



TO: House Committee on General, Housing, and Military Affairs
FROM: Seth Leonard, Managing Director of Community Development
DATE: October 18th, 2021
RE: Update on the ARPA-funded Homeowner Assistance Program

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funded Vermont Homeowner Assistance Program is awaiting Treasury approval prior to program launch. After VHFA published [a Treasury required draft Homeowner Assistance Fund plan on August 13th](#), the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) submitted the state's Homeowner Assistance Program Plan to the US Treasury on August 20th, 2021. Creation and submission of the plan was preceded by a [series of public hearings and outreach meetings](#).

Thanks to a national association VHFA is a member of, we are in touch with every other state agency administering homeowner assistance funds and as of this writing Treasury has yet to approve any state plans. We were advised by a Treasury official on a October 14th call that states would be receiving feedback on their plans "soon", likely via comment letters. The comment letters from the Treasury are the likely next step in a back and forth between states and the Treasury prior to final approval of plans. VHFA and DHCD will work to respond to any comments as quickly as possible to continue towards the approval of our plan as soon as possible.

In the meantime, VHFA signed a grant agreement with DHCD to administer the program, and entered into a contract with Speridian LLC, who is the selected vendor to create the online application portal, reporting, and will be managing the call center. Speridian has other contracts with the State of Vermont and has over a decade of experience running similar mortgage assistance programs for other states hit hard by the 2008 recession. They are working to create the online tools with a goal of launching the program by mid-November, assuming Treasury approval is granted by then. While most applications are expected online, alternative forms such as paper applications will also be accepted.

On August 25th, VHFA launched a "microsite" dedicated to the Vermont Homeowner Assistance Program at <https://vermonthap.vhfa.org>. At this site Vermonters can go

through a pre-screening questionnaire to check to see if they will qualify once the program has launched. Additionally, they can enter their email address to be notified when the program launches, and as of today there are over 428 unique individuals who have done so.

The microsite is available in 10 languages. Our goal for the full application site is to not accept any applications until the site has been translated into the ten core languages recommended by AALV. The microsite has online resource links as well as a list of Frequently Asked Questions, which we've been updating periodically.

So far, of the 476 people who have gone through the eligibility tool, 92% were deemed eligible, and while most (473 people) needed mortgage assistance, there was also clear demand for utility assistance (284 people), property tax payments (226 people), and association fees (112 people).

While we await Treasury approval, VHFA has continued to build out the network that we hope will support this program. That has included meetings with the HUD-approved housing counselors and VT Legal Aid who will be paid through this program to provide counseling and education to eligible homeowners. We've also met with a larger network of non-profits (17 agencies) who have long histories of working directly with consumers, such as Community Action Agencies, Homeownership Centers, Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV), US Committee on Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) VT, VT Center for Independent Living and regional Habitat chapters. Many of these agencies will become "HAP affiliates" by helping homeowners complete applications and helping to spread word of the program to their audiences.

Recordings and meeting materials for all four public hearings are [available on VHFA's website](#).

Additionally, DHCD has begun advertising for the new limited service position that will assist the State in administration, and reporting for this program.

VHFA's Executive Director Maura Collins will email the entire legislature with an update once Treasury approval has been received and applications can be submitted. In the meantime please feel free to send constituents to <https://vermonthap.vhfa.org> for the latest information.