



## **OHCS Statewide Housing Plan Year 2 Quarter 2 Update December 2020**

### **EQUITY AND RACIAL JUSTICE**

Over the last few months, our Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Officer has led the establishment of our Equity Council and four Equity Committees: *Equity Lab*, *Data Equity Workgroup*, *Diversity and Inclusion Best Practices*, and *Professional Equity, Growth, and Empowerment*. This work aims to center equity and racial justice (ERJ) across the agency, support agency transformation through internal capacity and skill building, and work in right relationship with community. By the end of December, the chairs of each committee held their first committee meetings to support relationship building, committee charter review, and begin planning for 2021 activities. As we continue to stand up our Equity Committee structure, we are intentionally focusing on **developing a strong foundation for success** and integrating these committees into our agency rather than on developing products or deliverables.

The **Data Equity Workgroup** (DEW) focused on the development of the **State of Data Equity Report** (SODER) to document and analyze the data collected by OHCS. The Research Team hosted two mapping meetings with staff to identify stakeholders who should be involved with the report and what engagement should look like. The team worked with program staff to collect and analyze data, document data collection methods, and complete a first draft of the report. To support community interaction and **collective visibility on program utilization**, the Research Team developed program-level data dashboards for Homeownership, Homeless Services, Energy Services, and Affordable Rental Housing. The team also created a **County Profiles dashboard** that allows users to see reference data on the state of housing and homelessness in Oregon.

### **HOMELESSNESS**

Our approach to partnership with organizations that serve Oregonians facing housing instability involves **providing funding and the sharing of best practice** and frameworks for successful outcomes. This has been especially true through the COVID-19 pandemic where best practices are in flux and the models we used to rely on are no longer feasible or adequate for the health and safety of those in need.

In the past few months, our focus has been on supporting those disproportionately impacted by housing instability coupled by the concurrent crises of the pandemic and Oregon wildfires. We have increased collaboration with other government entities to build a **collective and cohesive response to the current crisis**. We have also met with Continuums of Care to discuss service delivery for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, obtained over 50 applications for our **Emergency Solutions Grant – COVID (ESG-CV)**, and encouraged the integration of culturally-specific organizations in program delivery.

We have responded with flexibility and speed to support the vast needs of Oregonians who are unstably housed and experiencing homelessness during the pandemic. We have deployed millions of dollars to communities through **CARES Act funding and State Emergency response programs**, aggressively monitored spending rates, supported efficient program implementation, encouraged strategies for marketing to the most impacted communities. Our **energy programs** began utilizing streamlined eligibility standards to enable rapid processing of applications. Additionally, we hosted a listening and feedback session to **improve service delivery** in our rent assistance program. We plan to utilize this strategy of program design and collaboration to ensure our programs are improving and innovating to meet the needs of Oregonians.

In addition to the above achievements, we have made tremendous progress on enhancing data and research capability to understand and address housing instability and homelessness needs. We completed our Budget Note stakeholder engagement with the final report sent to legislature in September. As a result of the **Budget Note report**, we will be moving forward with implementing the **HMIS Multi-Continuum of Care** and the **HMIS data repository** that will support data sharing across the state. We have started reporting out demographic information disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, age, and other key characteristics and have created a **homeless services dashboard and energy services dashboard** to be made public in the coming months. We are also examining how we can align our data with other service providers' data. There is a continuing need to build data literacy as we continue to add new programs and experience increases in funds for existing programs.



## PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

We continue to have conversations with the **Portland Housing Bureau (PHB)** and METRO about creating more permanent supportive housing (**PSH**) units and providing updates to support these efforts. We are working with METRO to fund PSH units as they are placed in service. We will be obtaining tenant lease-up data for collaboratively funded PSH units through **METRO**. We are also hosting two groups from the METRO region in our second PSH Institute that aims to provide technical assistance and education to support the development and effective operation of homes.

We have had to revise our in-person **PSH Institute** model for a virtual platform to accommodate restrictions stemming from the pandemic. With help from our contractor, we are hosting our second PSH Institute cohort online for our teams (slated for a March graduation date).

Additionally, we continue to work on aligning resources for PSH and we have included these needs in OHCS' budget request. The **2021 PSH NOFA** was developed to align with **Federal Housing Trust Fund** and the **9% LIHTC NOFA** includes a point incentive for projects that incorporate PSH units. Projects that are awarded with the 9% LIHTC will also receive PSH rent assistance and services funding as well.

We also worked on developing a framework for our **PSH Project Based Rent Assistance**. We obtained feedback from the Housing Stability Council (HSC) and our partners and finalized the policy this past quarter. We plan to incorporate this assistance into the 2021 PSH NOFA with the goal of awarding PSH Institute cohort projects that can demonstrate successful development partnerships. Given the supportive political environment for PSH, despite the economic downturn and budget constraints, we believe we can secure additional resources for this priority.

## AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING

A core strategy of our Affordable Rental Housing (ARH) priority is to streamline processes, programs, and tools. Our new **State Program Manager**, Amy Cole, has helped us lead this work. In quarter one, we have been able to debrief our 2020 Notice of Funding Availability (NOFAs) with all program leads, introduce a **template NOFA** to refine processes, and initiate conversations on our **2021 NOFA goals and priorities**.

This past quarter, we focused on making housing development resources consistent and predictable to support a development pipeline. We implemented an **organizational structure** that clarifies leadership roles and ownership around **program policy manuals**. We also finalized a **funding calendar** that identifies the scheduled release of funding opportunities to help our housing stakeholders plan.

Additionally, one of the goals for the first half of year two was to improve our ability to track and report on our data to better align funding priorities with agency goals. We achieved this through continued **implementation of ProLink** for application review and data entry, as well as piloting MWESB data collection into the 2020 Vets-GHAP NOFA. Through **MWESB matrices**, more robust tenant data will be collected at lease up as it is integrated into the 2021 NOFA application. This past quarter, we were also able to perform outreach to industry groups to share our new MWESB strategy and emphasize our commitment to the COBID system.

## HOMEOWNERSHIP

One of our goals to support homeownership is to **modernize OHCS lending**. We are evolving in this role by serving as a convener, guiding and assisting relationships to provide a continuum of services as seamless as possible to assist Oregonians in achieving homeownership. We are investing in the creation of a modern and tailored lending platform. Central to this platform is our new **Flex Lending program** that will complement the **Whole Loan Residential Bond Program** and create other opportunities for MBS Bond products. In the first quarter of this plan year, we have engaged a hedge provider for this work. We plan to onboard a master servicer by the mid-2021 and anticipate offering our Flex Lending program starting in September 2021.

We are continuing to support homeownership for communities of color through outreach to culturally specific and culturally responsive organizations. During the first quarter, we shared our Flex Lending draft program design with 17 organizations to obtain feedback. We continue to conduct outreach and relationship building to support new program develop, identify barriers that exist for communities, and learn how to better leverage our resources to maximize outcomes for Oregonians. With the launch of **OHSI's COVID-19 mortgage assistance program**, we performed outreach to organizations that were not currently established OHCS partners and invested in media outreach utilizing our established culturally specific organizations. We continue to grow our network and learn more about organizations that can help us better serve our communities of color. Our goal this year is to increase the number of agencies supporting Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) in our resource/partner directory by ten percent.

We are finalizing our **Homeownership Center Request for Application (RFA)** and we are close to release. It is our first RFA to establish performance based contracting measures and the first to have established equity and racial justice goals and expectations. In addition to researching how to establish performance-based contracts, we have been engaged in identifying a homeownership development

framework that will help us provide more affordable homes. We hope to have an approved framework by the end of Statewide Housing Plan year 2, June 2021.

We have reopened the **Oregon Homeownership Stabilization Initiative (OHSI)** and completed our software conversion in the second quarter to cost effectively process applications. Since inception of our new application portal in mid-September 2020, we have received 368 application through the end of December 2020. This volume of applications is substantially lower than anticipated and we are evaluating options for tailoring the program to better meet the income challenges that homeowners are still facing.

e support low-cost homeownership through preservation and improvement of manufactured housing (MH). In the first quarter, we completed rulemaking, program design, and stakeholder engagement for the **MH Decommissioning and Replacement Program**. Program documents were finalized in the second quarter to begin administering the program in-house in the second half of SWHP year 2. While not part of the original scope, in response to the wildfires which have had a significant impact on manufactured housing parks in the state, we have pivoted quickly to participate in various task forces focused on response and recovery, while evaluating ways to leverage our existing resources to assist with the response. We also worked with partners to develop an informational sheet and **FAQs specific to manufactured housing** and participated in several community forums, legislative briefings, and information sessions.

While we do not yet know what funding will be available for wildfire rebuilding related to manufactured housing, we are starting to see requests from wildfire survivors whose manufactured house will require replacing. We are looking for creative ways to work with FEMA and other federal and state agencies to leverage resources for long-term manufactured housing recovery to replace some of the units lost in wildfires.



## RURAL COMMUNITIES

To support our rural outreach plan and marketing needs, we **evaluated our 2020 NOFAs** on their success in reaching rural areas and rural projects. **LIFT** was particularly successful, with more applications from rural than urban areas for the first time in its short history. Conversations with rural partners identified **potential areas for growth** among applicants and **potential barriers** to development that OHCS can help address. This past quarter, we partnered with Enterprise to support preservation training for rural areas. We are currently accepting applications for the Preservation Institute to further support this effort.

Like in other priorities, the ways we connect and the strategies we developed to reach our objectives has changed due to the pandemic. Due to the loss of Lottery Backed Bond resources we have to update our **HOME program** more dramatically than we initially envisioned. We separated our HOME NOFA from the 9% LIHTC, in part, to help target preservation needs in rural communities. In regard to **LIFT**, more resources were added to support projects in the 2020 LIFT NOFA round. We have shifted our request from LIFT funds to more general **XI-Q bond resources** that can be used for a number of rural-focused programs that can be leveraged most effectively by our partners.

In the first quarter, the legislative concept for the **Agricultural Workforce Housing Tax Credit (AWHTC)** was presented to the **Agricultural Workforce Housing Facilitation Team** and approved. The AWHTC is an important investment for the state, especially given the disparate impact of the pandemic and the wildfires on the agricultural worker population. The AWHTC will be published in the

small-project NOFA issued out in the summer. The update to the tax credit policy will help increase resources for rural communities and support more **efficient distribution of funds** to small, rural farmers.

In the Spring with Oregon's agricultural season ramping up, OHCS' Housing Integrators began hearing about a growing number of COVID-related housing and safe sheltering challenges facing **migrant farmworkers**. These concerns were echoed by other state agencies. In response to these urgent concerns, OHCS embarked upon a new partnership together with the **Governor Kate Brown's office, the Department of Agriculture, the Watershed Enhancement Board**, farmworker advocates, and farmers to develop and deploy rapid resources to Oregon's agricultural producers to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Normally, a new program of this magnitude would take months to develop but the **rapid inter-agency collaboration** supported standing up the program in one month. To date the program has provided **\$30 million** in safe, socially distanced sheltering options, safe transportation, and field sanitation supplies to the Oregonians on the frontlines. This program was coupled with **\$3.5 million of safe sheltering resources** that are available through the **Oregon Human Development Corporation**. During these rapidly changing times, we must take proactive steps to ensure partners most impacted by these crises are heard and supported and that urgent housing needs are addressed for all who reside here.