

USDA HPG Program

Pre-application

Submitted by: Putnam Habitat for Humanity, Inc.*POB 2433, Palatka, FL 32178

- i. Putnam Habitat for Humanity (PHfH) proposes an expansion of its current Emergency Home Repair Program (aka Putnam Service Project – PSP) for low-income homeowners living in Putnam County, Florida. Since 2008, Putnam Habitat has budgeted funds from unrestricted revenues (and later private grants) to assist homeowners, including homes and mobile homes, with emergency home repairs.

The most common types of repairs are roof repairs, septic pump outs, well repairs and handicap ramps. We initially budgeted \$30,000 per year, and it has increased each year since, and in recent years, we have budgeted \$50,000 annually, but it is never enough. These are grants, and we do not ask for re-payment. We do cap our home repair grants at \$1,000 per client, except for ramps, because they cost significantly more. When clients need a more expensive job, like the entire roof replaced, a new drain field, or a new well dug, we refer them to the USDA home repair program. We have a trained USDA specialist in the office on Friday's to assist them with the application if needed. Unfortunately, often they do not qualify because of the credit requirement.

- ii. To qualify for the program offered by Putnam Habitat for Humanity, an applicant's income may not exceed low-income and asset limits established by USDA Rural Development for Putnam County, Florida. The applicant must have occupied and owned the dwelling to be rehabilitated for at least 12 months prior to assistance, possess clear title to the property (if they have lien holder, that is acceptable), have equity sufficient to justify the amount of the financial support, and intend to occupy the home as their permanent residence.

The dwelling must be located in Putnam County, which is considered to be a rural area, and have defects that pose a risk to occupant health and/or safety. All parts of Putnam County are eligible for the program. However, nonconforming structures or dwellings built without local county permits are ineligible. The housing preservation needs of the unit will be determined by a site inspection utilizing HUD Housing Quality Standards (HQS). Potential environmental effects will be identified through inspection and examination of government records (Putnam County Planning and Public Works Departments), as well as US Soil and Water Conservation Services and US Fish and Wildlife Service records.

Approved work will be performed by a Florida licensed contractor or handyman and applications will be rated and ranked based on the priority of health, safety, and/or accessibility for the family members. Tentatively qualified applicants will have funds reserved pending receipt of a satisfactory bid from a Florida licensed contractor. Funds not spent within the specified reservation period will be made available to the next qualified applicant.

Outreach, pre-application screening, qualifying applicants, developing an approved list of repairs, preparing legal documents, monitoring construction, processing contractor payments, drawing down funds, writing reports, and keeping accounts will be performed by PHfH. PHfH will solicit competitive bids, select, and hire a Florida licensed contractor or handyman to perform repair activities. Privately contracted building inspectors may inspect the construction. The Putnam County Building Division of Public Works will inspect whenever a building permit is required.

Clients are selected on a first come, first serve basis until funds run out. To qualify, first they must provide proof of income and last two months bank statements. They sign a disclosure stating they are

not hiding any money in undisclosed accounts. USDA guidelines are used to determine if they are very-low income or low-income. Then, our Home Repair Specialist looks up their property on the Property Appraisers Website to confirm they are the homeowner. Once approved, a sub-contractor is sent to their home, depending on the type of repair needed. They provide a quote, pictures and an estimate. Once the work is completed, they provide the “after the repair” pictures.

- iii. The process for identifying potential environmental impacts will be accomplished by adoption of the PMOA, Exhibit F-1 for compliance. PHfH will follow a specific process to comply with Rural Housing Service (RHS) environmental rules for HPG-funded projects. While most same-site repairs are exempt, a full RHS review is needed if a home is in a floodplain or wetland, or if it has historic value. Dwellings in the Coastal Barrier Resources System are not eligible for any assistance. Putnam Habitat will first check if a property is in a wetland or floodplain and meets historic preservation rules. If it doesn't, no full RHS review is required, and Putnam Habitat will handle the documentation. If a full assessment is needed, Putnam Habitat will contact RHS, and RHS will perform the review before project funding is approved.
- iv. Work requiring permits by the Putnam County Building and Zoning department will be obtained and inspections completed by the agency. Repairs must fix health and safety hazards. No cosmetic or esthetic repairs will be made under this program.

The USDA's housing repair programs, such as Section 504, aim to ensure that homes are decent, safe, and sanitary for eligible homeowners. To achieve this, PHfH has established specific standards that must be met throughout the repair process. The following outlines a plan for meeting these standards:

1. Prioritize Health and Safety: The initial focus of any repair or improvement project should be to address and remove any major health and safety hazards, making the home decent, safe, and sanitary.
2. Ensure Modesty and Local Code Compliance: Repairs and improvements must be undertaken with a careful consideration of the property's value within the local market. The completed home should remain modest for the area, not exceeding the value of comparable properties in that rural location. All work must adhere to applicable state and local building codes and standards.
3. Address Infrastructure and Area Eligibility: Water supply and sewage disposal systems must be brought up to the standards set by the Rural Housing Service (RHS). Additionally, the property must be situated in a rural area designated by the USDA to qualify for these programs.
4. Avoid Prohibited Uses: Program funds are restricted to direct housing repairs and improvements. They cannot be used to create alterations that would lead to income-producing features within the property or for work on common areas.
5. Verify Applicant and Property Eligibility: Applicants must be the homeowner and occupy the property as their primary residence to be eligible for assistance.

- v. Funds will be expended within one year (12 months) of receipt of the grant award funds.
- vi. We currently have a home repair specialist who works part-time, additional hours will be added to her schedule as needed to implement and complete the program activities. The Executive Director will oversee her work, complete reports and invoicing for the program.
- vii. All clients will meet low- or very-low income based on the USDA guidelines. It is estimated that 60% of homeowners served will be minorities, and 40% non-minorities. They must be the homeowner, no rentals will be funded.
- viii. The geographical area to be served is Putnam County, FL.

- ix. We are requesting \$90,000, as follows.

Non-direct costs	
Home Repair Specialist -Salary (part-time, contracted)	\$10,000
Executive Director-Reporting, invoicing and oversight	4,200
Advertising	500
Direct costs	
Sub-Contracts including Permits, Labor, Materials and Equipment	\$73,700
	\$90,000

- Funds will be drawn down on quarterly, reimbursement basis. Each quarter, a detailed invoice will be provided to cover completed work and associated staff salary. We will also provide a detail repair log that shows the homeowner name, address, type of repair, amount of repair, age of each one living in the home, if disabled, veteran, if children under age 18 are in the home, the total number of people in the home, sex, race, and if the home's deed is in a female, male, or both names, and annual income. Total number of homes repaired and total number if individuals served. We also will calculate the average cost per job. We put the date of the call and the date of the completion of the repair. We've had an emergency home repair program for 18 years and keep impeccable records for reporting purposes to different agencies.
- x. We do not have any other source of federal funding. The non-direct cost percentage on this grant would be 16% if funded as proposed, well under the 20% cap.
- xi. Quick Books Pro, on-line, for non-profits is the accounting program used.
- xii. See reporting specifications in ix. above; in addition, if established objectives are not met, an explanation will be provided. Any problems, delays or conditions that have prevented the objectives being met will be explained. Final building inspections will be provided if needed, and kept on file. Before and after pictures may also be provided if desired. A mixed method approach will be utilized, by conducting surveys, interviews and reviewing program records.
- xiii. Putnam Habitat budgets \$50,000 annually for home repairs, these funds will be added to that and allow us to complete jobs that are more than \$1,000 each, which is our current cap per client. Last FY, 2025-26, we spent \$48,117.62 on direct home repairs, at an average of \$762 per job. 63 home repairs were completed, consisting of 118 individuals.
- xiv. Program income is used for direct services – home repairs; tracking and monitoring have been described in detail in ix. and xii. In addition to our detailed log, accounting transactions are maintained in Quickbooks and compared to budgeted amounts every other month at regular board meetings. We have an annual independent review by an external accountant who also handles taxes and official audits. Our financial reporting is built on a fund accounting model, which tracks and manages our net assets by their purpose, with or without donor restrictions. This system also uses the accrual method, so financial statements accurately reflect our performance by recording revenue and expenses when they are incurred, not just when cash changes hands.
- xv. Putnam Habitat has been in business since 1990 and does not anticipate losing legal status; however, if something did happen, we would transfer instruments to a qualified entity. All homeowner documents are kept in a locked, fire safe file cabinet.

PHfH will create a comprehensive inventory of all security instruments held as a result of HPG activities, clearly identifying the type of instrument, the associated homeowner/entity, and any

specific terms or conditions. PHfH will also provide clear and timely communication to homeowners and other beneficiaries of the HPG program regarding the impact of the loss of legal status and the procedures for the continued disposition of their security instruments. PHfH will maintain open communication with key stakeholders, including investors, creditors, and any other parties involved in the organization's activities, to ensure a smooth transition during the winding down phase.

- xvi. Putnam Habitat for Humanity's Putnam Service Project (PSP)-Emergency Home Repair Program, offers a lifeline to income-eligible homeowners, helping them maintain safe and healthy homes. PSP tackles crucial health and safety concerns, addressing aging infrastructure issues like leaky roofs, replacing stairs, septic pump outs, handicap ramps, air conditioning repairs, and plumbing problems through skilled licensed contractors. To qualify for this vital assistance, applicants must own and reside in their principal residence within the affiliate's service area.

The Putnam Service Project (PSP) provides vital assistance through repairs and accessibility modifications, empowering individuals and families to live safely and independently. The Putnam Service Project offers direct support for smaller jobs under \$1,000, including crucial fixes like leaking roofs, plumbing issues, and water well repairs. We understand that these critical repairs can become overwhelming burdens for those with limited financial resources, especially for those not qualifying for federal assistance programs. We strive to alleviate this burden by either supplying both labor and materials or funding these essential repairs, ensuring that no homeowner in need is left without a safe and secure home. When repairs exceed the \$1,000 we try to help with getting them qualified for the USDA 504 program, or through the Water Well Trust, when it is a well repair. When funds are available, we refer them to the SHIP program, but that is very sporadic in Putnam County; funds are allocated quickly, and they do not fund repairs for mobile homes, which is a large percentage of our repair calls.

- i. Our organization is dedicated to ensuring equitable access to our programs and services for all members of the community we serve. PHfH has implemented outreach practices designed to reach individuals regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, familial status, or disability. We aim to achieve proportional representation of program participants reflecting the racial and national origin demographics of our service area.

To monitor this commitment, we will collect and analyze race and ethnicity data from program participants. This data helps us identify areas where additional outreach or program adjustments may be needed to achieve proportional representation. Should we discover disproportionate representation, we will investigate the reasons for the disparity and develop a plan to address them. This analysis and our strategies will be documented to demonstrate our unwavering commitment to equitable outreach.

We will regularly review our outreach and program data against established benchmarks to ensure compliance with our commitment to equitable service delivery. Documentation of outreach efforts to community organizations and leaders, including those from underrepresented groups, will be meticulously maintained, including contact details and dates.

Press releases will be sent to our local newspaper, which is generous with running articles about our programs.; The executive director will go to the 3 local radio stations as a guest and have them create ads to run on each, printed flyers will be distributed to other social service agencies and churches that provide services including food banks to help get the word out to ensure that those that are in the most need get the services and to ensure that those assisted reflect the demographic diversity of the population in Putnam County. All printed materials will have the federal equal opportunity slogan. Additionally, copies of all advertisements, flyers, and distribution efforts will be documented and kept to demonstrate broad reach across the service area.