

**FY 2021 Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grants NOFO
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 NOFO language.

- 1. Our neighborhood has a lot of distressed housing, but it is neither “public housing” or “assisted housing.” Can we still apply for a Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant if our application meets the other eligibility criteria, but does not have “severely distressed public or HUD-assisted housing”?**

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 in the NOFO. The terms “assisted housing,” “public housing,” and “severely distressed housing” are defined in the Program Definitions section starting on page 8.

- 2. How many units or buildings need to be involved? If there are multiple buildings involved, how close geographically do they need to be to one another?**

There is no minimum or maximum for number of units or buildings designated as the target housing. There is no specific requirement about how close the projects must be to one another, but all the target housing must be located within the same neighborhood.

- 3. If several properties within a neighborhood have section 8 tenants living in them and the houses are distressed, could those properties qualify as “eligible target housing” for this program?**

No, the definition of “assisted housing” used in the Choice Neighborhoods program only includes properties receiving project-based section 8 assistance.

- 4. I would like clarification regarding Public Housing eligibility as it relates to the Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant. Within our target neighborhood, there are two public housing complexes – one has been deemed obsolete but is only occupied by elderly and disabled residents; the other housing complex is not severely distressed but the neighborhood around it experiences serious part I violent crime. Would these public housing projects combined meet the eligibility requirements for the program?**

No, each housing project identified as the ‘target housing’ must meet the program requirements: (1) be an eligible type of housing and (2) be severely distressed.

5. **If we have a co-applicant, aside from being an eligible applicant, must the co-applicant also meet all of the threshold requirements, statutory and regulatory requirements affecting eligibility and administrative/national/departement policy requirements for HUD recipients? Specifically, I am thinking of the outstanding civil rights threshold, outstanding delinquent Federal debts, compliance with fair housing requirements, etc.**

Yes, the Co-Applicant must also meet all eligibility requirements.

6. **Regarding the ‘Relation to Prior HOPE VI Revitalization Grants’ and statement that public housing projects previously funded through a HOPE VI Revitalization grant cannot be the target public housing project of a Choice Neighborhoods grant application, is there any leeway in the timeframe for properties having received HOPE VI funding in the past that would allow them to now be eligible for a Choice Neighborhoods grant?**

No, there is no ‘statute of limitations’ where a public housing unit that received HOPE VI funding can be eligible as the ‘target housing’ in a CN grant application. The prohibition applies to the entire public housing project that was the subject of the HOPE VI Revitalization Plan and does not differentiate among which funding source paid for the rehabilitation or redevelopment of specific units. An exception would be if the PHA demonstrated that, in accordance with 24(j)(2)(A)(v) of the 1937 Act, the target units were “sufficiently separable from the remainder of the project, of which the building is a part, to make use of the building feasible for transformation.”

7. **In Grants.gov, there are not enough slots for us to upload all the exhibits and attachments listed in the Choice Neighborhoods NOFO. How am I supposed to submit the application?**

Grants.gov is a system used by the entire Federal government and its structure does not necessarily reflect the Choice Neighborhoods NOFO. 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 NOFO and plug them into the slots provided by Grants.gov. Please be reminded that, as instructed in the NOFO, each narrative exhibit and attachment must be its own file. Do not simply create files that include multiple exhibits or attachments.

8. **If we have already demolished the target public housing site, via demolition approval from HUD’s Special Application Center, do we still need to get a severely distressed certification signed by an architect/engineer to include in the application?**

All applications must include the Certification of Severe Physical Distress (form HUD-53232). On the form, there is space to indicate the project has already been demolished.

- 9. We've already converted our public housing site through RAD to project-based vouchers (PBVs). Since PBVs are listed as one of the eligible types of "assisted housing" is it still eligible for a CN grant?**

No, units that have received the RAD Conversion Commitment (RCC) are not eligible to be included in an application for a Choice Neighborhoods grant. In addition, given the requirements of the RAD program to ensure stability of a project post-conversion, a unit that has undergone a RAD conversion would not meet the statutory definition of "severely distressed."

- 10. On page 33 under Format and Form, the NOFO states "80 pages maximum length of narratives" and on page 34 under Application Page Count it says that the application must contain "no more than 80 pages." Please clarify whether the 80-page limit includes the narrative exhibits and attachments or only the narrative exhibits.**

As specified on page 34, the maximum is 80 pages for narrative exhibits and attachments, excluding the exceptions listed.

- 11. Can you elaborate on what HUD considers to be the difference between a "Planning Coordinator" and a "planning partner"? The term 'Planning Coordinator' is defined in section I.A.4 of the NOFO, but then the "Capacity of a Planning Partner" rating factor refers to Planning Coordinators as one type of planning partner.**

A planning partner is an entity that will assist the applicant with leading/coordinating the proposed planning process. Such an entity can be a local philanthropic or other nonprofit organization. If such an organization has its own resources and will not be paid for with Choice Neighborhoods grant funds, then it does not need to be competitively procured by the applicant/grantee in accordance with Federal regulations. A Planning Coordinator is an entity that is hired by the applicant/grantee to assist with leading/coordinating the planning process and will be paid through the Choice Neighborhoods grant (or other Federal funding).

- 12. If we hire an individual or entity to help us write our Choice Neighborhoods grant application and then are awarded a grant, could we later choose to hire that grant writer to be our Planning Coordinator or provide other technical assistance to the planning process?**

It depends. As stated on page 19 of the NOFO, "a Planning Coordinator may participate in a maximum of two applications under this NOFA." While this provision only applies to the commitment or intention to commit to participate in the Planning Grant activities funded under this NOFA, hiring an entity for grant writing assistance and not identifying them as the proposed Planning Coordinator until after grant award should not be considered a way to get around that NOFO limitation. If the individual or entity did not commit or intend to commit to participate in the activities funded under this NOFO, then there is no restriction on them being procured to provide technical assistance post award.

13. Our neighborhood is located within an Opportunity Zone. Can we earn the points under the “Alignment with Existing Efforts” rating factor in addition to the two points available for under the Preference Points section?

No. An application may only earn the two points under the Preference Points section for Opportunity Zones.

14. Do we need a ‘wet’ signature for any of the documents in our grant application or can we use digital signatures?

HUD will accept digitally signed documents. However, the applicant should take care not to reformat the document in a way that would erase the digital signature when uploading files via grants.gov.

15. For the Part I Violent Crime Rate rating factor, the NOFO says we should provide data for the three years 2017-2019. Should we provide 2018-2020 instead since that would be the most recent three calendar years?

No, applicants must provide the Part I Violent Crime data for 2017-2019 as stated in the NOFO.