January 2015. As it states in the first paragraph of “D. Period of Performance,” the term of the grant is two years from the date of Grant Agreement execution (which would happen after the award announcement).

5. Is a small cities village eligible as a local government for a Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant?

It is the responsibility of potential applicants to determine if they meet the definition of a local government in the NOFA (please see the Definitions section starting on page 5).

6. We are a local council of governments. Does that qualify as a “local government” and thus we are an eligible applicant under this NOFA?

It depends on authority provided to the council in its charter from the state. This NOFA defines “local government” to have the same meaning as “unit of general government” from section 102(a)(1) of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 (42 U.S.C. 5302). Consistent with HUD’s interpretation in other programs that use this same definition, to be considered a unit of general local government the entity should possess the powers of a unit of general local government such as the power to tax. Potential applicants should consider whether they are deemed “unit of general government” for other HUD programs that use the same definition (e.g. the Community Development Block Grant program).

7. Can a PHA in receivership be an eligible applicant for a Choice Neighborhoods grant?

A PHA in receivership should consider whether or not it has the capacity to administer a FY14 Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant based on the events causing it to be placed under receivership and in the context of the NOFA criteria in section III.A.1.b (pages 12-13). The HUD Reform Act prevents HUD, both in Headquarters and the Field Offices, from directly answering whether or not a PHA is an eligible applicant.

8. Would a Limited Partnership be eligible to apply for a Planning Grant?

No. The NOFA does not list a limited partnership as an eligible applicant type. Further, whereas the FY13 Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grants NOFA included for-profit developers that apply jointly with a public entity as an eligible applicant type, the FY14 Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grants NOFA does not.

9. I am unclear about who the eligible applicants are from looking at the information in section III.A of the NOFA. The list in Section III.A talks about Native American tribal organizations (other than Federally recognized tribal governments) and the paragraph in Section III.A.1 talks about tribal entities.

Potential applicants should follow the language in Section III.A.1 (page 12 of the NOFA) on Eligible Applicants which states: “Eligible applicants for Choice Neighborhoods grants are Public Housing Authorities (PHAs), tribal entities, local governments, and nonprofits. Also see the Eligible Applicants threshold requirement in section III.A.5.a. and the definitions in

section I.C for definitions of related terms.” The definition of tribal entities is on page 11 of the NOFA.

- 10. I see the definition of Planning Coordinator on page 9 of the NOFA. What is the measurement for a Planning Coordinator to “have extensive professional experience in leading comprehensive neighborhood planning processes that lead to implementation activities and improved outcomes”? Is this something that is relative to local standards, or is there a more universally accepted tool by which one should consider prospects?**

It is the responsibility of the applicant to demonstrate how they meet this criterion. As experience can vary so greatly, the NOFA is not limited to a certain tool.

- 11. Must the Planning Coordinator be a local partner? How is “local” defined? Is it acceptable to suggest a regional firm located 100 miles away with “local” experience?**

The definition of Planning Coordinator (page 9 of the NOFA) does not mean that the Planning Coordinator must be a local partner. Rather, the point of the sentence you are referring to (“The Planning Coordinator is not just a local partner/stakeholder, but rather a single person/entity”) is to emphasize that the Planning Coordinator must be a single person/entity selected to assist the grantee in leading the planning process.

- 12. Can we have a team of consultants serve as our Planning Coordinator?**

No, in accordance with definition stated in the NOFA, the Planning Coordinator must be a single person or entity. If your application identifies a collaborative venture as the Planning Coordinator, HUD may not be able to rate the capacity rating factors. However, there is no limit to the number of partners you may assemble to contribute to the plan.

- 13. Is a RFP required for obtaining a Planning Coordinator prior to applying for the planning grant?**

Generally, yes. It is necessary to follow the applicable procurement regulations if the Planning Coordinator is paid for through grant funds.

- 14. Will an application for Choice Neighborhoods Initiative Planning Grants be considered if it does not have “severely distressed public or HUD-assisted housing” units in the neighborhood revitalization plan but meets other eligibility criteria?**

No, the “Eligible Target Housing” threshold requires that there be a severely distressed public or HUD-assisted housing project at the center of the planning process. Please see the Eligible Target Housing threshold on page 15 of the NOFA and the Definitions section starting on page 5.

15. We have demolished a public housing site. Can this site still meet the “Eligible Target Housing” threshold?

Yes, as long as the site has not been completely redeveloped or disposed of, it could still be eligible.

16. Our organization is a Tribally Designated Housing Entity and is interested in applying for a planning grant. Are HUD HOAP (Home Ownership Assistance Program) homes that have already been conveyed eligible? We have conveyed housing that has been abandoned, condemned or have structural issues. Home owners cannot afford to repair the blighted housing, which are a safety concern to the community.

Please note the definition of “assisted housing” from page 8 of the NOFA (copied here in part): “In this NOFA, the term “assisted housing” (used interchangeably with “HUD-assisted housing”) means housing assisted under... and the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act of 1996, 25 U.S.C. § 4101, et seq (Indian Housing). In the case of Indian Housing, this includes only single family and duplex rental housing that is clustered in a development and/or multifamily rental housing projects in which at least 50 percent of the units are assisted.” So in order to be eligible, the housing must currently be assisted with NAHASDA funding.

17. We want to target units that are not public housing and do not seem to fit within the definition of assisted housing in the NOFA. The units aren’t funded from any of the statutes listed but have received project-based rental assistance. Can you tell us if we are eligible if we provide additional details?

No. Because of the HUD Reform Act, HUD is not allowed to review specific situations and make determinations on them before an application is submitted. With that being said, here is some additional clarification that may be of help. First, there are several similar-sounding, “project-based” terms. Encompassed under the NOFA’s definition of “assisted housing” are “Project-Based

Vouchers”(http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/project, sometimes called, “Section 8 Project-Based Vouchers) and “Project-Based Section 8” (<http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/recovery/programs/project>, sometimes called, “Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance”). Then there is also the term, “Project-Based Rental Assistance” used in the context of the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD). Potential applicants should take careful note of such terminology. Also, for clarification, please note that to meet the NOFA definition of “assisted housing,” the housing in question must currently be assisted with a funding type listed in that definition.

18. In regard to the certification for severely distressed properties, is it acceptable for the licensed engineer/architect who signs the severe distress certification to not be an employee of the HA but to have a contract with the Housing Authority?

Yes, it is acceptable if the licensed engineer/architect signing the form has a contract with the Housing Authority but they cannot be an employee of the Housing Authority. Please do note though the full language of the criteria, as it extends beyond Housing Authorities (if they are the Lead Applicant) to other partners as applicable: (from page 18 of the NOFA) “.... The engineer or architect may not be an employee of the Lead Applicant, Co-Applicant (if any), Planning Coordinator (if any), the project’s owner, the public housing authority (if applicable), or a unit of local government in which the housing is located....”

19. We currently have a 2530 form on file with our local HUD office. May I provide you with the form for you to confirm if I can use it with this application or do I need to complete a new one and get new signatures?

Because of the HUD Reform Act, we cannot review applicant-specific information/forms and provide determinations in advance of an application being submitted. However, we can advise that the NOFA does not contain a specific requirement that the 2530 form be dated as of a certain date. Applicants should note though that when they sign the SF-424, they certify to the truth and accuracy of the information provided in their application. So with the 2530, applicants should ensure they are providing the most current/accurate form to respond to the Previous Participation Certification for Multifamily Assisted Property Owners threshold requirement (page 13 of the NOFA).

20. Are Co-applicants also required to have a Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System (DUNS) Number and active registration in the SAM.gov? Or is that threshold requirement only for Lead Applicants?

Yes, Co-Applicants are required to have a DUNS Number and active registration in the SAM.gov. As stated at the beginning of section III.A.5 (page 17) of the NOFA, “All Lead Applicants and Co-Applicants and applications must meet all threshold requirements of this NOFA in order to be rated and ranked.” Further, section III.C.1 (page 29) requires the following: “As stated in the General Section, all applicants must have a DUNS identifier. This is confirmed for the Lead Applicant through the Grants.gov registration process and on the SF-424. If your application includes a Co-Applicant, its DUNS number must be provided in the Threshold Requirements Exhibit.”

21. The FY2014 Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant NOFA states on page 26: “Planning grantees targeting public housing projects will be required to plan to utilize Section 8 project-based rental assistance or Section 8 project-based vouchers in order to meeting the one-for-one replacement requirement.” Does this requirement mean that all replacement units for the targeted public housing project(s) must be PBRA or PBV, or just a portion? If it is the latter, is there a specific percentage of replacement units that must be PBRA or PBV?

The NOFA does not include more specific language on the requirement copied above. Should an application targeting a public housing project be funded, the amount of Section 8 project-based rental assistance or Section 8 project-based vouchers to use in order to meet the

one-for-one replacement requirement would be a policy discussion that would occur during the planning process.

- 22. The NOFA requires (section V.A.1.f, on page 46) applicants to “describe a concrete improvement project community members and/or stakeholders will complete in the neighborhood during the grant term.” Can the grant funds be used to fund this project?**

Generally, Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant funds cannot be used for this type of activity as they can only be used for planning activities. Please refer to section III.A.4 for detailed information about eligible and ineligible uses of these grant funds.

- 23. On Page 47 of the 2014 Choice Neighborhoods planning grant NOFA, it states that applicants must submit a detailed plan to improve an existing school ... (unless you provide documentation that a plurality of neighborhood residents are enrolled in grades K-12 already attend a high performing school in the neighborhood). Can you provide a definition of “plurality”?**

The NOFA does not define plurality but potential applicants can refer to its definition as provided in a commonly used dictionary. For Planning Grant applications, it means the school which the greatest number of students in the neighborhood attends.

- 24. Could we get your guidance on the Consistency with Other Planning Documents rating factor (page 48)? Our PHA plan document mentions redevelopment plans specific to the program site in two different sections but, as it is an evolving project, the language does not specify “Transformation Plan” and details of the public housing project and the neighborhood. Do we have to amend our PHA plan?**

As noted above, in accordance with the HUD Reform Act, HUD cannot provide a determination to questions that ask about a specific situation outside of reviewing a submitted application. However, please be advised it is the onus of the applicant to ensure that the documentation they provide in response to the Consistency with Other Planning Documents rating factor responds to the criteria, specifically including: “The PHA/MTW Plan must specifically identify the intent to plan for the transformation of the target public housing project and its neighborhood.” Note that the language is, “intent to plan for the transformation of the target public housing project and its neighborhood,” not the term, “Transformation Plan.”

- 25. On the Choice Neighborhoods website, there is a budget form for the Planning Grantees to use (HUD-53421). Is it necessary to submit this budget form in our grant application or can we submit our own budget spreadsheet?**

The NOFA does not require use of the Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant Budget form (HUD-53421). Applicants should submit a Sources and Uses document in the format the meets the requirements identified in the NOFA.

26. Grants.gov only provides 15 slots for attachments, but the application requires more than 15 narrative exhibits and attachments. How am I supposed to submit the application?

Grants.gov is a system used by the entire Federal government so its structure does not necessarily reflect the Choice Neighborhoods NOFA. Its attachment 1 does not explicitly mean the Choice Neighborhoods Attachment 1. Applicants should zip together the multiple attachment files (in one or more zip files, depending on the size) they have prepared in accordance with the Choice Neighborhoods NOFA and plug them into the slots provided by Grants.gov. Please be reminded that, as instructed in the NOFA, each narrative exhibit and attachment must be its own file. Do not simply create one file that includes multiple exhibits or attachments.

27. Can a CN Planning Grant be used for indirect costs (administrative costs or overhead)?

Please see pages 13-17 for Program Activities, including Required Activities, Other Eligible Activities and Ineligible Activities. Further, pages 38-39 provide Funding Restrictions. Please note that on page 13, it is stated that, “Program activities include tasks necessary to develop a Transformation Plan that includes strategies to achieve the objectives identified in the NOFA, align investments with this plan, and develop the relevant planning and evaluation capacity of the applicant and its partners.” So any costs paid for with CN Planning grant funds have to be related to developing a Transformation Plan, aligning investments with this plan, and developing the relevant planning and evaluation capacity of the applicant and its partners.

28. Can the Lead Applicant conduct studies (other than the Physical Needs Assessment and certifications stating that a third party is required), such as the Environmental Assessment, if the organization has the expertise to carry out the activity?

The NOFA does not contain a prohibition that the Lead Applicant cannot conduct an environmental assessment if it is the appropriate/qualified type of agency.

29. Per V.A.1.d (3) of the NOFA (page 44), Part I Violent Crime, applicants are asked to submit data regarding the rate of Part 1 violent crimes for the precinct/PSA (Police Service Area) in which the target housing is located compared to the city/county/parish. If the target housing is located in a small city with only a single precinct, is it preferred that the applicant provide data for the entire city compared to the county, or should we parse the city crime data to fit the target neighborhood boundary and compare that to the city as a whole?

For the Part I Violent Crime rating factor, a smaller jurisdiction than the precinct can be used. The NOFA states, “precinct/PSA.” For example, a police ‘beat’ does constitute a PSA, as does a police district, zone, and sector.

30. Page 44 of the NOFA states that data should be presented for calendar years 2011-2013, while page 45 references 2009-2011. Which is correct?

Data should be for 2011-2013.

31. Are in-kind commitments are counted toward the leverage rating in this NOFA?

No, this NOFA does not provide for in-kind commitments to be counted as leverage. Instead, in addition to cash leverage commitments, HUD will consider “supporting commitments” as one type of leverage, as described on pages 50 and 51 of the NOFA.

32. Is there a definition of a cash commitment vs. a “supporting commitment”?

Under this NOFA, HUD will generally consider funding that is provided directly to the Lead Applicant for planning activities proposed in this grant application as “cash” leverage, provided the other requirements stated in the NOFA are met (e.g. on pages 49-50). Supporting commitments, as defined in the NOFA, relate to funding your partners have available for their use to carryout activities that directly support the proposed planning process.

33. As part of the rating factor, “Policy Priority: Promote Economic Development and Resilient Communities – Educational Opportunities Planning” (pages 46 and 47), the NOFA states: “Applicants must detail a plan to improve an existing school located within or near the neighborhood in order to receive more than 2 points under this rating factor (unless you provide documentation that a plurality of neighborhood residents enrolled in grades K-12 attend a high performing school in the neighborhood).” In which Attachment should the “documentation” (i.e., “...provide documentation that a plurality...” be located?

If applicable, applicants can provide “documentation that a plurality of neighborhood residents enrolled in grades K-12 attend a high performing school in the neighborhood” in Attachment 7, Eligible Neighborhoods Documentation- Inadequate School Documentation.