

Introduction

The 2013–2017 Consolidated Plan represents the Harris County’s vision for improving the quality of life in the low- and moderate-income areas of Harris County. It provides useful information about current conditions within the county and identifies its strengths and weaknesses on community development issues. The Consolidated Plan also explains the long-term goals and objectives for improving the quality of life for financially challenged residents, and states its specific plans for making improvements throughout the next year.

The Harris County Community Services Department (HCCSD) assists low- income individuals and communities by providing and supporting community programs, facilities and services through the distribution of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships program (HOME), and Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funds and the Housing for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) entitlement funds are distributed by the City of Houston, the largest metropolitan entity within Harris County

HCCSD is required to submit a Consolidated Plan to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in order to receive funding for program years 2013-2017. This money is provided to Harris County in order to benefit low- and moderate-income persons, eliminate slum and blight, and to provide for urgent needs within the County.

The Consolidated Plan

The 2013–2017 Consolidated Plan describes the housing and community development intentions of the Harris County service area for the next five years. It also gives specific details on what will be accomplished and how it will be done. The Plan also serves the following purposes:

- An informative description of Harris County and its goal to Harris County residents.
- A helpful guide for individuals and organizations that are interested in applying for one or more federal grants. With the Consolidated Plan, they are able to better understand the grants that are available, the application process, HUD program requirements and the objectives of Harris County.
- A helpful guide for HCCSD staff. Throughout the coming years, HCCSD staff will be able to look to the Consolidated Plan for valuable departmental and HUD information. Planning staff will also be able to chart HCCSD’s progress against the established goals and objectives and make any necessary adjustments to ensure that they will be accomplished.
- A guide for HUD representatives. They will be able to better understand the intentions of Harris County and get a clear picture of how HUD grant money will be spent in the community.

The Consolidated Plan identifies housing, homeless, community, and economic development needs and resources, and establishes a strategic plan for meeting those needs. In its completed form, the Plan will aid decision makers in creating strategies that address such issues as employment and employability, business opportunities, adequate streets, water, sewage and

drainage systems, proper and useful education, parks and green spaces, community facilities, quality health care, and safe, peaceful, productive neighborhoods to persons living in low-income communities.

The 2013–2017 Plan will replace the 2008-2012 Consolidated Plan. Included in the Consolidated Plan is a five-year strategic plan and a one-year annual action plan beginning with fiscal year 2013 and ending in fiscal year 2017. The strategic plan describes needs, goals, and measurable objectives for a wide range of community development activities, such as housing, homelessness, and non-housing community development. The Action plan describes the specific projects and activities that the jurisdiction will undertake in the coming one year.

The Consolidated Plan for Harris County is comprised of seven sections.

- **Section I, Introduction to the Consolidated Plan for Harris County**, introduces the plan.
- **Section II, Citizen Participation Plan**, describes the process for collecting information and feedback from Harris County citizens.
- **Section III, Objectives Summary Matrix**, is a detailed table, which serves as a helpful guide to the measurable objectives set forth by the Consolidated Plan.
- **Section IV, Community Profile and Housing Market Analysis** provides a detailed analysis of existing conditions in Harris County including population characteristics and demographic trends. *Section IV* also includes a detailed analysis of availability, affordability, accessibility, and adequacy of housing units in Harris County.
- **Section V, Strategic Plan** gives background information on housing, homelessness, education, economic development, and infrastructure. The Strategic Plan then identifies needs and issues associated with each area and establishes five-year goals with specific objectives that address those needs.
- **Section VI, Action Plan**, begins to address the objectives set forth by *Section V* by describing activities, projects and programs that Harris County will undertake during the next five years (2013-2017). It also provides an analysis of Department expenditures and a detailed description of the monitoring procedures utilized by HCCSD during the first year of the Consolidated Plan.
- **Section VII, Supporting Materials**, provides additional necessary information that includes target area profiles, definitions, service provider tables and certifications.

eCon Planning Suite

In May 2012, HUD's Office of Community Planning and Development (CPD) introduced the eCon Planning Suite, a collection of new online tools to help grantees create market-driven, leveraged housing and community development plans. These tools are designed to help grantees with the needs analysis and strategic decision making required for the Consolidated Plan.

One of these tools, the Consolidated Plan Template will be required for all Consolidated Plans submitted on or after November 15, 2012. Grantees that are scheduled to submit a Consolidated Plan to HUD after this date will use the template for both the Consolidated Plan and the Year 1 Action Plan.

The Consolidated Plan Template provides a number of benefits to grantees, including:

- The Consolidated Plan Template provides a uniform, web-based format to help grantees ensure their Consolidated Plan includes all the required elements per the regulations. The template also includes a Quality Check that grantees can use to review the plan for missing information and discrepancies before submitting the final version to HUD.
- With the incorporation of the Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan into IDIS Online, all of the key reporting elements of the grants management cycle are integrated into one system. This will help ensure cohesiveness between the goals described in the Consolidated Plan and Action Plan and the outcomes tracked in IDIS and reported in the Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) and make the Consolidated Plan a useful management tool.
- Many of the data tables within the Consolidated Plan Template are pre-populated with the latest housing and economic data. The data is provided to help grantees develop their funding priorities in the Strategic Plan and to save time in searching for and compiling the data.
- The Consolidated Plan Template is integrated with the CPD Maps tool. The maps and data sets available in CPD Maps can help grantees assess market conditions and present the information in a compelling fashion. The CPD Maps tool is publicly available so that community stakeholders will also have access to the same data sets. The Consolidated Plan Template allows grantees to easily insert maps and data tables from CPD Maps throughout the document.

Service Area and Target Areas

The Consolidated Plan addresses the needs of the Harris County service area which consists of unincorporated Harris County and the 14 small cities in the county that have signed cooperative agreements for inclusion in Harris County's application for funding. Because the populations of Houston, Pasadena, and Baytown are greater than 50,000, they are considered entitlement cities by HUD. These cities utilize their own community development resources and receive HUD funds and therefore are not within the Harris County service area.

Harris County was designated an urban county by HUD for the CDBG Program in 1975. In order to qualify for urban county status, a county must have a total population of 200,000 or more persons. An urban county's population consists of the total population of the unincorporated areas of the county and the various incorporated cities, towns and villages that sign cooperative agreements with the county. Fourteen incorporated cities have re-signed three-year agreements with Harris County in 2012 and are included as part of the Harris County service area.

HCCSD Cooperative Cities

- Bellaire
- Deer Park
- Galena Park
- Humble
- Jacinto City
- Katy
- LaPorte
- Morgan's Point
- Seabrook
- Shoreacres
- South Houston
- Tomball
- Webster
- West University Place

HCCSD has also designated 42 communities throughout Harris County both incorporated and unincorporated, as *target areas*. Harris County target areas represent portions of communities in which 51 percent or more of the residents are low- to moderate-income and thus eligible for CDBG, HOME and ESG activities which include projects and programs for housing, infrastructure, economic development, and the various other Consolidated Plan elements that impact quality of life. As seen in Map 1.1 Harris County Service and Target Areas, the majority of target areas are located in the unincorporated area of Harris County.

Resources available through Harris County are almost exclusively dedicated to the improvement of living conditions for extremely low, very low or low-income individuals and families which are defined as persons who make at or below 30 percent, 50 percent, and 80 percent of the median family income for the area (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Income Categories for Extremely Low, Very Low and Moderate-Income Families

Income Limits	% of MFI	Income
FY 2012 Median Family Income* Income		\$66,900
Extremely Low-Income	0-30%	\$20,050
Very Low-Income	31-50%	\$33,450
Low-Income	51-80%	\$53,500

**Based on a family of four*

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD Home Program Income Limits, PY 2012

Citizen Participation for the 2013-2017 Consolidated Plan

The cornerstone for the development of the Year 2013-2017 Consolidated Plan for Harris County was active citizen participation. Built on participation and cooperation, the Consolidated Plan is an expression of many voices: community leaders, educators, developers, nonprofit workers and government officials, and most importantly, the views of residents living in Harris County's low- income communities. The Harris County Citizen Participation Plan, Section II, provides details about the processes of obtaining public opinions for the Year 2013-2017 Consolidated Plan and how they will be collected in the future.

The Citizen Participation Plan emphasizes the involvement of low- and moderate-income residents including non-English speaking persons, as well as persons with mobility, visual or hearing impairments. The Plan outlines the process through which the public can access general information, receive technical assistance, provide comments on critical issues, and receive timely

responses to questions raised.

To identify the nature and level of needs within Harris County, a survey was developed and distributed for use as part of the citizen participation process for the consolidated plan. This broad based survey included questions related to Housing, Fair Housing, Social Services, Transportation, Senior and Youth Services, Parks, Public Facilities, Public Services, Infrastructure, Homelessness, and Education. It was developed to help identify the needs, goals, and objectives of the services needed in Harris County. The use of one survey, instead of having additional versions for service providers, was supported by the additional consultation efforts with various service providers to better capture their needs and opinions. Harris County CSD received over 100 responses to the survey.

The opinions of Harris County residents on problems that exist at the neighborhood level and their preferred methods of mitigating them are of utmost importance when drafting needs statements, goals, objectives, and strategies for building better communities. To this end, the survey was distributed to residents throughout the CSD service area to residents, social service providers, homeless care providers, cooperative cities, developers and nonprofits.

As part of the citizen participation process, focus group meetings were also held at the precinct level to help identify and evaluate characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses of the four precincts in Harris County. The focus group meetings were held at four Harris County Housing Authority Properties and three additional meetings were conducted as part of the developing the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development.

The results of the meetings helped us identify prominent issues facing Harris County and each of its four precincts. A brief outline of these issues is as follows:

Precinct One Issues

1. Lack of jobs and means of improving quality of life
2. Affordability concerns because of increasing rents
3. Lack of public transit/expand METRO service area
4. More parks and bike trails
5. Improve aging infrastructure to handle higher population and flooding

Precinct Two Issues

1. Safety concerns presented by large petrochemical facilities and the Port of Houston
2. Exposure to natural hazards (hurricanes, flooding) and recovering from Hurricane Ike
3. Lack of public transportation options
4. Higher quality housing options (many older homes and apartments present)
5. Improving safety and reducing crime

Precinct Three Issues

1. Reduce congestion and provide light/commuter rail option
2. Preserve the area's heritage while continuing to grow
3. Need to maintain safe, family friendly environment
4. Greater diversity of economic opportunities for all levels of education

5. Need to find balance between housing costs and commute time/distance

Precinct Four Issues

1. Increased traffic congestion from current and new developments
2. Loss of greens space and rural atmosphere
3. Lack of public transportation options
4. Affordable housing options beyond single-family homes needed, but need to avoid the stigma often associated with the term “affordable housing”
5. Need more sidewalks or trails that lead to commercial areas

The results of these meetings assisted in recognizing the needs, goals, and objectives of the services offered in Harris County and are a part of the Consolidated Plan.

CSD also assisted in the facilitation, coordination and presentation of the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County’s Community Charrette to help create a Community Action Plan to in compliance with the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act. This very large group of stakeholders discussed six distinct issue areas:

1. Integrating Housing and Services
2. Performance and Accountability
3. Right Sizing the Continuum of Care Housing Models
4. Prevention and Diversion
5. Coordinated Access
6. Political Will and Advocacy

Over 450 diverse stakeholders participated, including the following agencies:

- AIDS Foundation of Houston
- Alliance of Community Assistance Ministries
- Bay Area Homeless
- Bay Area Turning Point
- Bread of Life
- Catholic Charities
- City of Houston
- Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County
- Covenant House
- Harmony House
- Harris Health System
- Healthcare for the Homeless – Houston
- Houston Housing Authority
- Interfaith Caring Ministries
- Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority of Harris County
- Michael E. DeBakey Veteran's Administration Medical Center
- Neighborhood Centers Inc.
- Northwest Assistance Ministries

- Powell Foundation
- Salvation Army Houston
- Star of Hope
- The Beacon
- The Men’s Center
- The Women’s Home
- Unite Way of Greater Houston
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- Wells Fargo

The information obtained through this process was one of several primary considerations in the development of goals and objectives for each planning element described in the Strategic Plan section of the 2013-2017 Consolidated Plan.

Once the Plan draft was completed, the plan was made available to the public through the internet, and advertised in major publications including the Houston Chronicle and La Voz Spanish newspapers stating that the document was under review. During the following 30-day public review period, comments and suggestions were recorded and considered for addition and/or revision to the plan. In addition, a public hearing was held on December 6, 2012 in which Harris County residents voiced their opinions on the Consolidated Plan and the 2013 Annual Action Plan. All comments recorded during the public review period and public hearing was then added to the Consolidated Plan (see Appendix D).

The Request for Proposal (RFP) Process

Annually, Harris County is responsible for distributing its Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) and HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME) Program funds through a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process. These funds are awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on a formula basis and are distributed to governmental entities and organizations that serve low-income residents within Harris County's service area, as designated by HUD. These funds are granted to organizations that contribute programs or projects that improve the quality of life for low-income residents of Harris County.

PY2013, HCCSD received seventy-one (71) proposals in response to the competitive RFP, including eleven (11) pre-applications for CDBG General funding. Upon receipt of these proposals, each was assigned a file number and logged into the PY2013 RFP databases.

Proposal Evaluation Process

Overview. The proposal evaluation process included the assistance of staff from Development, Finance, Grants Management, Planning, Public Infrastructure Department (PID) and the Coalition for the Homeless Houston/ Harris County. The review process was divided into two phases, the initial eligibility review (Phase I) and the proposal review (Phase II). The purpose of Phase I is to determine initial eligibility based on HUD regulations for the CDBG, HOME and ESG programs.

Evaluation Activities. During Phase I of the review process, staff members reviewed all proposals assigned and determined eligibility based on the CDBG/HOME/ESG Eligibility Worksheets. At the conclusion of Phase I, the team members met to discuss their findings. These discussions resulted in the disqualification of seven proposals. Once the teams' findings were compiled into one document, they were presented to the Director for his review. Upon the conclusion of Phase I, letters were mailed to the organizations whose proposals were found to be ineligible. These letters included the reason(s) for disqualification and were signed by the Director.

Phase II evaluation consisted of a programmatic review of the projects by HCPID, HCCSD Development staff, environmental review by Planning staff and budget review by Finance staff. Following the completion of all reviews, Development staff members met during a funding conference to discuss evaluations and review each applicant's performance with Grants Management.

Evaluation Factors

While evaluating the proposals for initial eligibility, staff used the following established evaluation factors and criteria. These criteria was included in the RFP and incorporated into the evaluation worksheets.

- Does the project meet at least one National Objective?
- Does this project address a Measurable Objective outlined in the PY2013-2017 Harris County Consolidated Plan?

- Is this project located within the Harris County service area and/or serve Harris County service area residents?
- Does the organization have prior history with Harris County entitlement funds? If so, how is its past performance?
- Did the proposed project fall within the category of explicitly ineligible activities?

Staff evaluated each proposal based upon these criteria, made recommendations accordingly and justified these recommendations in the roundtable discussions.

Findings

While evaluating the proposals, staff used established evaluation criteria. These criteria were included in the RFP and incorporated into the evaluation worksheets. Each question on the objective review worksheets was assigned a point value. Scores were based on the following criteria:

- Priorities of the Consolidated Plan
- Completeness of proposal
- Diversity of funding base
- Availability of sources of funding for working capital
- Construction – work descriptions, plans, schedules and cost estimates (if applicable)
- Relocation policy (if applicable)
- Need and community impact
- Appropriate and measurable goals and objectives
- Marketing plans (if applicable)
- Program administration and operational expenses
- Organizational capacity
- Financial capacity
- Matching funds (if applicable)
- Duplication of services/products
- Geographic distribution of projects
- Funds available for allocation
- Past and current performance

Staff evaluated and scored each proposal based upon these criteria, made recommendations accordingly and justified these recommendations in the roundtable discussions.

Selection of Projects

Upon completion of the *Proposed Allocation Manager* and *Proposal Evaluation Summary*, the Assistant Director of Planning & Development met with the Community Development Director and Director to present the findings of the review process and the recommendations based on those reviews. The *Proposal Evaluation Summary* contains:

- A narrative outlining the activities throughout the RFP process and project selection;
- Proposed Allocation Manager;
- Proposal log;
- Complete listings of project results with funding recommendation comments;
- Evaluation instruments used in the proposal review processes; and

- Summary of Harris County projects.

The Director reviewed the reports and made his final recommendations for the first allocation. The projects above will be assembled and included in the PY2013 Annual Action Plan. The development of the Annual Action Plan is managed by Development Staff and includes all proposed projects. The document will be presented to the Grants Coordinator's office, the County Judge and Commissioners for approval on December 18, 2012.

Implementation Activities

Once the recommended projects are submitted in the Annual Action Plan, conditionally awarded applicants begin the contract negotiation process. At that time revised budgets and statements of work are submitted and processed for contract drafting by the Grants Management section.

The Consolidated Plan acts as a long-range guide for Harris County activities. It evaluates issues and needs in Harris County and provides an analysis of the housing conditions, homelessness population, and other community development issues. The strategic plan lists long-term goals of the department, as well as long-term objectives, which are a measurement of accomplishments. Each year, the Request for Proposals (RFP) process gathers grant applications from organizations that seek funding for their community development programs and projects. Upon application review and selection, Harris County describes the organizations selected to be subrecipients of funding, in the Annual Action Plan. At this point, the selected subrecipients become partners with Harris County in providing community development services to Harris County.

Once funding has been distributed to subrecipients, Harris County Grants Management provides technical assistance to the organizations to develop and manage projects so that, ultimately, their proposed accomplishments are met. Harris County staff then monitors the projects throughout the year, providing assistance as needed.

At the conclusion of the program year, the performance of each subrecipient is analyzed and evaluated according to their original proposed accomplishments. A Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) is then drafted, which describes the expenditures of each project and evaluates the impact of the project on the targeted population.

Harris County Community Services Department

The Harris County Commissioners Court originally established the Harris County Housing and Community Development Agency (HCDA), then the Harris County Community Development Agency (CDA) in 1975 to administer the Community Development Block Grant for Harris County. The program was authorized under Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 to improve the quality of living conditions of low- and moderate-income residents by providing decent housing, a suitable living environment and expanding economic opportunities.

More recently, the Harris County Commissioners Court changed the name of the department and established the Harris County Community & Economic Development Department (CEDD) in

September 2002. The name was changed again from CEDD to the Harris County Community Services Department (HCCSD) in 2008.

Harris County Community Services Department (HCCSD) acting as the lead agency to U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in Harris County is responsible for the development of the Consolidated Plan, the Annual Action Plan, and the Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation Report (CAPER). Harris County will administer the Consolidated Plan under the direction of the Harris County Commissioners Court. The five-year strategic plan will begin March 1, 2013 and guide Harris County's community development efforts until February 28, 2017. The Consolidated Plan will follow the format recommended by HUD ("Consolidated Submission for Community Planning and Development Programs," Federal Register, Vol. 60, No. 3) and its supplementals.

Finally, many of the statistics supporting needs, resources, strategies, goals, objectives and actions in the Consolidated Plan are based on the 2010 American Community Survey (ACS), 2000-2010 U.S. Census information, the 2005-2009 ACS Five Year CHAS data, and additional low-income information provided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Other resources included the Texas State Data Center, Houston/Harris County Coalition of the Homeless, Harris County Appraisal District, and Apartment Data Services Market TRAC Report for the Greater Houston MSA, and O'Connor and Associates, mention others. These data sources continue to release new and updated information yearly. Harris County will update the Consolidated Plan, as needed, throughout the five years.

Consolidated Plan Completeness

New Format

Prior to the Consolidated Plan Template, HUD did not require a specific format for the Consolidated Plan other than the required tables. The regulations indicate that a complete plan consists of information submitted in accordance with instructions prescribed by HUD or in such other format as jointly agreed upon by HUD and the jurisdiction.

The Consolidated Plan Template in IDIS Online provides a uniform and flexible template that helps ensure the Consolidated Plan is complete per the regulations found in 24 CFR Part 91. The template is divided into seven sections:

1. Setup
2. Executive Summary
3. The Process
4. Needs Assessment
5. Housing Market Analysis
6. Strategic Plan
7. First-Year Action Plan

Each screen in the template includes a combination of data tables and narrative sections that set a baseline for HUD's expectations for the amount of information required. Grantees have the option of adding additional content, in the form of maps, pictures, text boxes, and tables, to

support the baseline information. This allows grantees to customize the plan and add elements to tell a more compelling story.