

CITY OF HOUSTON

# Language Assistance Plan

FOR THE

## HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

UPDATED MAY 2014

ORIGINAL MAY 2013



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# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Development of the Plan .....	2
Four Factor Analysis .....	3
Factor 1 .....	3
Factor 2 .....	5
Factor 3 .....	5
Factor 4 .....	6
Language Assistance Measures .....	7
Oral Interpretation Services .....	7
Written Translation Services .....	8
Working with Subrecipients of Federal Funding .....	9
Staff Training and Coordination.....	10
Providing Notice to LEP Persons: Marketing and Outreach .....	11
Record Keeping and Evaluation .....	12
Appendix: HCDD Essential Public Information .....	13

## Introduction

The City of Houston is an incredibly diverse community where residents speak many different languages. More than 46% of Houston's almost 2 million residents over the age of 5 years old speak a language other than English at home (2008-2012 American Community Survey). Many Houstonians, whose first language is not English, may have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English and are considered limited English proficient or "LEP". LEP individuals may not have the same access to important housing and social services as those who are English proficient. LEP individuals may lack the social networks to connect them to housing services and programs; if connected to the programs, they may fail to comply with applicable responsibilities that could qualify them for programs and services. For these and other reasons, LEP individuals may encounter significant barriers to housing and social service programs.

### Federal Authority

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI) is the federal law that protects individuals from discrimination on the basis of their race, color, or national origin in programs that receive federal financial assistance. In certain situations, failure to ensure that persons who are LEP can effectively participate in or benefit from federally assisted programs may violate Title VI's prohibition against national origin discrimination.

Title VI requires organizations whose programs are federally funded to ensure meaningful access to those programs. In order to promote meaningful access for LEP persons to housing services and programs, the City of Houston Housing and Community Development Department (HCDD) prepared this Language Assistance Plan. HCDD administers various HUD funded activities through special grants and entitlement grants including Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Home Investment Partnerships Grant (HOME), Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA), and Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG).

Federally assisted recipients are required to make reasonable efforts to provide language assistance to ensure meaningful access for LEP persons to the recipient's programs and activities. To do this, the recipient can:

- 1) Conduct a four-factor analysis
- 2) Develop a Language Access Plan
- 3) Provide appropriate language assistance

The purpose of this Language Assistance Plan is to implement a process by which HCDD will provide greater access and participation in its services, programs, and activities for Houstonians with limited English proficiency. This Language Assistance Plan sets forth a framework of the language services and procedures that HCDD will implement in order to address the needs of LEP persons. In developing the Language Assistance Plan, HCDD followed guidelines issued by HUD including the recommended four-factor analysis to determine LEP needs and organizational capacity to meet those needs.

### Local Authority

On July 31, 2013, Mayor Annise Parker signed Executive Order 1-17 under the authority of Article VI, Section 7a, of the City Charter of the City of Houston. The order mandates all City departments to establish policies for providing information about City services, programs, and activities to residents and visitors who are LEP persons. As per the Executive Order, "Essential Public Information", which is defined as any information developed or used by the department or deemed vital for purpose of public safety, public health, and economic development, shall be translated into the top 5 commonly-used languages, when feasible.

## Development of the Plan

HCDD developed this Language Assistance Plan to help identify reasonable steps to ensure nondiscrimination for providing language assistance to persons with limited English proficiency who seek services and programs funded by HCDD. As defined in Executive Order 13166, LEP persons are those who do not speak English as their primary language and have limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English.

This plan outlines how to identify a person who may need language assistance, the ways in which assistance may be provided, staff training that may be required, and how to notify LEP persons that assistance is available.

In order to prepare the document, HCDD undertook the four-factor analysis which takes into account the following:

1. The number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the programs and services provided through HCDD funding.
2. The frequency with which LEP persons come into contact with the CDBG programs and services.
3. The nature and importance of the CDBG programs and services to the person's life.
4. The resources available to City staff and overall costs to provide LEP assistance.

## Four Factor Analysis

The four-factor analysis is recommended by HUD in order to determine the eligible LEP population and the level of need for language services to be provided to LEP individuals by HCDD. HCDD prioritizes language access by utilizing the list of most spoken citywide LEP languages based on Census data and internal research. HCDD provides services to LEP customers by various methods based upon the relative number of such persons and the frequency of contacts or anticipated contacts. Reasonable steps are taken to accomplish the goal of providing meaningful access to LEP persons within the cost limitations of HCDD funding.

**Factor 1: The number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the programs and services provided through HCDD funding.**

HCDD used the 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates to determine the potential LEP population in the City of Houston. The following tables provide information about these populations.

Compared to the Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), Texas, and the U.S, the City of Houston has the highest percentage of multi-lingual residents with almost half of the residents 5 years or older speaking a language other than English at home. There is also a higher percentage of residents within the City of Houston that speak English "Less Than Very Well", even compared to the Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown Metropolitan Area.

### Breakdown of Population 5 Years or Older – Language Spoken at Home

	United States	Texas	Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown Metro Area	City of Houston
Total Population	289,000,827	23,280,055	5,490,490	1,938,003
Speak English Only	79.5%	65.4%	62.8%	53.8%
Speak English Only or Speak English "Very Well"	91.3%	85.6%	82.8%	75.9%
Speak English "Less Than Very Well"	8.7%	14.4%	17.2%	24.1%

*Source: Table S16001, 2008-2012 American Community Survey*

The City of Houston is a diverse community. Houston residents speak more than 39 different languages. The most frequently spoken non-English languages are Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese (2008-2012 American Community Survey, Table S16001).

### Language Spoken at Home for the Population 5 Years or Older in the City of Houston

Language Spoken at Home	# of Persons	% of Population
Spanish or Spanish Creole	729,528	37.6%
Vietnamese	33,285	1.7%
Chinese	24,286	1.3%
African Languages	12,503	0.6%
Other Asian Languages	9,410	0.5%
French	9,058	0.5%
Arabic	8,580	0.4%
Hindi	8,203	0.4%

*Source: Table S16001, 2008-2012 American Community Survey*

Estimating the number of residents with limited English proficiency is important when identifying the need for language services. The following shows the number of City of Houston residents that speak English "Less than Very Well". Those with limited English proficiency most frequently speak Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, and Urdu.

**Populations 5 Years or Older by Language That Speak English “Less than Very Well” in City of Houston**

Language Spoken at Home	Population	Percent of Total Population	2 Year Change
Spanish or Creole	397,429	21.5%	-0.3%
Vietnamese	21,584	1.1%	11.5%
Chinese	13,521	0.7%	2.7%
Other Asian Languages	3,580	0.2%	66.9%
African Languages	3,364	0.2%	-0.1%
Arabic	3,324	0.2%	19.7%
Urdu	2,783	0.1%	24.5%
Other Indic Languages	2,718	0.1%	22.9%
Korean	2,498	0.1%	-9.9%
French (incl. Patois, Cajun)	2,084	0.1%	7.6%
Hindi	2,041	0.1%	31.3%
Persian	1,612	0.1%	23.3%
Tagalog	1,551	0.1%	30.7%
Russian	1,388	0.1%	-4.7%

Source: Table S16001, 2006-2010 American Community Survey and 2008-2012 American Community Survey

Residents living below the poverty line are in greater need of services that HCDD funding helps to provide, including housing and supportive services for low- and moderate-income persons. Examining the language spoken by the population living in poverty can help determine language needs of those in poverty and thus those most in need of HCDD services. In 2013 poverty is defined as those households who make \$23,550 for a household of four (<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/13poverty.cfm#thresholds>). The Area Median Income (AMI) in the Houston Metropolitan Area for a family of four is \$66,800 and the Poverty Line is approximately 35% of AMI (<http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/il/il13/index.html>).

**Poverty Status in the City of Houston by Language Spoken at Home for Population 5 Year and Over**

	Population	Percent of Total Population	Percent of Population in Poverty
People in Poverty	400,069	21%	100%
Speak Spanish	198,897	10%	50%
Speak Asian and Pacific Island languages	14,133	1%	4%
Speak other Indo-European languages	10,668	1%	3%
Speak other languages	5,172	0%	1%

Source: Table B16009, 2008-2012 American Community Survey

**Summary of the U.S. Census American Community Survey Data:**

- Almost half (45.7%) of the population living in the City of Houston speaks English and another language, which is a greater percentage compared to the United States (20.5%), Texas (34.6%), and the metropolitan area (37.2%).
- The most common languages spoken at home in the City of Houston are Spanish, Vietnamese and Chinese.
- Almost one quarter (24.1%) of the population living in the City of Houston speaks English “less than well”, which is a greater percentage compared to the United States (8.7%), Texas (14.4%), and the metropolitan area (17.2%).
- More than one fifth (21.5%) of the population living in the City of Houston speak Spanish and speak English “less than well”. Two other languages have a significant number of people that speak English “less than well”: Chinese (1.1%), Vietnamese (0.7%), Arabic (0.2%), and Urdu (0.1%).
- Half (50%) of the people living in poverty in Houston speak Spanish at home.

**Factor 2: The frequency with which LEP persons come into contact with HCDD programs and services.**

There are three primary ways that residents, including LEP persons, contact HCDD to inquire about HCDD programming and assistance. First, HCDD's front desk staff person directs callers and visitors to the appropriate HCDD Division staff member or to other City Departments. Second, HCDD's Homebuyer's Hotline / Housing Call Center answers questions and serves as the first step to participation in HCDD's housing programs including the Single Family Home Repair Program and Homebuyer's Assistance Program. Finally, the Fair Housing Office receives calls from citizens needing assistance with landlord/tenant relations or other fair housing concerns. These HCDD staff members interact with potential clients, including LEP clients, on a daily basis over the phone and in-person. Other staff members have less frequent interaction with LEP persons.

There is limited data available regarding HCDD staff contacts with LEP persons. Conversations with HCDD program staff provide anecdotal evidence about the frequency of contacts of the various LEP language groups with HCDD programs. This anecdotal evidence suggests that staff most frequently come in contact with LEP Spanish speakers that need language assistance. The second most frequent contacts are with Vietnamese speakers; however, these contacts are much less compared with LEP Spanish speakers.

**Factor 3: The nature and importance of the HCDD program, activity or service to the person's life.**

The majority of contacts between HCDD staff and LEP persons are through phone calls, in-person meetings, and written communication. The following illustrates the contacts between HCDD Divisions and Offices and the services provided to the public.

Division/Office	Target Population	Core Service	Level of Importance to LEP Population
Homebuyer's Assistance Program	LMI homebuyers	Provides funding assistance to LMI households purchasing homes	High
Single Family Home Repair Program	LMI homeowners	Provides funding assistance to LMI homeowners to repair, rehab, or rebuild their current home	High
Fair Housing Hotline	Residents or potential residents of Houston	Assists residents of the Houston area who believe they have experienced discrimination under the Fair Housing Act	High
Public Services Program	LMI residents, homeless persons, HOPWA persons and other special needs populations; subrecipients	Funds nonprofits and city departments in support of housing and related supportive service programs	High
Public Information Office	City of Houston residents, stakeholders, City Council	Provides information about HCDD activities	High
Municipal & Private/Public Facilities	LMI residents and special needs populations; subrecipients	Funds subrecipients rehabbing and constructing public facilities (parks, neighborhood facilities) and funds other city departments for lead abatement and code enforcement activities	Medium
Multifamily/ Commercial Construction	LMI residents in need of housing; special needs populations in need of housing; developers	Funds non-profit and for-profit developers to rehab or build affordable housing or create economic development opportunities	Medium
Planning and Grants Management	Internal staff and Houston residents	Ensures HCDD's compliance with all applicable laws and regulations and plans for future activities by soliciting public input	Medium
Compliance and Monitoring	Internal staff, subrecipients, developers, and contractors	Monitors HCDD contracts, activities associated with Section 3, Davis-Bacon, MBE, Environmental Assessments, Fair Housing	Low
Finance	Internal staff	Handles financial reporting, budgeting, payment processing, and IT Services	Low
Administration and Procurement	Internal staff	Handles records management, facilities, administrative services, and procurement activities	Low

**Factor 4: The resources available to city staff and overall costs to provide LEP assistance.**

HCDD utilizes a combination of multilingual staff members and procured vendors as professional, competent translators and interpreters. HCDD staff address most language assistance needs. Staff assist with over-the-phone and in-person interpretation, as well as, some document translation services. The City of Houston implements a bilingual pay system in which employees are identified as translators (Bilingual Pay Policy for Municipal Employees, Administrative Policy No. 3-9). HCDD staff have access to a list of bilingual HCDD employees that can assist with interpretation through the Staff Directory, which is updated regularly. If HCDD bilingual staff members are not proficient in the language needed, the City's Human Resources Department may assist in locating a bilingual staff person that can assist with translation from another city department. These are low cost methods of providing language services.

The City of Houston's 3-1-1 service request line has a contract with Language Line, which assists with over-the-phone translation services in over 170 languages and is available twenty-four hours a day. HCDD staff may use the Language Line. In addition, HCDD may contract with area vendors to provide in-person interpretation upon request in advance of public hearings. HCDD will procure qualified area vendors for written translation, when needed and as funding allows.

As a result of the Houston's Executive Order 1-17, the Mayor's language access designee will provide technical assistance and resources to assist in the implementation of HCDD's Language Assistance Plan.

## Language Assistance Measures

In order to promote equal access to HCDD programs and services by LEP individuals, HCDD will implement the following array of language assistance services. Actions will be implemented and monitored by HCDD staff.

HCDD will provide the appropriate level of oral interpretation and written translation services based on the four factor analysis and Houston's Executive Order 1-17. Members of most language groups will at least have the ability to receive oral translation services through 3-1-1's Language Line if an HCDD or City staff member cannot provide oral translation services adequately. However, due to financial constraints and undemonstrated need at this time for certain program documents to receive written translation, HCDD will focus its resources on providing written translations for LEP populations with the greatest language needs.

### Oral Interpretation Services

The need for oral interpretation services arises in one of two ways: either HCDD staff receive a telephone call or a client visits the HCDD office or a public hearing. The following describes the process that HCDD will use when receiving LEP clients through telephone communication or in-person visits. This process follows the City's Administrative Procedure for handling LEP individuals.

#### Telephone Communication

1. The HCDD Staff Directory indicates individuals within HCDD who can speak a non-English language and receive bilingual pay. The Staff Directory is available to all HCDD staff.
2. A staff member who receives a call from a LEP client will assess the primary language needed by the client. If that staff member is listed as bilingual in the Staff Directory and speaks a language relevant to the LEP caller, then that staff member will assist the client. If communication becomes difficult for any reason, the staff member will transfer the call to another HCDD employee identified on the Staff Directory as having language skills relevant to the LEP caller.
3. If a HCDD staff member receives a call from a LEP client and does not speak the language of the caller, the staff member will transfer the call to another member who is listed in the Staff Directory with relevant language skills.
4. If there is not a HCDD staff member indicated on the Staff Directory that speaks a language relevant to the LEP caller, then the staff member can use the 3-1-1 Language Line to communicate with the caller.

#### In-Person Client Visit

LEP clients visit the HCDD office for meetings with program staff, mostly regarding the Homeowner Repair Program. Other LEP clients may visit the office for general information about HCDD programs.

1. For in-person client visits, the front-desk staff member is the first point of contact with the client. Front desk staff will assess the language needs of in-person LEP visitors. Staff will be equipped with HUD's "I Speak" language card to facilitate language identification, if necessary. After identifying the relevant language, front desk staff will refer to the Staff Directory to identify staff that may best assist the client.
2. The identified staff member will meet with the LEP individual and provide oral translation services.
3. If no HCDD staff members can effectively assist an LEP individual, then the staff member may utilize the 3-1-1 Language Line.

4. If needed, HCDD may ask for assistance from other city staff that receive bilingual pay and speak languages other than those spoken by HCDD staff. The City's Human Resources Department will assist with identifying other city staff that may assist with language needs including in-person interpretation services.

#### Public Hearing Interpretation Assistance

When needed, HCDD will contract with area vendors to provide in-person interpretation upon request in advance of public hearings. HCDD may provide in-person interpretation for Public Hearings without advanced request, as need is anticipated and as funding is available.

### **Written Translation Services**

#### City's Executive Order

The City's Executive Order 1-17 defines "essential public information" as any information developed or used by the department and deemed vital for purposes of public safety, public health, and economic development. The Executive Order stipulates that, when feasible, the City shall translate "essential public information" into five commonly-used languages, as determined by the Office of International Communities. These five languages are:

1. Spanish
2. Vietnamese
3. Chinese
4. Arabic
5. Urdu

Staff will propose documents that meet the criteria of "essential public information" and final determination of which HCDD documents meet the "essential public information" criteria will be made by the Department Director or the Director's designee. One HCDD document meets the City's criteria and is provided in the Appendix of this Plan.

#### HUD Guidance

HUD guidance specifies that "vital" documents be translated for eligible LEP persons. HUD's Final Guidance defines vital documents as "any document that is critical for ensuring meaningful access to the recipients' major activities and programs by beneficiaries generally and LEP persons specifically". HUD characterizes a document as vital depending "upon the importance of the program, information encounter, or service involved, and the consequence to the LEP person if the information in question is not provided accurately or in a timely manner" (Federal Register / Vol. 72, No. 13 / Monday, January 22, 2007 / Notices p. 2732). However, this does not mean that a "vital" document should automatically receive written translation. Under the four factor framework, the frequency of contact with the document and organizational resources must also be considered.

HCDD does not currently collect data on which documents and programs are most accessed by each LEP language group, and so it is difficult to assess the frequency with which LEP clients access certain HCDD programs. As identified in the four factor analysis, anecdotal evidence through conversations with HCDD program staff suggest that Spanish speakers have had the greatest demand for language services, in particular the housing programs. In the future, data collection will be enhanced to allow HCDD to more accurately assess LEP needs within programs. The data will be used to refine the Plan during future reviews to more effectively serve LEP clients.

If oral translation, other program material, or a summary of a written document cannot be provided, a written translation of the document may best serve LEP individuals. The following provides a framework that will be used to assess which program documents may qualify for written translation into non-English languages.

Framework for Providing Written Translation Materials		
	Document does not need translation	Document may need translation
Can the document be translated orally?	Yes	No
Do LEP clients frequently access the document?	No	Yes
Is the document the only material available for increasing LEP client access to housing programs and social services?	No	Yes

## Working with Subrecipients of Federal Funding

HUD guidance specifies that subrecipients of HUD funding are subject to LEP guidelines. HCDD administers various forms of HUD funding to nonprofit and other community organizations. HCDD will collaborate with these organizations so that they understand LEP guidelines.

Since HCDD funds a diverse group of organizations providing a wide range of services, there is not one approach to developing each nonprofit's Language Assistance Plan. In addition, subrecipients may not have the resources and may choose not to develop a written Language Assistance Plan, however organizations without a written plan must still ensure meaningful access to their programs and activities by LEP persons. HCDD will work with subrecipients who elect not to develop a written plan, to find alternative ways to illustrate and record their plans to provide meaningful access to LEP individuals.

## Staff Training and Coordination

HCDD will provide training on the required assistance actions under the Language Assistance Plan for HCDD employees. This will include:

1. Training: As needed, training will be scheduled for all employees to review the Language Assistance Plan elements and inform staff of their responsibilities relative to LEP persons. On an ongoing basis, periodic refresher training will be provided to staff who regularly interact with HCDD clients. Discussion about the Language Assistance Plan and procedures will be periodically reviewed during Management Staff meetings so that they may reinforce its importance and ensure its implementation.
2. Coordination: The Planning and Grants Management Division is responsible for updating of the LEP analysis and the Language Assistance Plan, addressing staff and public questions and issues related to LEP matters, and providing ongoing training.

## Providing Notice to LEP Persons: Marketing and Outreach

Marketing efforts are instrumental to ensuring that LEP clients seeking language assistance for housing programs and social services receive appropriate and quality language services. Additional marketing and outreach efforts may uncover latent demand for language services, which may be tracked through future data collection efforts. To ensure that LEP persons are aware of the language services available to them, HCDD will take the following actions:

- Provide notice of language services available in documents and for HCDD visitors
- Place the "I Speak Card" in the HCDD lobby available for visitors to use
- Incorporate multilingual messages into HCDD outreach documents
- Post translated marketing materials and written documents on the HCDD website
- Work with community organizations and other stakeholders to inform LEP persons of available language assistance services
- Place public hearing announcements or information about programs and services on non-English media outlets, such as community newspapers or radio stations

## Record Keeping and Evaluation

To continue to provide effective services for LEP clients, HCDD will monitor its progress and adjust this Language Assistance Plan as necessary to client needs. As a part of the HCDD reporting process, the Language Assistance Plan will be reviewed annually and updated, if needed. The review will assess:

- Whether there have been any significant changes in the composition or language needs of LEP populations
- Any issues or problems related to serving LEP persons which may have emerged during the past year
- Identification of any recommended actions to provide more responsive effective language services

Collecting, analyzing, and maintaining data is one way that HCDD may assess the effectiveness of the Language Assistance Plan. HCDD will explore ways to regularly collect and maintain data on each encounter with an LEP client. The data may include the following:

- Method of communication (telephone or in-person)
- Type of language needed (Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, etc.)
- Type of language service needed (oral or written translation)
- The program being accessed (homebuyer, housing rehab, landlord/tenant)
- Outcome (how was the issue resolved and how long did it take)

As updates to the Language Assistance Plan are needed, the updating process may include public review and comment since it will be part of HCDD's overall planning process. HCDD may also utilize surveys during the Action Plan planning process to query residents about their LEP needs.

## Appendix: HCDD Essential Public Information



**Housing and Community Development Department**  
**Neal Rackleff, Director**



The City of Houston's Housing and Community Development Department (HCDD) provides the leadership and financing to make affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization happen in Houston. From investing in neighborhood parks, multifamily communities, and economic development to providing homebuyer assistance and funds to serve the homeless, the elderly and persons with disabilities, HCDD works to improve the quality of life for Houston's neighborhoods and families.

HCDD's funding priorities are divided among four major product categories:

- Affordable Housing (Multifamily and Single Family)
- Supportive Services (Homeless, Elderly, and Special Needs Populations)
- Infrastructure/Neighborhood Services (Facilities, Code Enforcement, and Lead Abatement)
- Economic Development

HCDD primarily administers federal grants funded through the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In addition to federal funds, HCDD also invests a limited amount of local funds (e.g. TIRZ affordable housing set-aside funds, Housing and Homeless Bond Funds, etc.) in community development and affordable housing activities. HCDD expends approximately \$50 million annually.

The **Homebuyer Assistance Program** provides downpayment and closing cost assistance to qualified homebuyers purchasing new or existing homes. The homebuyer must qualify for a mortgage through a program-approved lender.

**Housing Call Center – 713.522.(HOME)4663**

The **Fair Housing Office** assists residents who believe that in the rental of an apartment or the purchase of a home, they have experienced discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, family status, or disability. This office may also answer general questions about tenant's rights.

**Tenant/Landlord Hotline 713.868.8461**

HCDD sponsors a variety of **Economic Development** activities from small-business lending to business assistance programs to encourage job creation and retention.

**Economic Development – 713.865.4196**

The **Single Family Home Repair Program** assists low- and moderate-income homeowners with needed repairs that threaten health, life, and safety of homeowners.

**Housing Call Center – 713.522.(HOME)4663**

The **Public Services Division** provides funding to a variety of eligible non-profit organizations that deliver housing and supportive services to the homeless, elderly, youth, disabled and other special needs populations. Agencies are selected through a request for proposal process on an annual or biennial basis.

The **Multifamily/Commercial Division** manages new construction and rehabilitation of multifamily housing communities. These properties are privately owned but are required to set aside a certain number of units with affordable rates for lower-income persons and families. Projects are selected through an open request for proposal process.

The **Municipal and Private/Public Facilities Division** manages funds for the development and/or renovation of government and privately-owned public facilities serving low-income and special needs populations. Facilities are selected through an open request for proposal process.

HCDD Divisions supporting housing and community development activities include: **Compliance and Monitoring, Planning and Grants Management, Finance, and Administration and Procurement.**



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