

Delivering HFA Services Across the Digital Divide

Tuesday, September 28, 2021
12:00 pm - 1:00 pm ET



Panelists

DISCUSSION LEADER

Monique Gibbs, Policy Innovation Associate | MassHousing

PARTICIPANTS | *In order of presentations*

Carol Ventura, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director | Rhode Island Housing

Seema Malani, Architect | Connecticut Housing Finance Authority

Rodrigo Carrillo, Director, Strategic Initiatives and Planning | Illinois Housing Development Authority

Richard Livingstone, Deputy Chief of Staff and Communications Director | District of Columbia Department of Housing and Community Development

Delivering HFA Services Across the Digital Divide





Bridging the Digital Divide

September 28, 2021

Carol Ventura

Executive Director of RI Housing



Broadband Access in RI

- Fiber backbone runs within 1 mile of 90+% of Rhode Islanders
- But 20% of Rhode Islanders lack access to wired in-home internet
- Many people rely on cellular data for internet
 - highest reliance in New England



Increasing Access: Two Initiatives

1 Bridging the Digital Divide grant program

2 QAP Scoring



Bridging the Digital Divide grant program

- Launched FY2021 with initial \$250,000
- \$450,000 allocated for FY2022
- RFP looking for projects that would:
 - Implement infrastructure needed for access
 - Provide free or low-cost Wi-Fi in homes
- Maximum award of \$75,000

Eligible entities:

- Non-profit/For-profit organizations
- Public Housing Authorities
- Municipalities
- Faith-based organizations
- CDCs/private developers

Bridging the Digital Divide grant program

Priorities:

- How many people reached
- Demonstrated need
- Program sustainability
- Partnerships and/or potential for leveraging funds/replication

Priority buckets:

Municipality

Specific geographic area

Community Organization

Broader community, beyond assets and municipal boundaries

Public Housing Authority

Specific assets

Non-Profit Developer

Specific assets but larger community mission

Awardees

- **City of Central Falls**
 - \$50,000
 - Mobile hotspots for 208 families living in subsidized housing
- **NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley**
 - \$75,000
 - Multiple initiatives; reach over 700 residents
- **Newport Housing Authority**
 - \$75,000
 - Middle and last mile infrastructure; 325 residents reached
- **University of Rhode Island**
 - \$50,000
 - Cyber-Seniors Program; 100 people reached



2022 QAP

3 points

for

Wireless Access
in Each Unit

5 points

for

Hardwired
Access



Other RI Efforts



- **CDBG Broadband**

- \$1.5 million statewide

- Increase access for low and moderate income residents
- 11 proposals requesting \$1.75 million in funding
- Variety of applicants – PHAs, municipalities, non-profits

- **Broadband Mapping**

- Goal: Assess statewide internet access

- Speeds, infrastructure and access statewide
- Ability to overlay with all subsidized housing
- Help state prioritize where assistance is most needed



Other RI Efforts

Mesh Network

– Olneyville Neighborhood in Providence

- \$280,000 total
- Free neighborhood Wi-Fi
- Went live November 2020
- Estimate 1,000 unique users



Questions?



Contact Information

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Executive Director, RI Housing

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Delivering HFA Services Across the Digital Divide

CHFA's Journey of Broadband Requirements in QAP, Future Ideas

Seema Malani
Manager, Connecticut Housing Finance Authority



CHFA's Journey of Broadband Understanding Connecticut's Digital Divide

Nearly 1 in 4 CT households lack high-speed internet at home. However, some households are more likely than others to face the digital divide, including:

36% of low-income CT households

36% of residents age 65 and older

35% of Hispanics

34% of African Americans

40% of households located in CT's urban centers

CHFA's Journey of Broadband Incentives in the QAP

Technological advancements do not equitably benefit all sections of society. Our reliance on technology for education, employment, health, civic engagement, and well-being has reinforced the divide between the digital “haves” and the digital “have-nots.” Digital exclusion exacerbates existing socioeconomic and racial disparities further. This impacts residents of affordable housing the most.

To ensure equitable access to broadband and bridge the digital divide CHFA has incentivized High-speed Broadband access to units in the current Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP).

1 point- High-speed Broadband access to units

- Provide infrastructure for High-speed Broadband internet to all units and provide free High-speed Broadband in community rooms.
- Demonstrate efforts to engage with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to provide subsidized monthly subscription plans for residents. Document any barriers/hardships that may exist.

CHFA's Journey of Broadband Guidance to Project Teams

- Explore available incentives and grants like, [FCC's Lifeline program](#) or [HUD's Connect Home](#).
- Consider bulk purchasing of service. Explore partnerships with Internet Service Providers, non-profits, housing authorities, and universities.
- Recommend simultaneous construction of broadband infrastructure alongside other rehab and new construction projects wherever feasible to achieve cost efficient infrastructure development.
- Recommend resident service coordinators and property staff provide digital literacy training to residents and initiate outreach activities, such as community surveys and sign-up events.

CHFA's Journey of Broadband Rationale for Owners/Managers and Residents

- Positions a development as a strong competitor and differentiator in a growing market.
- Potential for owners/managers to increase NOI by gaining Operational Efficiencies.
 - Ability to track resident and property performance outcomes
 - Potential to Improve Resident Experience via online portals for resident services (rent pay, broadcast information, reduce paperwork, increase transparency)
 - Potential to add Autonomous Building Tech. Use mobile apps and Wi-Fi enabled sensors for security, convenience, and controlling utility costs.
- Is a sought after desirable amenity for residents. With rise in e-commerce in all aspects of life, broadband insures residents have remote access to work, can attend school, receive health care, and stay connected to family and friends.
- Access to 24/7 account information, ability to pay rent, and request repairs are a big plus.
- Offers additional level of safety via notifications and ability to connect with community.

CHFA's Journey of Broadband Advocacy

- Advocate for HUD to consider broadband as an eligible utility expense.
- Advocate for HUD to expand its ConnectHome program and support broadband deployment through new grants and programs focused on building infrastructure, improving access to devices and affordability of services, and providing digital literacy trainings.
- Advocate for FCC to expand and improvise the Federal Lifeline program. Initiate new programs that increase connectivity and lessen the digital divide.
- Provide grants for organizations to pilot ideas to address existing challenges.
- Advocate for equitable use of funds set aside for broadband buildout in President Biden's American Jobs Plan. Prioritize flow of funds to areas that lack broadband access over areas that may have access but are lacking in speed.

CHFA's Journey of Broadband

Why it matters to HFAs

CHFA's goal is to provide housing that maximizes benefits to our low- to moderate-income families in terms of health, wellbeing, satisfaction, and financial burden. Access to broadband directly helps us check all those boxes.

- Helps residents in remote learning, searching and applying for jobs, and accessing benefits.
- Helps HFAs deliver services and programs to communities more efficiently.
- Helps HFAs with outreach and engagement. Build trust with communities. Reflect their voice in the policy and program.
- Electronically delivering programs reduces response time during a public health and economic crisis, for instance deploying Emergency Renter's Assistance Funds.
- Uses data to monitor progress and quickly pivot strategies to what works.
- Manages asset portfolio efficiently

CHFA's Journey of Broadband Future Ideas for consideration

- Encourage and incentivize owner-provided broadband access to all units. It is the most cost effective way to ensure 100% connectivity for residents. It helps owners maximize efficiencies in building performance, maintenance and operation. It helps us track progress of our investments.
- Explore creative ways to limit burden on owners and thereby spur broadband access, adoption, and growth. Identify funding and financing sources for broadband deployment. Initiate partnerships with other state agencies, local governments, and public-private sector.
- Progressively increase requirements and offer additional incentives for providing free in-unit broadband access, higher speeds, and other ways to expand broadband adoption to serve the growing digital economy.

Access to broadband is fundamental to building a sustainable digital future and bring the benefits of technology equitably to the broader society.

Thank you!

Seema Malani
seema.malani@chfa.org

Delivering HFA Services Across the Digital Divide





Illinois Rental Payment Program (ILRPP)

Outreach Across the Digital Divide

Rodrigo Carrillo, Director of Strategic Response



Outreach Channels

- Housing Stability Servicer (HSS) Agencies
- Grassroots Outreach
- High-touch Collaborations
- Data-informed Strategies



Outreach Channel: Housing Stability Servicer Agencies

- Provided **intentional outreach and intake assistance** to applicants who may face technology or language barriers
- Selected **64 nonprofit agencies** to ensure statewide coverage
 - Included housing counseling agencies, community-based organizations, and legal aid organizations
 - Coverage in all 102 Illinois counties
 - 80% of agencies offer Spanish-speaking services
 - 12 language services offered, including ASL



Outreach Channel: Grassroots Outreach

- Conducted grassroots outreach to **300+ agencies statewide**, with support of staff task force (seven “Outreach Warriors”)
- Held over **10 in-person outreach events** including central and downstate Illinois
- Additional outreach via **program material drop-offs at local community hubs**:
 - Grocery stores
 - Restaurants
 - Community centers
 - Housing fairs
 - Often located in schools and libraries
 - Including nonprofit- and legislator-hosted fairs
 - Other local businesses including gas stations, laundromats, candy stores, bakeries, etc.



Outreach Channel: High-Touch Collaborations

- **Columbian and Mexican Consulates:**
 - Co-hosted Facebook Live “How to Apply” ILRPP webinars intended to equip agencies, legislators and other individuals with information to broadcast and support less technologically proficient applicants in their communities
 - Collaborated with consulate bus, which travels to various communities to make consulate services more accessible
 - Provided radio interviews on Spanish language channels
- **State Legislators:**
 - Co-hosted Facebook Live “How to Apply” ILRPP webinars
 - Supported legislative staff with ILRPP application questions and concerns from constituents
- **20+ Facebook Live Events:**
 - With nonprofit hosts, held in English and Spanish
 - Views totaling 100,000+



Outreach Channel: Data-Informed Strategies

- Using **data mapping technology** to inform outreach targets for upcoming rental and mortgage assistance programs
- **Analyzing zip code and population demographics data** to determine highest-need areas for outreach:
 - Where are we able to engage?
 - What areas did we not reach?
- **High-priority populations** including migrant and immigrant residents

Delivering HFA Services Across the Digital Divide

September 29, 2021

NCSHA Annual Conference

Richard Livingstone, Deputy Chief of Staff and Communications Director
DC Department of Housing and Community Development

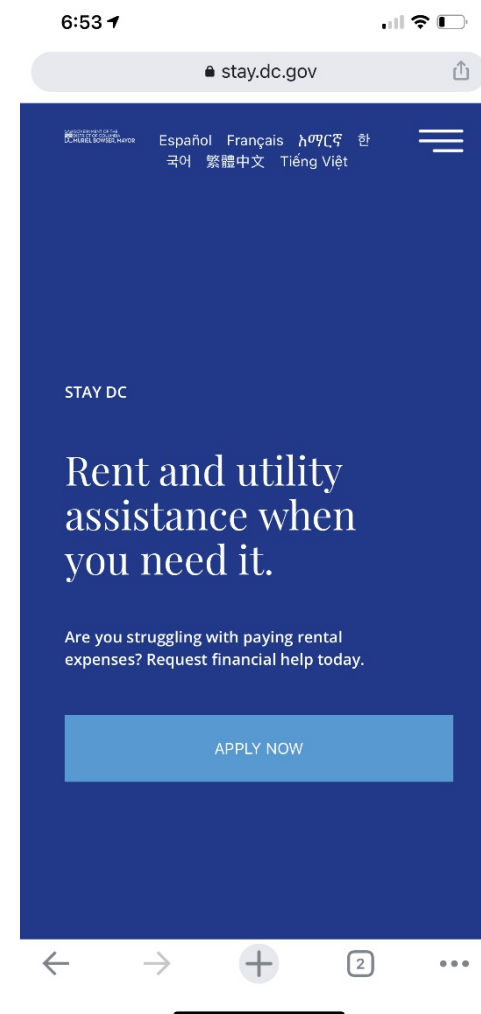
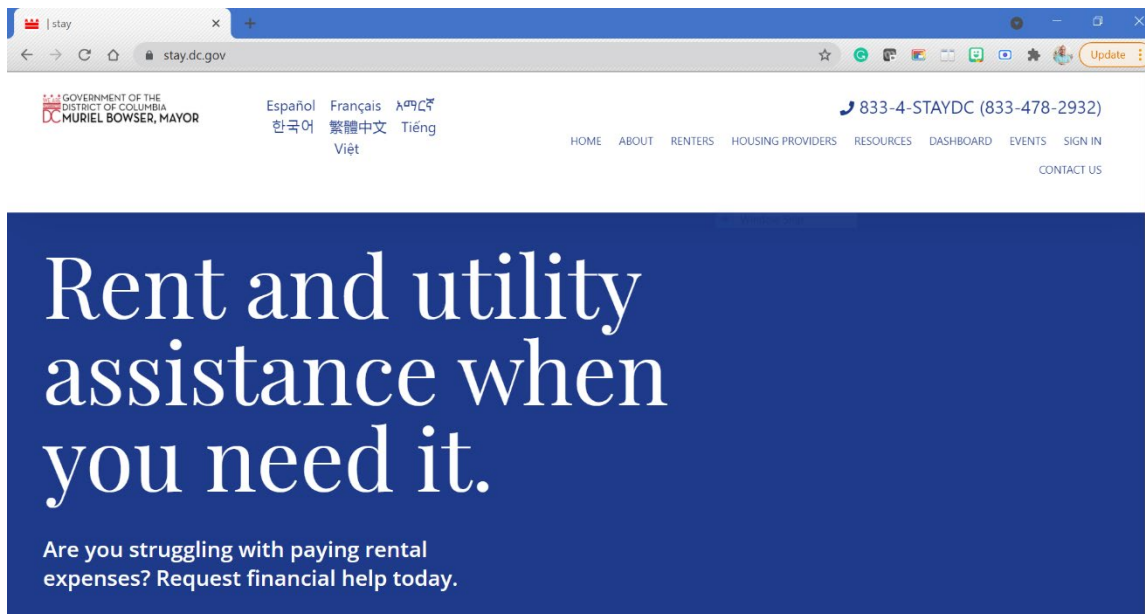
District of Columbia Emergency Rental Assistance



- Naming
- Brand Development (Logo, Brand Identity)
- Messaging Development
- Marketing Strategy
- Outreach Strategy
- Advertising Strategy
- Media Buy Services
- Collateral Development (Program Flyer, Campaign Ads: Metro, Social media, Radio ads, One-pager info sheet)
- Grassroots Engagement: On-the-ground outreach to get the word out.



Simple and Accessible Program Website



- Easy to find – stay.dc.gov.
- Plain language - translated
- Call Center
- Who, what, where, when



Human-Centered Application Design

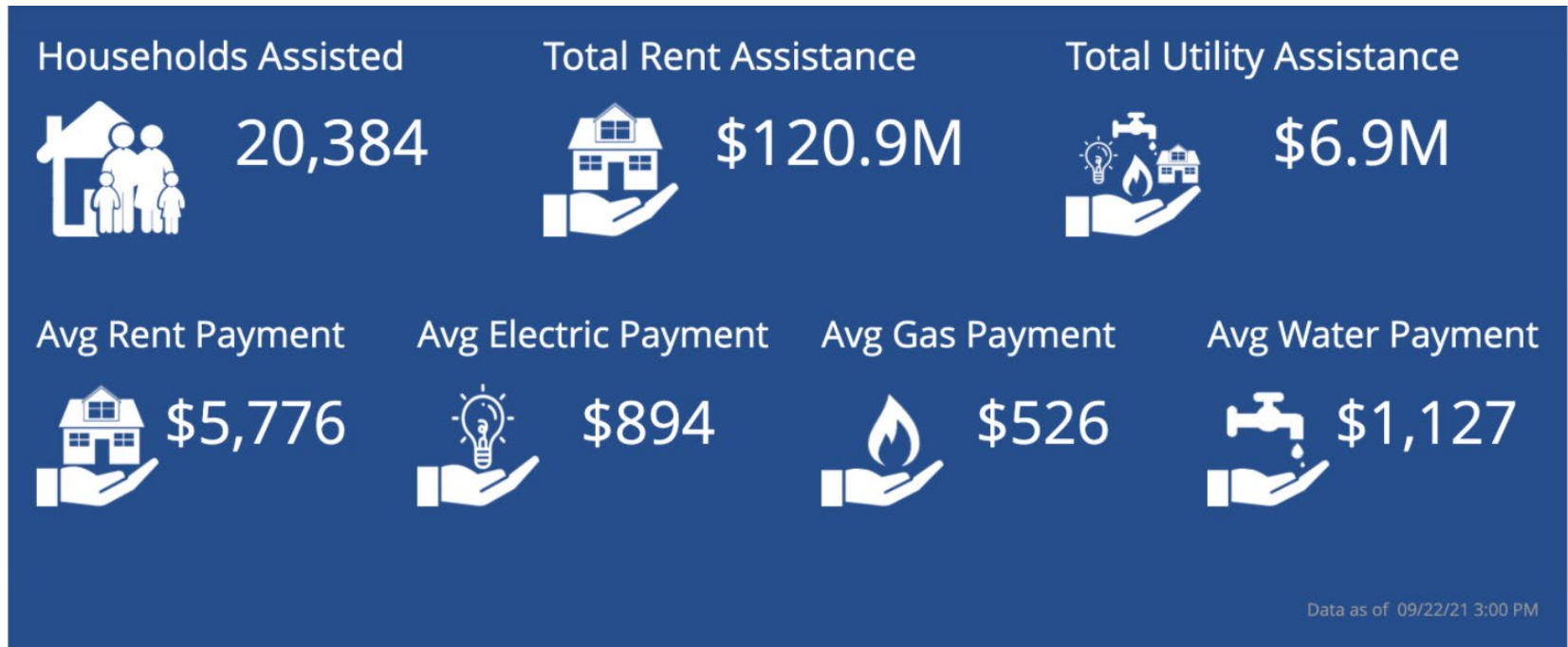


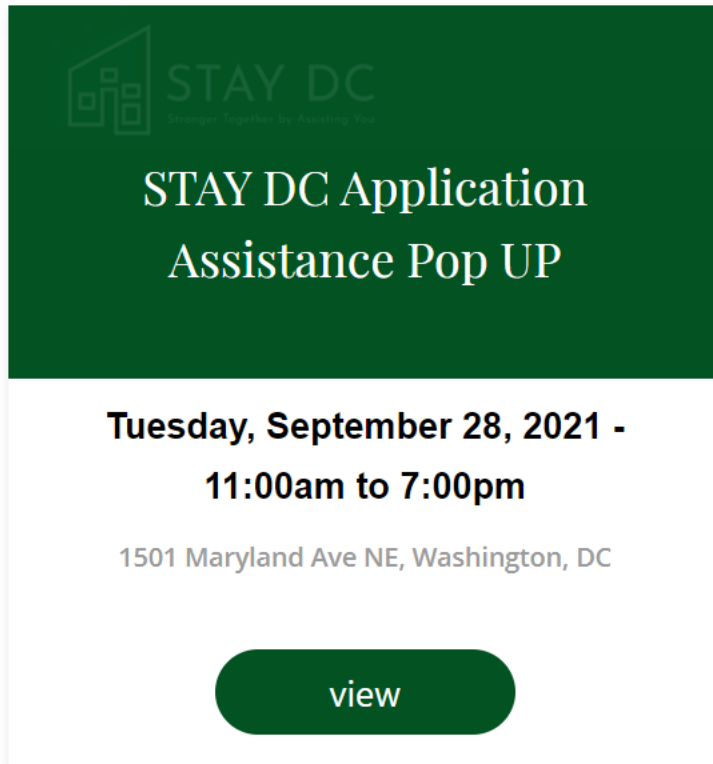
A screenshot of the STAY DC web application interface. The header is dark blue with the STAY DC logo and tagline 'Stronger Together by Assisting You'. It includes a welcome message for 'Richard Livingstone' and a 'Logout' link. A navigation bar contains 'Home', 'Program Overview', 'Applications' (highlighted), and 'Help & Support'. A 'Language' dropdown menu is set to 'English'. The main content area shows 'Tenant Application Request 0067438' with a 'Last Saved: 2021-09-17 6:26pm' timestamp. Below this is a progress bar with six steps: 1 Pre-Eligibility (highlighted), 2 Applicant Information, 3 Rental Assistance Information, 4 Utilities, 5 Payment Information, and 6 Certification.

- Determine eligibility upfront
- One thing at a time; progressive disclosure
- Save and return
- Self-attest (one form or throughout)

Visibility and Transparency

- Online dashboard showing progress
- Application and call center can provide status update





STAY DC
Application Assistance Pop UP

Tuesday, September 28, 2021 -
11:00am to 7:00pm

1501 Maryland Ave NE, Washington, DC

[view](#)

- 25-person contract with 3x a week pop up and daily high-traffic area canvassing
- Community Based Organizations funded with Community Development Block Grant (CDBG-CV)
- Government agencies opening their own offices

Advertising

STAY DC
여러분을 도움으로써 서로 더 강해집니다.

전화: 833-4-STAYDC (78-2932)
온라인: stay.dc.gov

월세 또는
공과금을 내는 데
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Audience Q&A