



SHERA Application Readiness

May 19, 2021

Last Updated: July 7, 2021



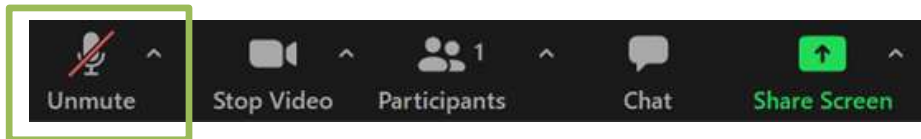
5/5/2021

ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES



Please Mute

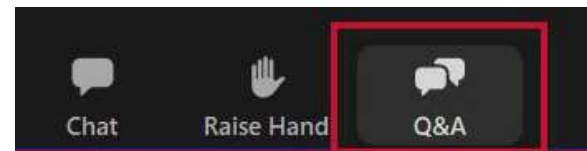
Please join the meeting muted during the session to keep interruptions to a minimum



Asking Questions

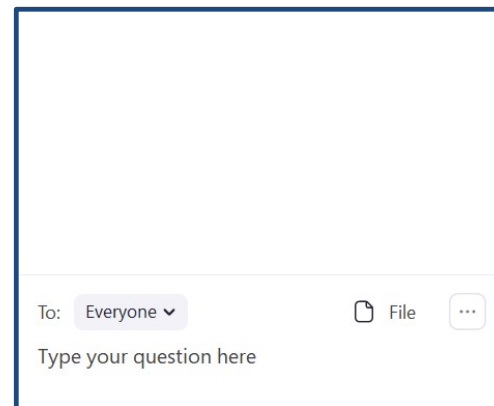
We will be monitoring the Q&A for questions

1



Click “Q&A” to open the chat window

2



Enter your question into the chat

We will follow up with answers to any questions that we don't get to during the session.

THIS CALL IS BEING RECORDED



5/5/2021

MEET YOUR FACILITATORS



Ben Stone
DHCD

Chris Devore
DHCD

Mirna DeRodriguez
DHCD

TRAINING SUPPORT

- Cybersense
- Accenture



5/5/2021



Our Journey Today

I HOUR



Training Goals & Objectives



SHERA Overview



Owner and Property Registration



Tenant Outreach, Eligibility, and Documentation



Application Requirements



Tips from Pilot Owners



Support, Resources, and Next Steps



Questions



5/5/2021

TRAINING OBJECTIVE



Purpose



Review the steps to register and prepare to apply for the new **Subsidized Housing Emergency Rental Assistance (SHERA) Program**

Goal



Provide guidance to better support property owners and tenants who are eligible for SHERA



SHERA OVERVIEW



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SHERA OVERVIEW

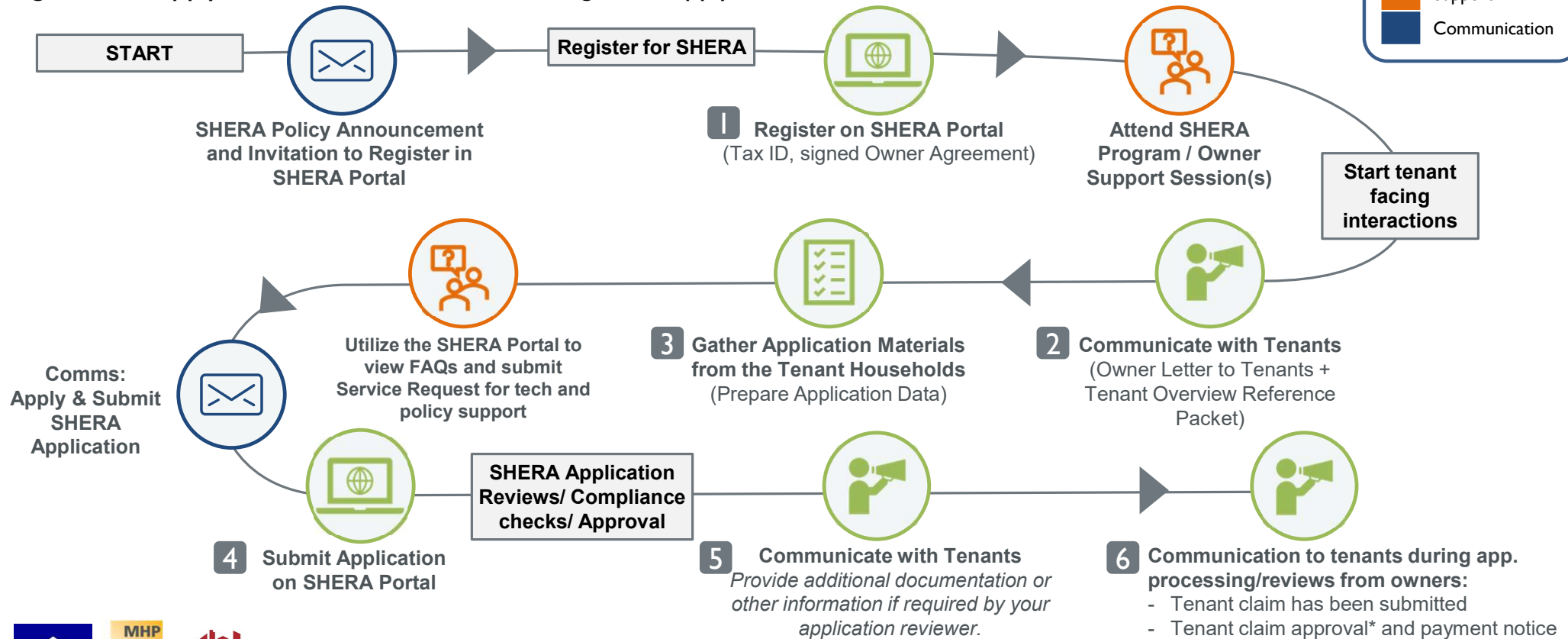


- SHERA is a **federally-funded emergency** housing assistance program that helps residents of public and affordable housing clear rent arrearages.
- SHERA offers a **single application** for multiple eligible residents in an eligible property.
- The period covered is **18 months** starting on **April 1, 2020**.
- This session is for Public/Local Housing Authorities (P/LHAs).

SHERA OWNER JOURNEY



Owners can generally expect to follow this journey if they're participating in SHERA once they're eligible to register and apply. **Note:** not all owners will be eligible to apply at this time.



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*Tenant claim denials will be communicated to owners and tenants by DHCD

REVIEW KEY DOCUMENTS



Below are documents that are **key to registering, applying, and communicating with tenants:**

- [SHERA Policy and Program Overview](#)
- [SHERA Tenant Notification Instructions](#)
- [P/ LHA Version: SHERA Owner Outreach Letter to Tenants](#)
- [SHERA Owner FAQs](#)
- [P/LHA Version: SHERA Talking Points for Owners and Managers](#)
- [SHERA Administrative Review Procedural Guidance](#)

Found on SHERA Portal:

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/subsidized-housing-emergency-rental-assistance-shera-program-for-owners>





OWNER AND PROPERTY REGISTRATION



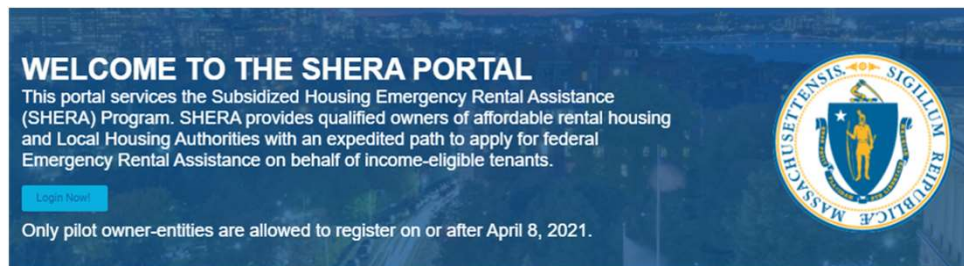
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OWNER AND PROPERTY REGISTRATION (1/2)



The Owner Entity, or owner's authorized agent, should register on the SHERA Portal

- Portal link: <https://sherafunding.mass.gov>
 - ✓ Program Information, documents, and webinar/training resources can be found on the home page tab of the SHERA Portal
- Owner vs. Sponsor
 - ✓ An "owner" is the legal entity that owns a particular property.
 - ✓ A "sponsor" may serve as the sponsor for multiple properties, and may be an organization with multiple, wholly-owned entities consolidated into their organizational financial statements
 - ✓ For P/LHAs, they are both the "Owner" and Sponsor" for their properties.



If you have a technical, policy, or other question, please submit a service request.



OWNER AND PROPERTY REGISTRATION (2/2)

Registration requirements for each property include:

- ✓ Enter Property ID
 - Sent to the Owner by DHCD with your invitation to register
 - For state public housing, 8 digit development identifier (001-667-02)
 - For federal public housing, PIH development number (MA001000001)
- ✓ Electronically sign the Owner Agreement
 - You can also view the Owner Agreement in Program Information
- ✓ Complete the W-9 form with Tax Identification Number for the property
- ✓ Upload signed Compliance Training Certification
 - Available on portal in Program Information; lists acceptable certifications





INITIAL COMMUNICATION WITH TENANTS



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SEND TENANT OUTREACH LETTER



Owners distribute the P/LHA SHERA Owner Outreach Letters to Tenants (including the SHERA Tenant Overview Reference Guide) to ALL tenants. There are two letters, one for tenants with eligible arrears and one to remind tenants to report unreported income even if they do not currently have arrears.

The outreach letter explains:

- ✓ The SHERA program
- ✓ Eligibility requirements
- ✓ How to apply for assistance

Dear **Tenant**:

We know that many residents have struggled during the COVID-19 crisis, and so we are excited to tell you about a new program that can help.

IF YOU HAVE FALLEN BEHIND ON YOUR RENT BECAUSE OF COVID, WE CAN APPLY FOR EMERGENCY AID TO PAY THE RENT THAT YOU OWE.

This rent would be paid directly to your landlord or property manager through the **Subsidized Housing Emergency Rental Assistance (SHERA) program** that is funded by the federal government. We will need your assistance and permission to apply for these funds.

- You may be eligible for this rental assistance if:
 - Your household income is below the program limit, at or below 80% [Area Median Income \(AMI\)](#);
 - You owe rent that was due between April 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021; and
 - You or someone in your household has lost income, and/or had a significant increase in expenses, because of COVID-19.

You will need to sign a sworn statement saying that this is true.

You may be eligible for SHERA regardless of your immigration status.

You do not need a social security number to apply. However, if you have a social security number, you will be required to provide the last four digits.

SHERA Overview

- The Subsidized Housing Emergency Rental Assistance (SHERA) program is a federally funded emergency housing assistance program for renters in subsidized housing impacted by COVID-19.
- Qualified owners of subsidized housing can apply for assistance on behalf of all their income-eligible residents with rental arrears.

KEY POLICY GUIDELINES

- 1. ELIGIBILITY**
 - The household has a household income at or below 80% [Area Median Income \(AMI\)](#).
 - The household has experienced a financial hardship due to COVID-19.
 - The landlord provides proof of non-payment of rent.
- 2. ELIGIBLE USE OF FUNDS**

Eligible use of funds:

 - Tenant-paid rent due between April 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021 (12 months).
 - No dollar limit per household.
 - Will only cover rental arrears, not other landlord-imposed costs such as parking fees, pet fees, or damages.
 - Does not cover utilities or moving expenses.
- 3. TENANT CERTIFICATION**

The signed Tenant Certification attests to:

 - COVID-19 Impact:** The tenant has incurred a financial hardship due to COVID-19.
 - No Duplicative Assistance:** Assistance requested does not duplicate any other government assistance received for the same cost.
 - Tenant Permission:** Gives owner permission to apply for benefits on tenant's behalf, and to share the information necessary for doing so.
- 4. STEP'S FOR TENANT**
 1. Work with your landlord to make sure your household qualifies
 2. Complete and sign the tenant certification to:
 1. Certify that your financial hardship was directly or indirectly caused by COVID-19;
 2. Affirm the amount of assistance you are seeking, based on the rent you owe between April 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021, and that you have not received and will not receive the same assistance from another program for the same months; and
 3. Give your property owner permission to apply for funds on your behalf.
- 5. TENANT NOTIFICATIONS**

Owners must provide participating tenants with notifications regarding:

 - Documents needed to apply
 - Confirmation of application submittal
 - Requests for additional documents
 - Application approval and payment to tenant account
 - Application denial will be provided by DHCD
- 6. PRIORITIZATION**

Funding will be prioritized for those who have been unemployed for 60 days or more and for those with a household AMI of 50% or lower at the time of application.

Department of Housing and Community Development | Mass Housing | Mass Housing Partnership 2



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TENANT COMMUNICATION RESOURCES



Several useful resources can be found on the SHERA Portal to help owners communicate with their tenants about the SHERA program. See P/LHA-specific materials.

- 1 A sample SHERA Owner Outreach Letter to Tenants is available on the SHERA Portal home page in “Program Information” under SHERA Tenant Communications
- 2 Tenant Overview Reference Guide is a helpful resource for tenants (Overview, FAQs, Document checklist)
- 3 Talking Points for Owners & Managers are a helpful resource when communicating with tenants

All sample notifications will be available in Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer and Russian.





ADDITIONAL TENANT NOTIFICATIONS



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ADDITIONAL TENANT NOTIFICATIONS

Tenant Notification #1: **SHERA Submission Letter to Tenants**

Tenant Notification #2: **Application Outcome**

- SHERA Payment Letter to Tenants - The SHERA Portal will also send tenant a payment confirmation as a supplemental notice via SMS text or email if the tenant elected to do so in the Tenant Certification.
- Application Denial – DHCD will communicate all denials to the tenant and the owner.

Tenant Notification #3 **to nonresponsive or ineligible tenants (if applicable)**

- Notice of Ineligibility (Non-Participation Record and Notice of Outstanding Arrearages)

Tenant Notification #4 **for Owners not participating in SHERA (if applicable)**

- Information will be provided for Owner distribution to tenants regarding ERAP, administered by RAAs

See the SHERA Notification to Tenant Instructions and Form Letters on the [SHERA Portal](#)



INELIGIBLE TENANTS



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ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEWS FOR INELIGIBLE TENANTS (1/2)



Owners are expected to work with tenants who ask for a review of ineligibility determinations when the tenant is found ineligible by the owner during the preapplication stage.

Notify the Tenant Immediately

The Owner must:

- Accept the tenant household's self-attestation of financial hardship due to COVID-19.
- Immediately notify the tenant of the reasons for ineligibility by sending a *SHERA Tenant Ineligibility Notice*. This notice will provide the tenant with the opportunity to ask the Owner for an administrative review, in writing, within 15 calendar days.

Conduct the Administrative Review

Once the Owner receives this request, the Owner must designate someone who did not make the initial determination to review all submitted documentation to determine whether the tenant is eligible for SHERA within 15 calendar days of receiving the request.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEWS FOR INELIGIBLE TENANTS (2/2)



Communicate the Outcome

- If the Owner determines the tenant is eligible for SHERA, the Owner is expected to submit an application on behalf of the tenant through the SHERA Portal; to notify the tenant of the application submission; and to continue with the SHERA claim process on behalf of the tenant.
- If the Owner confirms that the tenant is ineligible for SHERA, the Owner must notify the tenant of the decision. In the redetermination notice, the Owner must include BOTH:
 - A statement encouraging the tenant to notify the Owner of any changed circumstances in the future in case the tenant may then be eligible for SHERA
 - A listing of available rental assistance resources, including information on the no-cost community mediation program.



APPLICATION DOCUMENTATION



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GATHER APPLICATION DOCUMENTATION



Owners should gather tenant household documentation and maintain a file for each tenant household.

Each household file should contain:

- ✓ Identification for Head of Household
- ✓ Last four digits of the Head of Household's Social Security Number if they have one – immigration status does **not** affect program eligibility.
- ✓ Verification of current housing (e.g. lease, tenancy agreement)
- ✓ Tenant Certification of Rental Assistance Eligibility
- ✓ Documentation of qualified rent arrearages owed from the eligible 18-month SHERA period starting on April 1, 2020.
- ✓ Verification of income – can be most recent income cert, even if before 2020
- ✓ Lease(s) effective during the term of the rental assistance (if different than current lease)



SHERA Tenant Certification of Rental Assistance Eligibility



SHERA Tenant Certification of Rental Assistance Eligibility form includes many of the data points that may not reside in the property management system

SHERA | Subsidized Housing Emergency Rental Assistance Program

CERTIFICATION OF RENTAL ASSISTANCE ELIGIBILITY FOR THE Subsidized Housing Emergency Rental Assistance (SHERA) Program

PART 1: ASSISTED HOUSEHOLD INFORMATION AND ELIGIBILITY

Property Name	Building Address	City/Town	Zip
Tenant Name (Head of Household)	Tenant Unit # (the "Unit")		
Tenant Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy)	Last four digits of SSN		
Email	Phone		

Office use only

Head of Household Information

- 1) Do you have difficulty understanding English?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
- 2) Is English your primary language?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No. What is your preferred language?
- 3) What is your gender?
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Nonbinary
 - ☐ Choose not to respond
- 4) What is your race?
 - ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
 - ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
 - ☐ Black or African American
 - ☐ White
 - ☐ Some other race
 - ☐ Choose not to respond
- 5) Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Choose not to respond
- 6) In addition to receiving formal written notices on your application status, do you also want to receive updates by email or by SMS text message?
 - ☐ Yes – with the phone number I provided
 - ☐ Yes – with the email I provided
 - ☐ No, please only send me written notices through the mail
- 7) The undersigned hereby certifies that (check all that apply):
 - ☐ I am listed as a tenant or sub-tenant on the written lease for the Unit
 - ☐ The Unit is my primary residence (the place where I live all or most of the time)
 - ☐ At any time since April 1, 2020, due directly or indirectly, to the COVID-19 outbreak, I or another person in my household:
 - ☐ qualified for unemployment benefits;
 - ☐ lost income;
 - ☐ had increased costs; and/or

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SHERA | Subsidized Housing Emergency Rental Assistance Program

☐ had other financial hardship. Briefly explain: _____

☐ I or another person in my household have been unemployed for at least the last 90 days

8) I owe rent for the following months (check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/> April 2020	<input type="checkbox"/> May 2020	<input type="checkbox"/> June 2020	<input type="checkbox"/> July 2020
<input type="checkbox"/> August 2020	<input type="checkbox"/> September 2020	<input type="checkbox"/> October 2020	<input type="checkbox"/> November 2020
<input type="checkbox"/> December 2020	<input type="checkbox"/> January 2021	<input type="checkbox"/> February 2021	<input type="checkbox"/> March 2021

9) I am applying for a total of \$_____ to cover unpaid rent owed to my landlord for all of the month(s) checked above.

PART 2: HOUSEHOLD CERTIFICATION

- I certify under penalty of perjury that all information and answers to these questions are true and complete to the best of my knowledge.
- I certify that I have not received and will not receive any other government assistance to pay for the same unpaid rent that I have requested above.
- I consent that my landlord or another person authorized by my landlord, such as my property manager, may apply for Subsidized Housing Emergency Rental Assistance for me.
- I consent and agree that any information needed to process an application for this assistance can be shared with my landlord and property manager, The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development ("DHCD"), the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency ("MassHousing") or Massachusetts Housing Partnership ("MHP"), as well as other people or agencies who have contracts with either DHCD, MassHousing or MHP to help process applications for assistance.
- I understand that if MassHousing or MHP (or their agents), the Federal awarding agency, or an auditing agency finds that I have received an improper payment, I may have to repay some or all of the assistance provided by DHCD, MassHousing, MHP, or my landlord.
- I understand that it is a crime to lie or provide false information in this certificate or my application. I also understand that my application may be turned down if I have made statements that are not true or accurate.

Typing your name in the signature field below means that you are signing this document electronically. An electronic signature has the same meaning, validity, and effect as a handwritten signature.

_____ Head of Household Signature _____ Date _____

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SUBMITTING THE SHERA APPLICATION



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SUBMIT THE SHERA APPLICATION (1/3)



- 1 Owners must provide a list of data elements for each tenant rental arrearage claim in an excel or csv file.
- 2 Each **file** represents one application. Each **row** in the application represents a tenant claim. Please submit separate applications for each property (development for P/LHAs)
- 3 Owners upload the application onto the SHERA Portal: <https://sherafunding.mass.gov>
- 4 Once an application is uploaded into the Portal, each tenant claim is assigned a unique identifier for tracking, payment, and reporting purposes.
- 5 Applications will be processed, and payments made directly to the property's legal ownership entity for each approved tenant claim within an application.

Tenant Claim: The individual tenant household application.

Application: The property's application file made up of several tenant claims.

Note: on the SHERA Portal all applications, tenant or owner are called applications

SUBMIT THE SHERA APPLICATION (2/3)



- Each tenant claim in an application must contain:
 - Address for each unit (matched against owner-registered list)
 - Tenant information (many of these are included on Tenant Certification form)
 - ✓ Head of household: First and last name, middle initial (optional)
 - ✓ Head of household: Date of birth
 - ✓ Head of household: Gender
 - ✓ Head of household: Race
 - ✓ Head of household: Ethnicity
 - ✓ Head of household: Last four digits of social security number
 - ✓ Cell phone – optional (required if no email)
 - ✓ Email – optional (required if no cell phone)
 - ✓ Limited English Proficiency - optional
 - ✓ Language preference
 - ✓ Total number of household members
 - ✓ Household gross income
 - ✓ Tenant's share of the contracted rent owed for each month from the eligible 18-month SHERA period starting on April 1, 2020
 - ✓ Rent arrearage payment requested for each month



SUBMIT THE SHERA APPLICATION (3/3)



- Excel template is available on the SHERA portal
 - Owners can design their own reports to match the required data fields
 - Portal can import .xls, .xlsx, or .csv files
 - Opportunity to match the data fields in your report to the required data fields to make import automatic
- Step-by-step instructions (complete with screen shots) are available on the SHERA Portal in the Application Material section: [SHERA Portal User Guide](#) and [INSTRUCTIONS - SHERA Application Data Fields](#)

A recorded technical training on how to use the SHERA portal is available:

<https://youtu.be/KvNsRYWgfX8>





APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS



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APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS (1/2)



Know the steps in the application review process:

- DHCD is responsible for final application review and for approving all assistance payments.
- The SHERA Portal will conduct a range of system checks that verify:
 - Each household's monthly arrearage amount is less than or equal to the household's portion of the monthly rent obligation
 - Assistance is only provided for units at qualifying and validated properties. All public housing is qualifying.
 - All required information has been provided
 - There are no duplicate or overlapping requests
 - All required documentation has been uploaded

APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS (2/2)



- If a tenant claim does not pass the automatic Portal system checks just listed, that individual claim will be:
 - Returned to the Owner, OR
 - Flagged as an "exception" for secondary review by DHCD, MassHousing or MHP to clear up the exception for that claim or confirm a rejection is correctly determined
 - Reviewers may email the Owner a request for additional documentation
- The following tenant claims will be rejected:
 - Any request for assistance for a unit that has not been registered as a qualified address in a qualified property
 - Any request for assistance that exceeds the tenant share of contracted rent for the unit for any given month, or
 - Any duplicate requests for assistance for a particular unit for a given month, or for a particular tenant for a given month, based on the unique identifiers of both tenants and unit addresses



TIPS FROM A PILOT OWNERS



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TIPS FROM PILOT OWNERS (1/2)



- Get organized and set up (two weeks)
 - Review all SHERA program/policy materials
 - Create a work plan
 - Identify and empower key staff person
 - Determine what is centralized/done at the site level
 - Keep a centralized list of properties and ID numbers, as well as staff assigned to SHERA for each
 - Determine how application spreadsheet will be populated; some have had software vendor build
 - Consider phasing
 - Registration process – consider completing a week prior to submitting an application; complete at corporate/central level
 - Application process – submit applications weekly as individual tenant claims are completed
 - Prepare materials on letterhead, etc.
 - Schedule tenant outreach – Outreach Letter, phone calls, knock on doors



TIPS FROM PILOT OWNERS (2/2)



■ Implementation tips

- Develop and deliver staff training on the program, the documents and the Portal
- Anticipate a more favorable initial response from tenants than with other emergency rental relief programs; not as complicated for the tenant as other programs; not as much follow up required by Owner
- Plan on two to three weeks to complete tenant outreach and have all information for an application; consider phasing outreach to coincide with when rent is due
- Plan to implement all rent arrearage applications over a few months



APPLICATION SUPPORT



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SUBMITTING A TICKET ON THE PORTAL



Please make sure to include your **Project ID** if you already registered or tried to register on the SHERA Portal and as much information/ context as possible.

Service Request

Contact Information

Name *

First

Last

Email *

Mobile Phone *

Development Name

Please select option *

☐ Owner ☐ Property Manager ☐ Other

What can we help you with? *

Select (Drop Down)



Please let us know how we can help you. *

Submit

Cybersense Support



- Cybersense will be providing "office hour-style" support to LHAs on registering, preparing and submitting claims, and responding to requests for additional information
 - Sign up by google doc to be provided by Cybersense.
- They will also provide a webinar training on how to prepare for applications, including:
 - Extracting tenant info from management systems
 - Converting files to csv for upload
 - Mail merge for tenant communications
 - General tech support on Podio system
- Cybersense will send registration link for webinar

Housing Mediation Program



- **Free** program which helps find flexible solutions that work for both the landlord and the tenant
- Program information:
<https://www.resolutionma.org/housing>
- Find the mediation center in your city:
<https://hedfuel.azurewebsites.net/>

Benefits of Mediation

- Agreements reached collaboratively have better rates of compliance
- Allows for creative, flexible solutions
- Usually cheaper and faster than legal action

Eligibility

- Risk of eviction due directly or indirectly to COVID-19
- **No** cost
- **No** income eligibility criteria
- **No** court referral required (available even before an eviction is filed)

“Mediation is the best thing! We both should feel good that we helped a good family. I don’t ever want to evict them, but I just wanted to light a fire under them to get rental assistance...” – Landlord in Natick





RESOURCES & NEXT STEPS



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RESOURCES



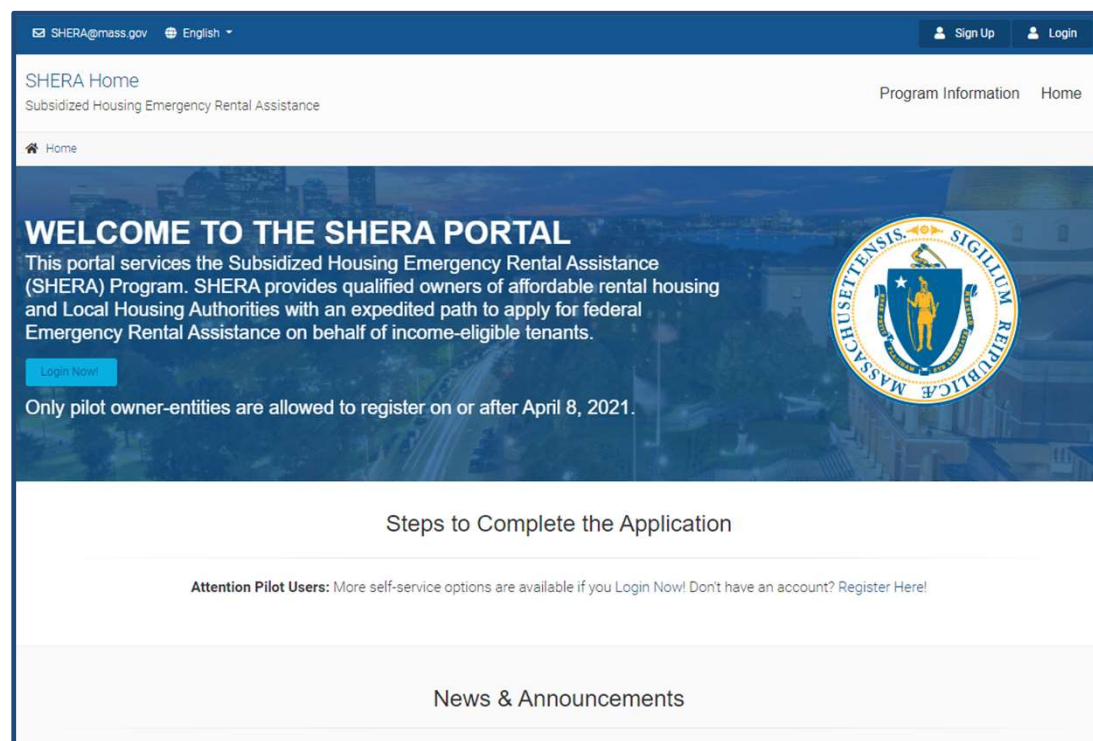
RESOURCES

- Review materials on the SHERA Portal Program Information tab <https://sherafunding.mass.gov/>
 - SHERA Policy Guidance
 - SHERA Notification to Tenant Instructions and Form Letters



SUPPORT & QUESTIONS

- After reviewing the materials, if you have questions related to SHERA, please [submit a support ticket](#) on the Portal.



NEXT STEPS



- 1 **WATCH OUT FOR** the SHERA Registration Invitation Email and develop your plan to engage with tenants.
- 2 **REVIEW** the [SHERA application data fields instructions](#)
 - An [application template](#) is included on the SHERA website. This includes the information owners need to collect for tenants with rent arrearages to ensure a complete application. You may already have some of this data in your tenant management system.
 - Note: you will receive a notification when you are able to register and submit applications
- 3 **SEND/SHARE** the [Owner Letter to Tenants](#) and the [Tenant Certification](#)
 - The Owner Letter to Tenants is to inform residents about the program and the Tenant Certification is to verify eligibility and start collecting tenant permissions for the Owner to apply on their behalf. *These documents will be available in 7 languages.*





QUESTIONS



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THANK YOU!



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