

Transcript: The Role of the CDBG Program in Creating a Suitable Living Environment

The CDBG program can be used in a variety of ways to improve people's quality of life by creating suitable living environments. Some common projects include improving facilities such as senior centers or neighborhood centers.

The Germantown community is really a community that is so diverse. There were a lot of years prior to that that people didn't feel part of the fabric of the community; they felt like they didn't have a voice. When this community center came to their new home, it opened up a new set of ideas for people. A whole idea of hope that it could be theirs and belongs to this community.

You can see it changes people's lives, people don't think about it. I mean, how many people are going hungry? And how many people have food on the table because of this place? I'd be a fool to not want to be a part of that.

CDBG-eligible public services include providing employment opportunities to persons with disabilities, child care services, or food programs.

The most important thing I found so far is just being there for them and being an ear to listen. Some of them really don't have someone at home.

Low income communities may use CDBG to install basic infrastructure or upgrade infrastructure in low income neighborhoods. Three of the many communities who identify gaps in the living environment of their low income residents and creatively use CDBG to craft a solution are Quincy, Massachusetts, Indio, Massachusetts, and Loudoun County, Virginia.

The story of the Manet Community Health Center is of a grassroots movement to open a small clinic in an underserved area with CDBG funds, that has grown into a sophisticated health facility over time.

That is why we're here. It started here 30 years ago, or 35 years ago by a group of people found there were patients with no access to care or who were voiceless or disenfranchised. The organization came together here to share the facility that is used as a neighborhood center to create a community health center adjacent, to be the access point for those who either had no insurance or were using emergency rooms or not seeking care at all.

If Manet were not here there would be a huge gap in the care, we've had approximately 50,000 visits in the last year. So that would be, I want to say about 5,000 or more patients that come to Hough's Neck, so it would make it more difficult for patients to have access to primary care if it were not here.

I come from a population of 800. Coming to this community health center gives me a sense of community. They know who I am. And that is important to me.

On the other side of the country, in the desert community of Indio, the city was concerned about older neighborhoods lacking basic amenities and feeling overlooked. They created the Better Neighborhoods Program to have residents choose the CDBG improvements that would make the most difference in their neighborhood, then work with a team of city departments to make it happen.

Our major challenge number one is our old aging infrastructure. In 2010 when the Better Neighborhoods Program was introduced it made sense to us that we needed to start investing into our most poor neighborhoods.

We looked around at what other cities were doing, we looked at the needs of our community and felt we need to engage the community more than we had been doing. And so the Better Neighborhoods Program takes this approach that relies on citizen involvement, going into the neighborhoods and engaging residents in the process.

In this process we have taken decision making past the local electeds and city staff to the residence themselves. They make the decisions in their communities, what they want to see and what they want to investment through our CDBG dollars and city dollars to bring projects to fruition.

Burr neighborhood chose a park as their top priority.

It brings kids together to have somewhere to go. You know, they have to, it helps that they can show respects towards it. This is a thing they're contributing to their neighborhood by joining together and playing and they can participate together on a united type of situation.

Valencia neighborhood focused on sidewalks along with park upgrades.

Doesn't seem like a big deal, a sidewalk. But it makes a huge difference to people that are using it. You know, and to stay out of the cars, and traffic.

Neighborhood clean ups are a part of each neighborhood's package.

Once you clean up an area in the neighborhood the sense of pride in the residents is really amazing. They start to keep their yards cleaner and take more pride in ownership of what they have. It's beautiful, it really is.

In Loudoun County, Virginia, four different homeless shelters were facing issues from contamination nation and lack of coordinated services, so the county used CDBG funds for a centralized homeless center.

Here in Loudoun County, there's been a growing need to provide a place of refuge, a place of civility for the homeless, and this is a wonderful facility for that too, because of the increase in population there is more space and there is more programming and more case management to help them get back on their feet.

Loudoun is unique in many ways because it's one of the fastest-growing communities and one of the richest communities. For the homeless population that doesn't always, that is not a positive thing because we're overlooked in many grant opportunities because we're seen as a wealthy community. So we lose out on grant dollars sometimes because of that.

One of the things we can say we do well is collaborating with community partners. And we do have a quarterly meeting we have here with stakeholders involved with the shelter. We have representatives from family services and mental health, we have Volunteers of America at the table and we are talking about you know, what are the issues that we need to address, what is working well? What is not working well? Those are really the same partners that came together when we had a need to shelter and what would work here, what you wouldn't, the layout.

In creating a suitable living environment, the goal is to make improvement that are sustainable over time. The key to enduring impact is creation of strong partnerships as in our three sample projects.

The project is a wonderful example of coordination, different organizations and different funding sources. The county initiated the idea of a new facility and then there was a gap in funding, and CDBG

was able to come forward and then, in addition once the facility is built we've got a management company through a nonprofit, contracting with the county to provide management services, we've got other agencies providing case management and emergency assistance.

The city recognized in order to create this positive change we have to involve other departments; our engineers, our code enforcement, our police department, animal enforcement, housing, community development, just the who gamut of programs and services that are available within the city. You can't do it without them, that partnership, that collaboration.

One of the things the Department of Public Health has been able to do in our partnership with Manet is leverage some of the capital investments that are made through the Community Development Block Grant for example, by putting our investments into programmatic activities that sit on the corner stone of the capital investments that are made through CDBG. And because of that leveraging of those funds we are able to make inroads into improving community health and it's a great partnership.

The results are a better quality of life for residents over decades.

They recognize that this is a low-income area, we don't have that opportunity to drift off and go to other neighborhoods and say hey, we're going to upgrade and move on. We have to have it here. And this is one thing we did recognize is that the city and the government planning did recognize. We appreciate that.

I had two cancer operations in my throat. And with radiation in my lungs. And I have a few spots of cancer, skin cancer. Only reason I'm telling you this, I have an appointment here at Hough's Neck and I'm going to get my skin cancer treated. They have a cancer freezing machine at Hough's Neck. Can you believe that? I can't believe it. From what, you know, what we try to do in the beginning and what we have to work with. To have a machine like that, that is incredible. That is really important. No doubt bit.

Thank you for giving us this opportunity and for just having been able to be on the receiving end of the CDBG funds is huge, not just for our residents that are here now but for the ones that are still to come.