Last Updated: November 8, 2021

Please note this document will be updated as more information is available to share.

Central Application FAQ

Contents

Central Application FAQs

Central App Overview

1. **What is the central app?**
   The Central Application is a single online location where Massachusetts residents can apply for emergency housing assistance payments, including RAFT, ERMA, and ERAP, regardless of where they live in Massachusetts. The Central Application provides a single-entry point for Landlords, Tenants, Homeowners, and Advocates to apply for assistance.

2. **Are there any changes to the RAFT/ERMA/ERAP programs with the Central App?**
   No, there are no changes to the RAFT/ERMA/ERAP programs with the launch of the Central App.

3. **How does the central application differ from the current application and process?**
   While Cognito will remain the tool for accepting applications, there will now be one, centralized application instead of an application at each RAA. With significant input from RAAs, advocates, and low-income households, the new application asks generally the same questions but in a simpler manner for clients as well as RAA staff to process and review. Additionally, MassHealth/DTA income verification and de-duplication is done centrally and, in a bulk, batch process. Each RAA will receive applications through either DocuPhase or SharePoint and will no longer access applications through their own Cognito forms.

4. **Can applicants still submit paper applications?**
   Yes. Applicants can submit paper applications and documentation. The RAAs will manually enter the information into the central application portal. Maintaining an online record for all applications allows for ease to manage and track for DHCD and the RAAs. However, RAAs should encourage applicants whenever possible to submit online using a smartphone, with the help of an advocate, or via a computer/kiosk in an RAA building.

5. **Can advocates submit applications?**
   Yes, advocates can submit on other's behalf. They will indicate that they are submitting on behalf of another person in the Cognito form when they are applying for assistance.

6. **Can an applicant save their application and come back to it at another time?**
There is not a "save and resume" function with the Central App. Applicants can continue working on the application prior to submission while the browser is open, and the internet connection is stable.

7. **What is the application ID?**
The application ID is a unique identifier that is automatically generated once an applicant submits the application in Cognito. The application ID will appear on the client's folder and each file and will be emailed to whomever submits the application. The application ID will be unique per application and will be used to track and monitor the processing lifecycle.

8. **Do landlords have their own application ID?**
The landlord will use the same unique identifier for the application as the tenant. The tenant will receive an email containing the application ID regardless of who submits the application initially. If the landlord applies direction, they will receive the application ID directly via email after applying.

9. **What is the difference between the RAA and Applicant portal?**
Both RAA Staff and Applicants have access to the same Central Application Portal. However, RAA Staff have access to the "log in" feature on the portal. Once the staff has logged in, they have access to additional functions for manually entering paper applications and submitting tickets for technical issues or to request an application be routed to another RAA, when needed.

10. **What documents are required to be submitted with the application?**
The documents required to be submitted with the application may vary depending on the applicant's response to questions. The application will indicate with a red asterisk what documents will be required before submission is allowed. The full list of required documents for the application to be processed can be found here, though an applicant can submit the application for consideration without all documents attached.

11. **What happens if the applicant forgets to upload a document with their submission?**
If an applicant file shows missing documentation, the RAA will contact the applicant with their application ID and a link to the portal where they can upload additional or new required documentation with their application. The applicant will select the "Upload Documents" tile. They will be asked to enter the application ID and then can proceed with uploading the additional documentation. New documents will be transferred to the RAA's storage tool (either DocuPhase or SharePoint) with the application.

12. What do RAAs do if they need to change applicant answer on the application itself?
The RAA staff will use a form or note on the pdf with the change, date, and how client communicated the change to you.

13. How does additional RAA documentation get added to the client folder?
The RAA staff will upload notes and documentation via the central app portal which will be transferred to DocuPhase or SharePoint into the applicant's folder. This is important as DHCD Compliance will use DocuPhase for reviews and will need to see RAA documentation during those reviews.

14. What if the RAA staff is having a technical issue?
If a user is having a technical problem, they can speak with their supervisor and then open a ticket using the Central App Portal. They must include details of the problem in the form for the technical team to resolve the issue.

15. Are there new fields in happy?
The new field to be completed in HAPPY is "Central App application ID".

16. How can an applicant retrieve their application ID?
Applicants can reference the original email that they received upon application submission. Additionally, applicants can contact the RAA by phone or email by accessing the information from the "Need Help" tile on the Central App portal.

17. What languages are the application available in?
The application is available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Haitian Creole, Russian, and Khmer/Cambodian by selecting the appropriate tile on the Central App Portal. All other languages are available by selecting the language through the Google Translate tool at the top of the application page.

18. How can staff direct applicants to the appropriate RAA or RAP Center?
The RAAs can direct the applicant to the Central App portal to enter their Application ID once selecting the "Application Information" tile. There they will see which agency their application is with. If the applicant does not have their Application ID, the RAA can search the DocuPhase repository directly to find the name of the agency to provide to the applicant.

Central App Processing

19. **How should RAA employees in need of emergency rental assistance apply? How can they prevent applying at their own RAA to avoid a conflict of interest?**
    RAA employees who apply for assistance should submit a staff service request in the Portal to ensure the app is re-routed to the RAP Center to avoid a conflict of interest. If the employee does not have access to the Portal, they should ask a - supervisor to submit the request or ask to be added to the Portal.

20. **How do signatures work if an advocate is completing an app on behalf of the applicant? (or What is the application signature requirement when an advocate or other professional completed the application with or on behalf of the applicant? Does the requirement differ if it is completed by an advocate versus a RAA staff person?)**
    Advocates submitting an app on behalf of the applicant can electronically sign on the applicant's behalf. RAAs submitting paper applications can electronically sign as advocates do, though RAA staff must still upload the PDF of the paper app with the applicant's signature.

21. **How long does it take before the RAA can see an app in their DocuPhase/SharePoint system?**
    Typically an RAA can see newly submitted applications and associated documents within one to two hours of submission.

22. **How do you transfer an app to a different RAA?**
    RAA must submit a ticket request via the Portal noting the app must be re-routed.

23. **How can RAA staff obtain log in credentials for the Portal?**
    Another RAA staff person with Portal access must submit a ticket requesting Portal access for the new staff member.

24. **What paper applications do RAAs have to enter into the Central App Portal? Is there a date cut off?**
    RAAs should be keying from the Central App paper application to ensure all data for required Central App fields are entered into the Portal.

25. **If there are no income documents in the applicant file, how should RAAs determine what income range to select in HAPPY?**
    The Central App asks applicants to state their income, but it does not ask for proof of income. RAAs can calculate the AMI based on the applicant's stated income and then rely on the MH/DTA verification as documentation that their income reporting was accurate.