

Article I. Community engagement

Section 1.01 Community Engagement Requirements

(a) Explain to the public the Fair Housing Act's AFFH duty and ensure the engagement meets all criteria

Community engagement is required under the Affirmatively Further Fair Housing (AFFH) rule (24 CFR § 5.158). The rule states, "...a solicitation of views and recommendations from community members and other interested parties, a consideration of the views and recommendations received, and a process for incorporating such views and recommendations into decisions and outcomes." This rule means that program participants must ensure that an AFH is informed by meaningful participation from the community. The equity plan should include a summary of community engagement, including public comments, a summary of comments, views, and recommendations, and an explanation as to why recommendations were not accepted.

Participants should include residents, interested community members, community-based organizations, housing agencies, and government agencies when conducting community engagements. The inclusion of different members of the community can help housing agencies collect a greater understanding of the jurisdiction.

At the time of creating this equity plan, the community engagement of BHA is in the early stages of planning and implementation. Recommendations will be given for the agency to accomplish community engagement successfully. These are all recommendations; therefore, they are subject to any changes. As AFFH is in its early stages, there is possibly more to do beyond these recommendations. The recommendations are again subject to change and, after further review, could be changed or adjusted to fit the needs of Bloomington and its residents.

(b) Communicate the meetings to the broadest possible audience

To reach the broadest audience possible, the agency should conduct in-person meetings, online (e.g., Zoom) meetings, surveys, and participate in other events throughout the city. Lastly, it is recommended that through the use of in-person/online meetings and surveys, residents be found to participate in focus groups. These are just an initial idea of possible engagement opportunities but are subject to changes or adjustments.

Conducting in-person meetings in multiple public locations allows residents to find a meeting close to them and at a convenient time. It is recommended that these meetings be held in local churches, libraries, and community centers. These locations are usually places where residents may feel more comfortable and familiar, which may lead to a greater turnout. In addition, these places would be close to bus stops, making it easier for residents to get there and from. Online meetings are also recommended as they are accessible to residents who may not be able to travel or cannot make it to an in-person meeting. It is advised that if online meetings/materials are utilized, Section 508 compliance is met. Section 508 Compliance states that all electronic and

information technology is accessible to those with disabilities. Online meetings, like in-person meetings, should be hosted during different times and dates. Both types of meetings can be beneficial as they can provide diverse opinions.

The use of surveys is also recommended as it can be easily shared and provide the agency with data from those who may need to be more comfortable expressing their thoughts in a large group setting. Surveys can help collect specific data, such as community members' experiences, behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes about fair housing. Surveys can also be beneficial as they can be translated into different languages, allowing those with LEP to be included. It is also recommended as it could assist in collecting and analyzing community demographics such as race/ethnicity, sex, LEPs, family, and disability status. It is also recommended that the survey be shared during meetings, on the BHA website, on social media, and possibly with other organizations focusing on housing. This, once again, would create a wider pool of responses.

To get more people to participate in community engagement, BHA should participate in more events and partner with other organizations. By participating in more city events, BHA will make themselves more known to other members of the community who are not already in the program or have never heard of BHA. At the time of writing these recommendations, BHA is planning on participating in Bloomington's Fiesta Del Otono. Fiesta Del Otono is the city's annual Hispanic Heritage Month festival. During this event, BHA will aim to form connections with the city's Hispanic community and inform them of our programs. Through collaboration with the city's Latino outreach coordinator, BHA will be able to participate in this event, which is known to have a large turnout. This is just one example of how, through partnering with other organizations, more people can be reached and informed about BHA. It is recommended that BHA partner up with other organizations that serve those with LEP to form that connection and trust.

Lastly, it is recommended that through these meetings, participants can be found to take part in focus groups. Focus groups are a great way of getting in-depth feedback from a small group of participants. Focus groups can also give us direct examples of inequalities in Bloomington. It can also be beneficial as it could help identify any repeating offenders or patterns of inequalities. It is greatly recommended that BHA hire a focus group firm to assist in these procedures.

These recommendations are subject to any changes or adjustments that will serve the residents and community members of the city. AFFH is still in its early stages, and as its requirements change or adjust, so will BHA's community engagement to fulfill those requirements.

(c) Three different meetings at various accessible locations and at different times to ensure that members of protected class groups and underserved communities are afforded opportunities to provide input

It is recommended that in-person meetings be held in the Monroe County Library, local churches, and at BHA's community building. In addition, if BHA chooses to partner up with other local organizations and they have the space, meetings can also be held there. All sessions can be held at these locations at various locations and times.

The Monroe County Library offers accessible parking and entrances for those with disabilities. The library is also a place that is familiar and can add a sense of comfort for those who take part in the meetings. The library is a public space offering free internet access and computers, which can help with more survey results. The downtown location is also recommended as it is located in the city's center, close to the bus station, and has three routes that stop at the library. The downtown location is also beneficial as people from all over the city go and use the library's resources. This means we can collect input from those who are underserved and living in non-underserved neighborhoods such as downtown Bloomington.

Local churches are also recommended for meeting locations. HUD Table 1 Demographics shows that Chinese and Spanish are the most common languages besides English. It is recommended that BHA partner up with local churches that offer services in these languages. By creating this connection, BHA can inform those with LEP and find community members who can help with translations. Teaming up with churches can also be beneficial as they may know of families who may be in need and can qualify for our programs. Hosting meetings at their local churches adds familiarity and makes members more comfortable participating.

Table 1 - Demographics			
(Bloomington, IN CDBG) Jurisdiction			
Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Language			
#1 LEP Language	Chinese	3,275	4.11%
#2 LEP Language	Spanish	2,005	2.51%
#3 LEP Language	Other Indo-European Language	1,735	2.18%
#4 LEP Language	Korean	1,270	1.59%
#5 LEP Language	Other Asian & Pacific Language	1,200	1.50%
#6 LEP Language	Other & Unspecified Language	775	0.97%
#7 LEP Language	French	545	0.68%
#8 LEP Language	West Germanic Language	510	0.64%
#9 LEP Language	Slavic Language	405	0.51%
#10 LEP Language	Vietnamese	170	0.21%

BHA's community building is also recommended as it is located in a residential neighborhood. Therefore, residents have easy access to it, offering accessible parking spots and entrances. The community building is also open to all community members and offers residents computers. By having access to computers, those without technology can use the resources there to complete the survey, for example. The building has not been finished at the time of this draft, but it is planned to be back up by the end of the year.

(i) At least one meeting in a location where underserved communities disproportionately reside

The Southwest Branch of the Monroe County Library is also recommended as a meeting location. The southside of Bloomington needs access to the city's center as few bus routes serve that side of town. Families in this community are farther away from the center of the city, which makes them underserved and may lack access to specific opportunities. By hosting a meeting

there, BHA connects with these residents and informs them of our program. Seeing as BHA is located on the North side of town, many of the residents in the South who do not have access to transportation may have never heard of the agency. By going directly to them, there is a sense of trust and community that is built. The Southwest branch is therefore recommended, seeing as many residents on that side of town may attend this meeting because of its accessibility and distance to home.

(d) Make data and information about fair housing public to those attending

It is recommended that BHA create marketing information and data public to those who attend the meetings. It is also recommended that these materials be translated into Chinese and Spanish so those with LEP are informed and have the same access as those who speak English. It is recommended that BHA hire an outside firm to assist with these translations. Making this information public can be done by having a specific section on the BHA website, through social media graphics or posts, and by sharing our data with other housing organizations. After community engagement, those who attended meetings can also send out emails with findings and data.

(e) Involve local community leaders

BHA can involve local community leaders by inviting them to meetings and informing them of our community engagement. They can be involved by spreading the word about meetings and attending them. They can also be engaged by helping identify families or individuals they believe may benefit from our program. BHA is recommended to work with religious leaders, zoning boards, and redevelopment commissions. Meeting with religious leaders can be a great way of connecting with them and learning about the needs they see within their communities. Zoning boards and redevelopment commissions can also be beneficial; these offices dictate what construction and development happens in the city.

It is also recommended that BHA work with Monroe County Community School Corporation as that can help identify families who'd be willing to participate or need assistance. Working with the local hospital would also be beneficial, such as posting our marketing material on bulletin boards and informing case workers of our programs. Working with these local leaders in the city can spread the word about our program and activities and form meaningful connections with residents of Bloomington.

(f) Conclusion

The recommendations above are subject to all changes and are merely recommendations to start the community engagement process. HUD recommends that the community engagement process take 40 days, a month, and 10 days. I recommend that BHA community engagement span 60 days, which is two months. This is because it gives more time to plan and reserve meeting spaces. This also would allow the survey to circulate longer, thus increasing submissions. In addition, this would enable meeting dates and times to be more spread out so burnout is not experienced. This increase in time is also beneficial as it allows us to plan to attend any other city events that we could participate in. For example, when writing this draft, BHA plans to attend Bloomington's annual Hispanic Heritage Month festival. By participating in this event, we will be able to connect with the Spanish-speaking community and build the foundation needed to

gain their trust and build a relationship. Other events such as these happen throughout the city yearly; therefore, participating in these events may be out of the 40/60-day timeframe. Regardless, participating in these events is still beneficial as there may be people in the city who may have never heard of BHA or its services. Aside from these recommendations, there is still much to do, and as the plan continues to develop, so may the way community engagement is conducted.