

# Know Your Options – Homeowner Assistance Fund (HAF) Introductory Videos

**Kentucky Housing Corporation**

Special Achievement: COVID-19 Response

## **HFA Staff Contact**

Molly Tate

[mtate@kyhousing.org](mailto:mtate@kyhousing.org)

### **Know Your Options – Homeowner Assistance Fund (HAF) Introductory Videos**

The concept was simple. Kentucky Housing Corporation (KHC) had been inundated with calls, social media messages and requests since it launched its Healthy at Home Eviction Relief Fund (HHERF) program. When would the state offer help for homeowners? When Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) granting states funding for mortgage relief, KHC wanted to quickly communicate to homeowners that help would soon be available, but it may not be the best immediate option for them. The timing of accessing the Homeowner Assistance Fund (HAF) and exiting from the COVID-related loss mitigation options were critical and homeowners needed to be aware of the details before making a decision.

Thus, the [Know Your Options campaign](#) was born. It was a multi-channel, multi-departmental effort to educate struggling homeowners about how they could rebound from COVID and begin rebuilding their lives. However, KHC wanted to ensure homeowners understood that HAF was a one-time application to wipe away their housing-related debt. If they needed a more long-term solution to make their housing costs more sustainable, they needed to speak with their servicer.

#### **Background**

KHC used many of the lessons it learned in launching and promoting the eviction relief program a year earlier to guide the communications plan for HAF, including:

- **Less is more** – too much information in program messaging is too confusing. KHC tried to segment the information in its HAF rollout to better inform each group of users about program features unique to their needs.
- **Consolidate information** – with the eviction relief program, information is decentralized with multiple people managing publication, website and portal updates. With HAF, KHC made sure that the nitty-gritty details were on KHC's website, which is easy to edit and accessible by multiple staff members, and all other information points back to KHC's website. This allowed KHC to more quickly respond to program modifications.
- **Leverage existing resources** – KHC previously offered had a program similar to HAF (the Unemployment Bridge Program) that relied on housing counselors vetting applicants and helping them work on applications for relief. KHC decided to leverage those same counselors for HAF, because they had institutional knowledge, familiarity with KHC and the resources to guide applicants through the process. Plus, they helped spread the message about the program.

When ARPA was announced, KHC quickly began assembling a team to create a HAF program that would meet the needs of Kentucky homeowners. [Surveying](#) the borrowers on KHC's COVID forbearance plan, KHC asked what type of relief homeowners would need – mortgage, utilities, homeowner's association fees, insurance payments, etc. – to begin structuring its plan.

The need was great. More than 550 people responded and a majority said they would need their delinquent mortgage payments plus four to six months of future payments to get caught up, and many were behind on their utility payments as well.



**HFA Name:** Kentucky Housing Corporation  
**Entry Title:** Know Your Options – HAF Videos  
**Entry Category:** Special Achievement  
**Subcategory:** COVID-19 Response

Working with the administrator of the forbearance program, who was the most knowledgeable about COVID relief options and federal regulations, KHC began crafting an email message with detailed information about homeowners' options, including forbearance, repayment plans, loan modification short sale and deed-in-lieu foreclosure. For many borrowers, once they received HAF funds, they may be ineligible for other COVID loss mitigation options, and she worried that simply taking the HAF grant would not be the best long-term options for those most in need.

However, that email was long and ineffective. HAF needed a direct, easy-to-understand message to help borrowers financially impacted by COVID. So, loan servicing and HAF staff worked together to craft a quick, informative video script that explained to each type of borrower their options for moving forward.

KHC [created one version](#) for the HAF pilot program, all of whom had FHA loans, a [more general version](#) for borrowers who had federally-backed and conventional loans, and a [Spanish version](#) for Spanish-speaking homeowners with limited English proficiency. The English versions of all HAF videos also have Spanish subtitles to ensure every viewer can access the information regardless of which video they watch.

The goal was to keep the videos five minutes or less so that homeowners could watch the video at home, at work, while on their lunch break or before going to bed. Most of the versions ended up being less than 3:30 minutes, so KHC accomplished its goal. KHC wanted to pick a main character who seemed like an every person and show her in her home to make her more relatable. As a result, KHC received almost as much positive feedback about the cat in the video as it did about the message. Staff also refined the script many times to remove jargon, unnecessary detail, policy information and anything that would not be pertinent to an average homeowner.

### **Innovation**

While creating a video is not particularly innovative – KHC creates explainer videos for most of its programs and to promote many of its initiatives – but this video was the quick resource that many struggling homeowners needed. It was short, clear, and fun, and addressed all of their questions and concerns without referring them to fliers, links, and other websites.

### **Replicable**

Plus, it was easy and cheap to produce. No additional money was spent creating these videos. Both the English and Spanish voiceovers were recorded by KHC staff using free recording apps on their phones or using the audio from a Microsoft teams meeting (video conferencing software that is part of KHC's Microsoft contract). The Communications team then built the video using Vyond, an animation software (\$89/month) it uses regularly for corporate videos and music available through the Vyond software.

Communications used the branding it uses for the HAF program – colors, fonts, logos – to create a uniformed look so that borrowers could instantly recognize the video as a HAF communications tool. This helped for visibility and for legitimacy, as several people were unsubscribed from HAF emails or



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questioned the COVID Forbearance Administrator emails, because they thought the HAF program and her emails were phishing attempts.

### **Measurable Results**

Each video has more than 700 views, and many other agencies – other state housing finance agencies, NCSHA staff, HUD leadership, lenders, housing counselors – have commented on the videos’ effectiveness and asked how they could replicate it. Similarly, the U.S. Department of the Treasury named Kentucky’s videos a Promising Practice for offering a plain-language approach to a complicated issue, so we know that the message is getting out and is effective.

“The video walks the viewer through the relative advantages and tradeoffs between loss mitigation and HAF options for homeowners through the Federal Housing Administration, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac. This video outlines key questions the potential applicant should ask themselves and encourages engagement with their servicer.”

[-U.S. Treasury website](#)

### **Supplemental Visual Aids for HAF**

- [HAF preview page](#) that allowed interested parties to sign up for information about the program with status tracker
  - When registering, people could self-identify as a homeowner, housing counselor, lender, mortgage servicer, real estate agent or other so KHC could message each group information pertaining to them.
- [Survey invitation email](#)
- [Survey to gauge need](#)
- [Change in status/progress toward approval email](#)
- [Email inviting pilot program group to apply for HAF](#) (FHA loans only video)
- [Email to second wave of pilot program](#)
- [Weekly counselor email](#)
- [Blast to 9,388 people on HAF lists in November 2021](#)
- [Email to third pilot program group](#) (all federally backed loans video)
- [Program open email](#)
- [Informational website](#)
- [Application portal](#)