Federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP)

Review: HAPPY & Data Quality
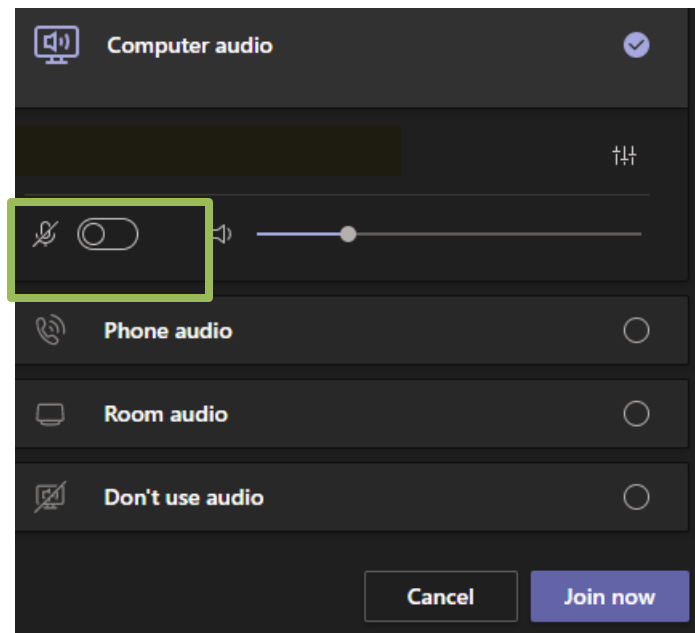
September 10, 2021

WELCOME

Please Mute

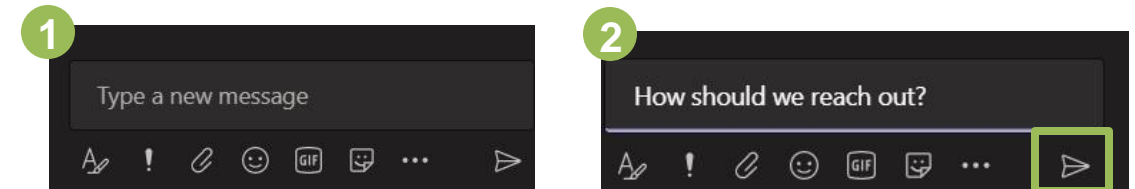Please join the meeting muted during the session to keep interruptions to a minimum

Engage During Meeting

1. Teams Chat

Send a message in the **Teams Chat** panel
1. Type in your **question**
2. Hit Enter

2. Questions

- We will be monitoring the Teams Chat for questions throughout the session
- We will triage questions during designated checkpoints

THIS CALL IS BEING RECORDED

Our Journey Today

1 HOUR

📋 **Objective & Introduction**	5 mins
🗄 **HAPPY Guidance & Best Practices**	
💡 **FAQs: HAPPY Edition**	30 mins
📋 **Processing Goal Update**	
✏️ **Central App Update**	
⧗ **Questions**	20 mins
⇨ **Wrap Up**	5 mins

Purpose

Review guidance related to HAPPY reporting and how to prevent common errors

Goal

Provide RAA staff with **guidance and continued support** related to ERAP and other EDI programs

HAPPY GUIDANCE

HAPPY GUIDANCE OVERVIEW

- HAPPY is a state-wide database used to make payments for RAFT, ERMA, HomeBASE, and ERAP. It collects demographic and program data for reporting purposes.
  - Payments made directly out of Happy
  - Happy is used for reporting to Legislature and Treasury, as well as Public Records Requests, policy decisions and fiscal tracking
- Guidance for Happy data entry is uniform across the state, but practical use may vary based on your RAA's processing structure
  - Payment entry guide available on RAA portal
- Use Happy Support line or MRI portal to log technical issues, escalate to Molly Butman as needed

PAYMENT ENTRY OVERVIEW
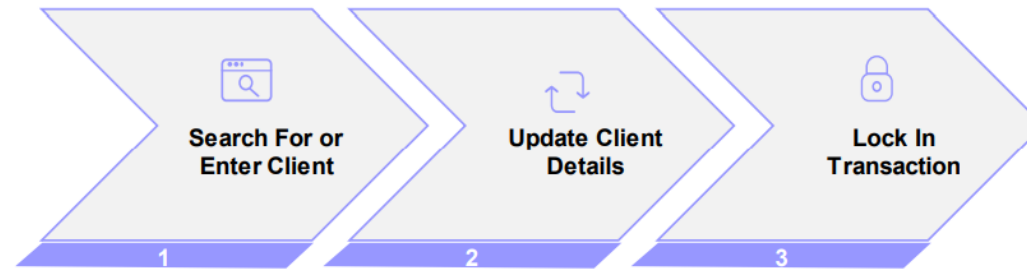
- Always search before entering a new household

- Use one record per household, retain program history
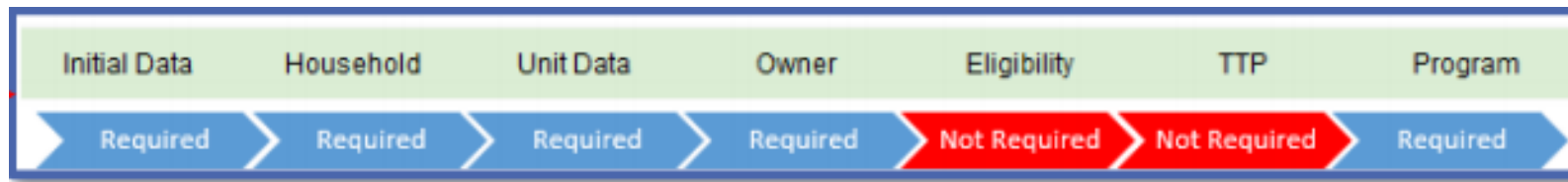
- Update all required tabs / fields prior to locking in any transactions

PROGRAM TAB (ERAP)

The Program tab has been updated to reflect the appropriate fields required for ERAP. Now, **all fields must be completed** for an applicant to receive a payment.

Required for all	Required for recerts
• **Monthly Rent**	• **#Times Recertified**
• **Total Arrearage Amount**	• **Total # months paid**
• **Landlord Door Y/N**	• **Formstack ID**
• **Approval/Denial Date**	• **Recert Denial / timeout (if applicable)**
• **Application Date**	
• **Housing Crisis**	
• **Income tier**	
• **Arrearage # Months Paid**	
• **Earliest Date of Arrears Paid**	
• **ERAP Status**	
• **Central App # (if applicable)**	

SELECTED PROGRAM UDF FIELDS

TEXT

Central App Application # FAKE123456

Landlord Door Y/N N

NUMBER

Monthly rent 1200
Total rent arrearage amount 12000

Formstack ID 85565415

DATE

Approval / Denial Date 3/18/2021

Application Date 1/1/2020

VALUE LIST

Housing Crisis PCRA
Income 15-30
Arrearage # Months Paid 10
Earliest date of arrears paid C June -

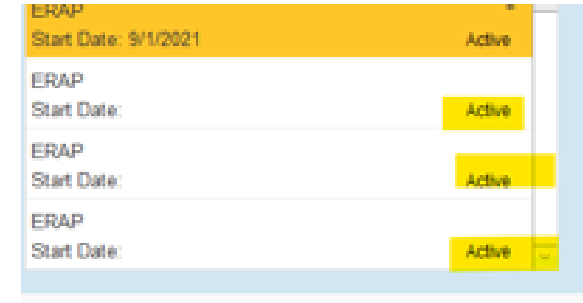# Times Recertified 01
Total #months paid(ARR+future) 16
Recert Denial/Timeout

ERAP Status A

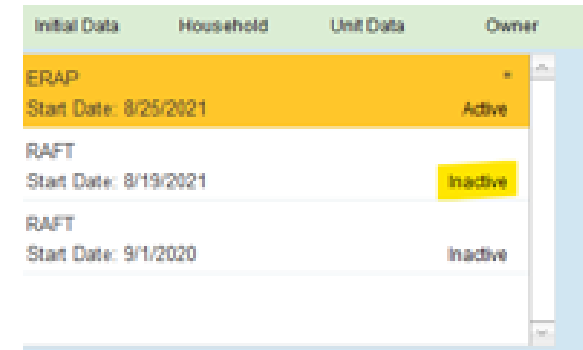**All information in this screenshot is fictious and for demonstrative purposes only.*

- If you **accidentally make a program line,** please do the following:
  - Erase all start and end dates
  - Erase all data from fields
  - Make the program status inactive

- Keep program lines active for recent RAFT/ERAP participants

- If switching programs post payment entry, go back to program tab to confirm there is an active program line

- Do not autopilot on program tab - review with a critical eye to make sure the data makes sense
  - Examples on next slide

COMMON ERRORS – PROGRAM TAB

- Blank Fields
- Housing crisis (none or other letter)
- Mismatch in arrearage # months, earliest date of arrears, and total arrearage
  - Please do not enter utility arrearage on program tab
- Please avoid using decimal points or dollar signs
- Subsidized clients with high rent or market rate clients with zero/low rent

RECERT DATA ENTRY

- Please do *not* add new program line
  - Fill in the (below) recert fields on current ERAP program line
- To find total # months paid (rolling total)
  - Combine the first ARR # months paid + stipends from first benefit + stipends from recert
  - In most cases, Total # months should be 6 higher than original ARR # months paid
- Do not change application or approval date
- Recert denials
  - If household had received ERAP in the past, but recert is denied select appropriate reason and fill in Formstack ID
  - If household did not receive ERAP, do not add new program line to enter denial

These are common mistakes to look out for and avoid:

- Stipends in subsidized units
- Prospective rent in subsidized unit through ERAP
- Paying tenant through RAFT/ERMA
- Using incorrect payment codes
  - Do not use FLM, SD, UTLDep
- Missing account numbers for utility payments
- Mismatched program and increment
- Missing tenant ID
- Paying stipends as ARR

- Entering incorrect tenant ID

- Changing tenant ID

- Missing housing type

- Incorrect / missing birthdays for HOH

HAPPY BEST PRACTICES

- Always search by SSN and name before entering new household
- Avoid searching for units when entering address in unit tab, always create new
- Keep a list of common vendors handy to speed up data entry
- Use the green arrows to navigate from one tab to another
- Log out of Happy every night using the silhouette at the top right
- If another RAA asks for a client to be released – prioritize and let them know ASAP that it has been done
- Review weekly data check – let DHCD know if you do not understand the highlighted errors

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs):
HAPPY Edition

What should RAA staff do if they notice an applicant is entered twice in HAPPY, for example with two different last names?

The program entry should be entered into the HAPPY entry with the associated program payments. For instance, if the applicant is receiving additional ERAP benefits, it would be entered where the initial ERAP benefit was listed.

If a recert applicant answers "No" to needing additional assistance, do RAAs need to enter the applicant in HAPPY?

Yes, these instances should be reported in HAPPY as denials in the recert section of the Program tab, and staff should use the drop down to indicate the reason most accurately.

How do RAAs report when a recert applicant's landlord/owner increased the rent?

RAA staff should update the rent amount in HAPPY and obtain documentation of the new rent amount for the file.

How do you verify duplicate checks in HAPPY?

Duplication checks should continue to be performed in HAPPY. Keep the following in mind:

1. RAAs should search for the HOH in HAPPY to see if they have received RAFT or ERAP previously.

      This search should be done by checking for the HOH as a "Member" instead of a "Tenant" to ensure that the search includes households where the HOH may have been a household member on another HOH's household.

2. RAAs should then search to see whether there may be overlapping benefits.

3. If there may be overlap/duplication of benefits, RAAs should investigate whether prior benefits covered the same time period.

PROCESSING GOAL UPDATE

GOAL: $283.7M*

$260M
(91%)

100%

75%

50%

25%

0%
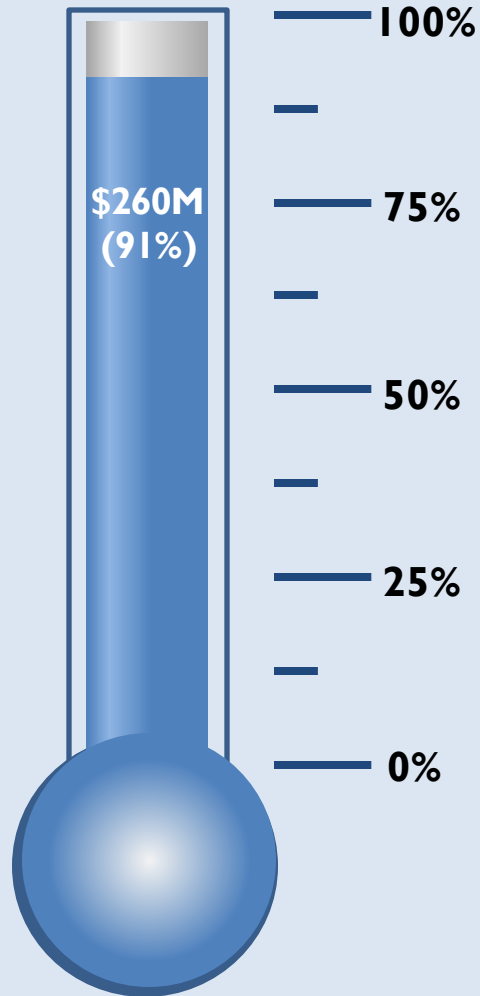
- 59.6% of ERA1 funds have been spent or committed as of 9/4 ($260.3M)*
  - Includes $43M admin
  - $6M stabilization
  - $5M SHERA
  - $40M COVID RAFT allocated to ERA1 in June
  - **The majority—$165M—is from ERAP**
- Gap of $23M to be made up by 9/30 to hit 65% goal
- In addition, 8% of ERA2 funds have been spent or committed ($25M, with **$16M** from ERAP)

65% of ERA1 funds must be spent or committed by September 30, 2021

POLICY UPDATES

Application Signature Change

- On the Central Application, only the Head of Household will need to sign the application

- Cognito applications and paper applications still request all adult household member signatures

- However, RAAs are allowed to process applications *without* adult household member signatures, as long as the head of household has signed
  - This is true even if the application was an "old" application, a Cognito application, or a paper application
  - Adult household members' information (name, DOB, SSN if they have one, etc.) still need to be collected and their income still needs to be included in the household's income calculation

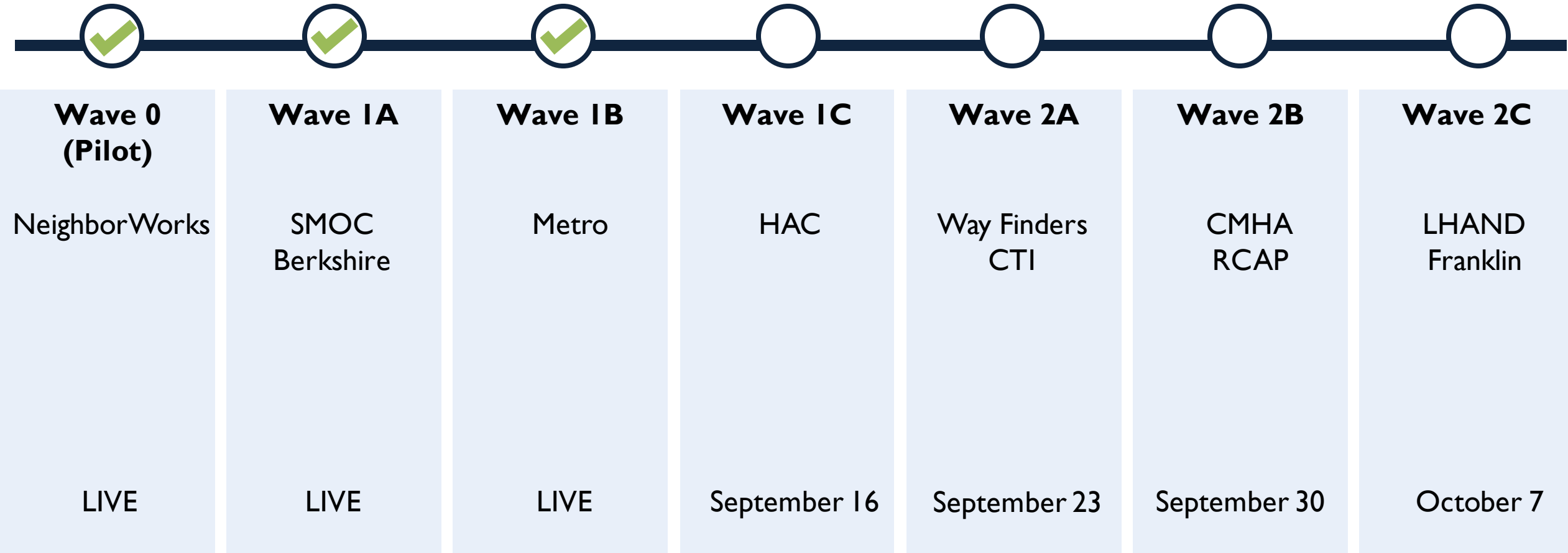# Direct Payments to Tenants: Policy Clarification

- When an RAA is making a direct payment to a tenant, proof of the amount owed is required

- However, if the tenant cannot provide a **breakdown of the months of arrears owed (such as a rent ledger)**, the tenant may self-certify that the arrearage is less than 18 months and for rent after March 13, 2020
  - This should be a written statement, such as a signed letter or an email from the tenant, that is kept in the tenant file
  - This policy is outlined in the Paying Tenants Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)
  - This self-certification is only allowed for direct payments to tenants. If an RAA is paying a landlord, the RAA must collect proof of the months owed

CENTRAL APP UPDATES

CENTRAL APP UPDATED TIMELINE

Wave 0 (Pilot)	Wave 1A	Wave 1B	Wave 1C	Wave 2A	Wave 2B	Wave 2C
NeighborWorks	SMOC Berkshire	Metro	HAC	Way Finders CTI	CMHA RCAP	LHAND Franklin
LIVE	LIVE	LIVE	September 16	September 23	September 30	October 7

QUESTIONS

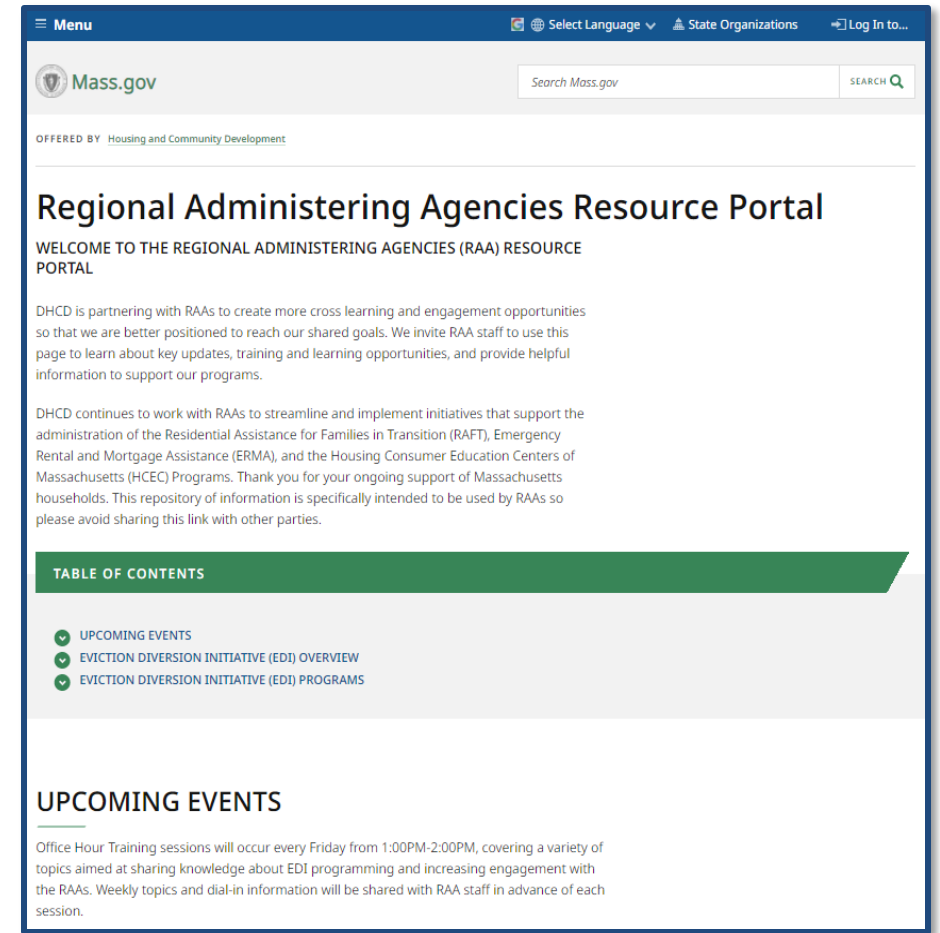# RESOURCES

RESOURCES

1

[RAA Resource Portal](#)
Central resource to provide RAA staff with key updates, training and learning opportunities, and helpful information to support programs

2

[FAQs](#)
Comprehensive list of FAQs spanning a variety of topics

Further Questions

Direct questions to your supervisor and then contact the RAA support inbox (dhcdraaraft@mass.gov) as a point of escalations for questions. A member of the RAA Support Team will respond.

- *Time-sensitive Questions*: Critical questions that require responses within 24hrs should be submitted with a subject line that includes "**URGENT**."

- *Example:* Tenant is facing imminent loss of housing (24 hours) and applicant does not necessarily fit guidelines.

Best Practice

Please **specify the program** that you are reaching out about to ensure that the DHCD RAA Support team is best positioned to provide policy guidance.

THANK YOU!