![Administration for Children & Families logo]
ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES
330 C Street, S.W., Suite 3026, Washington, DC 20201 | www.acf.hhs.gov

OFA State and Tribal Technical Assistance and Resources

Leveraging Strategic Partnerships and Funding to Address Housing Stability Needs of TANF Recipients and Families with Low Incomes
Webinar
Audience Q&A

Building strong and sustainable partnerships can equip TANF agencies to better refer participants experiencing housing instability to services and supports. The Administration for Children and Families and the U.S. Department of the Treasury hosted a webinar on April 20, 2022 to highlight contemporary housing challenges impacting families with low incomes, provide background information on the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERA) and TANF program, and discuss how TANF programs and ERA grantees can build and sustain partnerships to expand housing services. Presenters provided: an overview of the ERA funding stream and TANF program, principles for partnership for TANF and ERA stakeholders to build partnerships to improve housing stability, and an example of community activities used to build and sustain partnerships.

Webinar speakers included:
- Nicholas Feucht, Real Estate and Housing Coordinator, Chesterfield County (VA) Department of Community Enhancement;
- Rachel Gwilliam, Program Specialist, Division of State TANF Policy, Office of Family Assistance;
- Sharon McDonald, Senior Fellow for Families and Children, National Alliance to End Homelessness;
- Cindy Moussavou, Program Director, Housing Families First;
- Gina Rendina, Policy Advisor, Emergency Housing Team, U.S. Department of the Treasury;
- Raessa Singh, Senior Advisor, Administration for Children and Families; and
- Vivian Turner, Assistant Director, Workforce, Child Care and Strategic Partnerships, Franklin County (OH) Department of Job and Family Services.

Following the moderated discussion, presenters engaged in a Q&A session with the audience. This document provides the answers to the submitted questions.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: If we pay hotel stays or security deposits, are those considered other expenses or housing stability services?

Rendina: Hello! Hotel stays and security deposits are considered relocation expenses under "other expenses." As I said, these expenses are available depending on the program design in your community.

Question: Please add to Chat where I can find ERA providers in my state.

Answer: Consumer Financial Protection tool or treasury.gov/ERA

Question: Does ERA cover mortgage?

Rendina: ERA does not cover mortgage. However, Treasury also has a program called Homeowner Assistance Fund (HAF) that is currently in the rollout phase.

Question: Are any tools available to view differences in ERA benefit rules (what is allowed, what isn't) across states? I'm thinking something along the lines of an interactive map.

Rendina: I do not believe this tool/map currently exists.

Question: Any suggestions for TANF and ERA programs in a state/region to partner and figure out how to best coordinate benefits?

Rendina/Gwilliam: We will have a few community examples in this webinar.

Question: Are there caps on the dollar amount that may be expended on eviction prevention/housing support services?

Rendina: Grantees can spend up to 10% of their ERA dollars on housing stability services.

Question: Is it common to see "Due to the total requests for assistance exceeding the available funds, the Oregon Emergency Rental Assistance Program is CLOSED to new applicants"?

Rendina: Yes. Funding in many places has largely been distributed. The time and place are a product of capacity to deliver those funds, limits on how much funding provided per participant, and overall demand for assistance. In Chesterfield, Virginia, we closed our portal for new applicants on December 15, 2021. All our funding will be distributed by the end of this month.

Question: Can we use an ERA applicant's proof of enrollment in TANF as categorical eligibility for the ERA? If so, how do we know what AMI bracket they would fall under if they don't provide any other income documentation other than proof of TANF enrollment?

Rendina: It's really up to program design and the flexibilities that you want to build into your ERA program. Treasury has provided some examples of how to build in flexibilities for folks and for programs when you're trying to determine income, eligibility, and other things. We have encouraged programs to use self-attestation when appropriate without compromising program integrity. So, it's really a conversation that you have to have with your ERA program in conjunction with your TANF program and making sure that you're really not cutting corners, but you're really establishing a process that might be efficient for both sides, but also ensuring that you are determining eligibility for both programs.

Question: Is there a tool or a map that shows ERA programs across the nation, and what expenses they do allow, and what they don't?

Rendina: Unfortunately, there are none that I know about, but that is something that would be particularly helpful. But you would have to go to your local program and really figure out what they would allow and what they don't.

Question: Our TANF program won't help people whose housing is "unaffordable." This ultimately leaves anyone with no or low income unable to receive rent assistance. How can we help them update their thinking on this?

Gwilliam: A lot of that, of course, is a state call in the situation, and it would be something that would need to be addressed with the state on a local level as far as I know. Sharon may have additional insight on that.

McDonald: I think it's going to take some local advocacy. I think there's a great book by Beth Shinn, probably maybe some articles we can get from you around homelessness. But the research does say if you really want to make an impact in reducing homelessness, or the researchers say, you need to steer it to populations at highest risk and not to those who look more likely to be able to sustain their housing. That's where you're going to get bang for the buck, as it were, you're going to have a greater impact. We developed some ideas about how to prevent homelessness and how to do eviction prevention and crisis assistance developed in the 1970s, and we haven't rethought them since, and that's 50 years ago. And I think ERA and the administrators and the great folks at Treasury and their partners are really helping to evolve thinking and getting really creative and thinking in ways. I think it would be great to bring TANF folks to the table, because they have the clients and a lot of expertise to share, and Treasury has a lot of innovations to share, and I think it's just – the potential of the collaboration is great. Gina, was there anything to add about the potential, just bringing the great minds of both systems to bear?

Rendina: I think the first step is just talking to each other, right? I think a lot of communities just in general have silos and are in their lane and do really well at what they do, but I think the point of ERA was to really bring about a communication piece, right, because that's historically, communities haven't seen this level of rental assistance funding. And so, I think part of it is bringing that financial piece, but also bringing that communication and networking piece that maybe was lacking in some communities. Some not, some already have that infrastructure, but I think that's also the purpose of what ERA is trying to accomplish.

Question: Does your organization partner with TANF? If so, how? If not, how would you like to?

Feucht: I do not know what state you are in, but in our case, there was no need to involve the state. The county provided funding to a non-profit. Informally, and for the most part, this non-profit was already integrated with the county's social service department and the liaisons to the public school system.

Question: Are the payments listed in Cindy's presentation as Leasing/Move-In reported as housing stability services or other expenses related to housing?

Moussavou: It depends on the situation and what the expense is. Take a look at the early slides in the presentation. Housing Families First also has different types of funds in their program to deal with things that ERA cannot pay.

Question: How do I get access to these programs in the Hampton Roads area?

Feucht: https://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/rmrp

Question: This sounds like an incredible program. How do you unwind all of these actions to provide unique household information required by the Treasury?

Moussavou: Yes. Reporting takes effort. You need a point person to organize this effort and spend time monitoring Treasury's reporting guidance and program guidelines. Generally, all expenses have to be logged and recorded. Reporting takes a time aggregate and then submits to Treasury via their portal.

Question: For Cindy, how do you all (DHS, your organization, Nicholas' organization) kick off your partnership?

Moussavou: We really launched after a few collaborative meetings to ensure mutual agreement on how the referrals would flow and to make sure that partnering agencies had understood expectations of one another. We also had to set expectations about ROIs and any data sharing that may be needed. Once we were all on board, we established a partnership and launched referrals. We also then became a subgrantee of ERA funding and set contracts for that as well.

I think it really came down to a phone call from our partner who was a grantee of Chesterfield County, because they had a conversation about helping to serve their most vulnerable in Chesterfield, then doubled up, in hotels and all of that. We got involved because we are a housing partner who is known for serving families in our community and who already uses private funding to, sort of, leverage what rapid rehousing dollars can't pay for – just like Nick had mentioned, ERA funds, sometimes, they can't pay for certain things. And so, we seemed like a natural fit in that case. And so, we came to the table and had a couple of conversations about, "How would this work?" "How would we identify the families?" "How would we make those referrals?" And really just had to hammer out legalities, sort of, if we're sub-grantees, there was the contract fees, trying to get that off the ground. But also, in terms of expectations from relationships. We just contacted the McKinney-Vento person, contacted the DSS and said, "Get your leadership involved that needs to be involved. Let's all come to the table, and let's just talk about how this could work." And from there, sort of figuring out, "What permission do you need?" "What MOUs do we need?" "Is there anything your legal team has to review as far as data sharing and having ROIs so that families can be referred on a general form?" As far as the toolkit for launching referrals and program forms and eligibility, all that, we handled all that because we know how to do that, so that was just our work in it. But as far as building those relationships, the schools had some concerns about, what if families don't want to talk to us about their homeless situation? It's okay. They don't have to, but if they're McKinney-Vento, they are obviously needing some of your scope of practice, so that's automatic, and so you can go ahead and refer them over to DSS. And DSS was the key voice sending those families over to us. And so, the bridge was already there for schools to talk to DSS. That's how they met. And then DSS was able to talk with us, and that's how we got the work done. And then we worked with Nick on the grant itself, doing the data reporting, administering the funds, and making sure that the regs were followed and all of that. So, you kind of had to have those four players, and that's how we did it. But mostly, conversations. A lot of conference calls. And then once it was done, it was done, and then it just needed some light maintenance. And so that was really great.

Question: Is there a program in our area similar to Housing Families First?

Turner: Not sure what your locality is, but there are similar school-based re-housing relationships in Atlanta, Georgia and some elsewhere, but our BFH program is unique in our state, though the bones for the program are similar to those of rapid re-housing housing counseling models.