



February 17, 2023

The Honorable Marcia Fudge, Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and
Urban Development Regulations
Division, Office of General
Counsel
451 7th Street SW, Room 10276
Washington, DC 20410

RE: AIA Response to Request for Information for HUD’s Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) Rules, Waivers, and Alternative Requirements [Docket No. 2022-27547]

Dear Secretary Fudge,

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) is committed to protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the public. Since 1857, this concern is central to all that do. As a key component of this goal, AIA works to support federal initiatives that ensure the growth of equitable and resilient communities. Especially for those living within disaster-impacted areas at high risk of repetitive natural catastrophes, AIA writes to you today to provide our recommendations on HUD’s request for Information on the HUD Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) grant fund program.

As you are aware, the funds for this critical program are appropriated by Congress and allocated by HUD to rebuild disaster-impacted areas and provide crucial seed money to start the long-term recovery process. These flexible grants help cities, counties, Indian tribes, and States recover from Presidentially declared disasters, especially in low-income areas, subject to the availability of supplemental appropriations.

AIA represents over 96,000 architects and design professionals throughout the world, including many who specialize in affordable housing and resilient design. AIA appreciates HUD’s commitment to improving the resilience and equitable development of affordable housing and surrounding communities. Designing for greater energy efficiency, resilience, and equity is a top priority for practicing architects.

As a repository of architecturally licensed subject matter experts on resilient housing design, pre-disaster mitigation, and post-disaster recovery, AIA applauds HUD’s focus to standardize grant applications for the CDBG-DR Program using a Universal Notice. Too often, architects see first-hand how low-income, disadvantaged communities are inherently limited in their ability to successfully receive federal grant awards due to a lack of resources, staff, and technical expertise to apply for federal grants in the first place. These problems are often exacerbated after a disaster, compounding many communities’ inability to effectively complete necessary grant application requirements.

These are the communities that may need this assistance the most. The CDBG-DR's varying guidance after each Congressional supplemental appropriations cycle intensifies these pressures. AIA commends HUD's approach to establishing a Universal Notice that will standardize all future CDBG-DR-related grant applications, as it directly addresses HUD's 4-stated RFI goals for low-income disadvantaged communities.

Specific Information Requested by HUD:

1) Reducing Administrative Burden and Accelerating Recovery

AIA suggests that HUD increase technical assistance, specifically to low-income and historically disadvantaged communities. To maximize equitable results, AIA recommends providing early technical assistance for the initial administrative work. Additionally, HUD should establish an internal priority-setting process to identify communities with limited administrative resources to enable HUD to proactively offer the necessary assistance through the later stages of the CDBG-DR process (such as developing action plans and program implementation).

HUD and other federal agencies that administer disaster relief programs, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Small Business Administration (SBA), among others, should coordinate on an interdepartmental initiative to eliminate duplicative and time-consuming reporting requirements. Doing so will lessen administrative pressures on disaster-stricken jurisdictions, especially low-income and historically disadvantaged communities.

2) Establishing Priorities

To help ensure that the HUD CDBG-DR funding supports the most low-income and historically disadvantaged communities as possible, AIA recommends HUD streamline various federal funding opportunities within HUD's programmatic menu. This should be extended to the extent possible for other federal, state, or local agencies that provide post-disaster housing and community assistance to lessen the administrative burden on impacted communities during particularly difficult instances.

3) Advancing Equity

HUD should prioritize CDBG-DR grant awards to both urban and rural low-income communities historically underinvested, underserved, and that are at high risk of future natural disasters. To do so, HUD should utilize the National Risk Index (<https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/>) and provide targeted support for those within the highest individual hazard risk rating areas. HUD should also establish a final rule fully reinstating the Discriminatory Effects Standard to strengthen the HUD's ability to punish discriminatory housing practices.

8) Modifying Green and Resilient Building Codes and Standards

HUD should maximize CDBG-DR funds to support the adoption and enforcement of the most recent consensus-based building codes for newly built, rebuilt, or retrofitted buildings. AIA recognizes that there can be additional costs associated with constructing buildings to comply with more recent versions of consensus-based building codes. However, those investments benefit building owners and tenants through lower utility bills, insurance premiums, and recovery costs. The National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS) found that as much as \$11 is saved for every \$1 invested in pre-disaster mitigation when using the latest building codes to account for property losses, direct and indirect business interruption expenses, casualties, insurance, and urban search and rescue costs.ⁱ These savings should be incentivized for all CDBG-DR grant recipients.

AIA thanks you, in advance, for your review of AIA's recommendations for HUD's Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Program. As you and your team review our official comments, please also feel free to utilize AIA's *Resilience Project Process Guide*.ⁱⁱ This AIA resource, which can be found here: <https://www.aia.org/resources/6512008-aia-resilience-project-process-guide>, is meant to support architects in designing a more resilient and climate-adaptive environment.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any additional questions or would like more information from AIA.

Sincerely,



Sarah Dodge
Senior Vice President of Advocacy and Relationships
The American Institute of Architects

ⁱ http://2021.nibs.org/files/pdfs/NIBS_MMC_MitigationSaves_2019.pdf

ⁱⁱ https://content.aia.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/AIA46_Resilient_Process_061422.pdf