



# Community Involvement Program Guidelines for Land Banks

## About this Tool

### Description:

This document provides guidance on the community outreach process in land banking. It discusses strategies for communicating meetings and activities to the public, tips for establishing a meaningful dialogue with the community, and guidance on evaluating a community involvement program. It also provides a definition of “community” in the context of community outreach for land banking.

### How to Adapt this Document:

This document should be used as a guide for creating a community outreach plan and program that meets the needs of the individual municipality and land bank. This guidance should be a starting point for community outreach and dialogue, and the process may be customized based on the overall size of the land banking program.

### Source of Document:

Center for Community Progress

### Disclaimer:

This document is not an official HUD document and has not been reviewed by HUD counsel. It is provided for informational purposes only. Any binding agreement should be reviewed by attorneys for the parties to the agreement and must conform to state and local laws.

This resource is part of the NSP Toolkits. Additional toolkit resources may be found at [www.hud.gov/nspta](http://www.hud.gov/nspta)

## **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM GUIDELINES FOR LAND BANKS**

Community involvement guidelines will provide land banks with a framework to ensure that land banks include community input in the development of policies, program goals, outreach procedures, evaluation, etc. Community involvement is a key component of successful land bank programs. A community outreach plan is an effective tool for managing community involvement activities. The purpose of this plan is to help land banks who wish to develop and implement a community outreach program to support NSP eligible activities with foreclosed properties. The benefit of an outreach strategy is the ability to ‘control the message,’ build a base of support and understanding, document progress, and learn what stakeholders think so that land banks may adjust accordingly.

Your community outreach plan should be appropriate for the size of the locality. Cities with larger, more extensive land bank programs may expect to have a more extensive long-term community outreach plan. Smaller counties, cities, towns, or land banking organizations may need a less extensive, shorter term community outreach plan. At a minimum, your program should demonstrate a commitment to open, two-way communication with the people living or working near the properties being evaluated or targeted for land bank redevelopment.

### ***Goals, Activities, and Schedule***

Land banks should create a plan and specify what outreach activities will be implemented. Furthermore, a timeline should be created to indicate when community outreach activities will occur. Allow time to prepare for successful events. Program evaluation and specific techniques for evaluating each activity should be included in your planning.

Activities could include public meetings, land bank NSP redevelopment workshops, and/or site visits (if the site is considered safe for visiting). Meetings should be scheduled well in advance and at times that are convenient for community participants. This may mean holding meetings during the evening or other times outside of typical business hours. It also includes seeking input from stakeholders, especially potential community participants, as to when and where meetings will be held. Distribute information on meetings and other activities in a manner that encourages participation. Announcements and notifications should be targeted toward all potentially high foreclosure affected neighborhoods and stakeholders, and all income and age groups.

The following are potential ways to announce meetings and activities:

- Newspapers
- community newsletters
- notices displayed in stores, libraries, churches, community bulletin boards, and other public locations
- announcements on community television programs
- telephone calls or direct mailings to non-governmental organizations, and community groups in the area
- door-to-door personal invitations

You may wish to work on a mutually agreeable schedule for meetings and other activities in an initial meeting. If your program is large, it may be appropriate to set up subgroups to meet on specific topics, or to organize community activities which will increase community interest and participation in land bank programs and redevelopment decisions.

### ***Who Is the Community?***

Avoid defining the community too narrowly or targeting only selected groups for participation in your community outreach activities. Use an “open admissions” policy that allows good faith participation of any interested individual or group. Potential community participants include the following:

- local residents
- local businesses
- educational institutions
- neighborhood associations
- school, religious, civic, and other non-government organizations;
- healthcare providers, and police and fire departments
- elected or appointed officials
- people in other neighborhoods or the larger community who live in close proximity to land bank properties or have an interest in redevelopment of foreclosed properties.

### ***Education and Information for the Community***

After preparation of a community outreach plan, consider in detail the initial steps that will be taken to provide land bank neighborhood stabilization program, community plans, land banking and site-specific information to the community. The community will need adequate background information to participate or provide input to decision

making. Many interested members of the community are likely to have little, if any, knowledge of the background, history, or redevelopment options for land banking and the targeted areas or property.

A critical first step in establishing a meaningful dialogue is to provide the community with background information on NSP, land banking and foreclosure to help individuals identify issues that are relevant and important to them. The community needs to know what decisions are already made and what decisions their input will affect. You should provide this information in a format that community representatives can understand. Often it is helpful to use more than one format – verbal presentations accompanied by written handouts, for example.

If members of the community are not native English speakers, providing translators and/or written materials in the native language of the community may be useful. This educational component of the outreach program may be accomplished by using several of a variety of activities or tools:

- educational workshops
- informational meetings
- community day or fair to bring together different age groups
- bus or walking tours of targeted areas of redevelopment (i.e. NSP Target Areas)
- visual-aids – maps, pictures, or conceptual drawings
- summaries of important documents – environmental reports, neighborhood plans, etc.

### ***Focus for Community Dialogue***

Communication is a two-way process. You need to provide information to the community, and the community needs to provide information to you. Community representatives and other stakeholders should be invited to jointly decide what topics and issues need discussion, more explanation, or further study. Information generated as the result of community requests should be presented in a format readily understood by or explained to the community. The following questions may be asked by stakeholders:

- Are there any known immediate safety or health concerns?
- Are there immediate plans for securing the site, and/or removing debris or maintenance?
- What is the compliance status with environmental condition, local job creation, affordability?

- Are there already plans for redevelopment?
- Will zoning for the properties change?
- What is the timeline for redevelopment activities on the site?
- How will my participation affect the future of this property and neighborhood stabilization?

### ***Community Outreach Program Evaluation***

You should develop a system to continually evaluate the effectiveness and relevancy of your community outreach program. Possible options include obtaining feedback from community members who participate in community outreach meetings and activities by distributing questionnaires and conducting informal interviews. Include a description of your process for evaluating the effectiveness of your program in your community outreach plan. It is critical to track activities such as: how many mailings, emails, posts have been distributed; how many sessions took place and what was the attendance; and how many one-on-one briefings took place. Set up a system that protects the identity and privacy of individuals who participate in evaluation activities.

In order for land banks to use the evaluation of community involvement for the development of policies, program goals, future outreach procedures, etc., make sure that you continue to assess the effectiveness of each activity, look at the short and long-term goals of community involvement, and compare results with the plan to see what worked, what didn't, and how to improve. The changes implemented as a result of community input and involvement will demonstrate that they are willing and open to partner with the community to stabilize neighborhoods, thus rebuilding communities for the benefit of all.