

Rental Assistance Processing (RAP) Center FAQ

1. What is the role of the Rental Assistance Processing (RAP) Center?

The RAP Center will review and process backlogged RAFT applications and accelerate payments to households facing a housing crisis. The RAP Center is designed to complement and support the existing work RAAs are doing.

2. Why is DHCD establishing the RAP Center?

Unprecedented application volume has led to application processing delays across the Commonwealth. DHCD believes it is essential to provide additional support to RAAs to ensure they have the tools they need to meet our collective goals – providing prompt assistance to ensure Massachusetts residents can remain housed.

3. Who is partnering with DHCD in this initiative?

Nan McKay and Associates (NMA), a company with four decades of experience in affordable housing administration and COVID-era rental assistance processing in other states, will operate the RAP Center. DHCD, with support from Accenture (a consulting firm), will oversee NMA's work in the RAP Center.

4. How will you decide which applications go to the processing center?

DHCD, Accenture, and NMA have identified an initial cohort of applications from Metro Housing Boston that NMA can effectively process and that will have a positive impact on Metro's abilities to continue processing other applications. These applications will be transferred to the RAP Center for processing beginning on January 11.

Later in January, the RAP Center will begin processing backlogged applications from Way Finders that will have a similarly positive impact on that organization's ability to process new applications.

As needed, services will expand to assist additional RAAs.

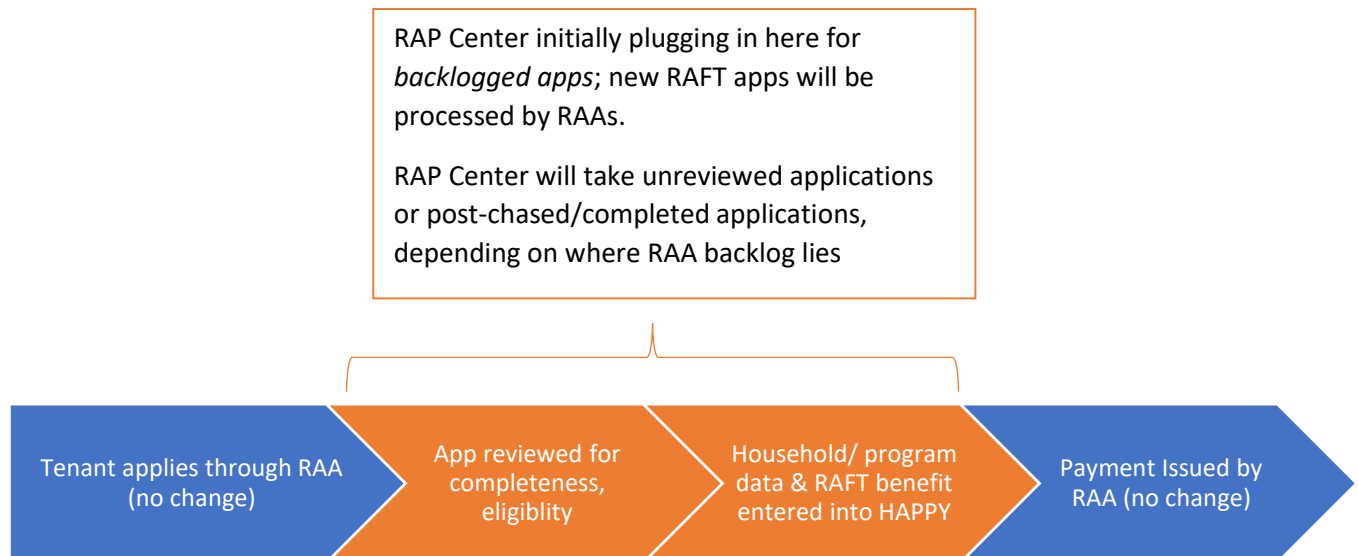
5. Where can I get more information?

DHCD, Accenture, and NMA will be sharing additional information in the coming days and weeks. If you have a specific question about the RAP Center, please email adam.schaffer2@mass.gov.

6. What work will the RAP Center take on, and what will remain with the RAAs?

DHCD and Accenture will work with individual RAAs to determine which submitted applications to transfer to the RAP Center, focusing initially on older/backlogged applications. The type and number of applications may change as we learn more about what works – and what doesn't – in this model.

RAAs will still issue payment, but are *not* expected to review data entered into HAPPY for accuracy, completeness, or eligibility. RAAs will simply issue payment and accompanying 1099 forms.



7. How will RAAs and families they serve benefit from these changes?

With this added capacity, families will receive payments more quickly. By focusing on backlogged applications, the RAP will benefit RAAs by allowing them to focus on a more manageable number of existing and new applications.

8. Should RAAs stop hiring temps?

RAAs may need temps to continue working through new application volume. It is also important to plan for permanent staffing structures taking into account projected application volumes, program policy streamlining and RAA process improvements currently being implemented. We encourage RAAs to discuss hiring and staffing concerns with DHCD and Accenture, if applicable.

9. Why isn't DHCD just providing funds to add additional staff to the RAAs?

The additional staff hired by the RAAs are an essential component of the expansion of RAFT. However, the unprecedented application volume has led to a backlog that cannot feasibly be addressed by additional staff alone, particularly given the technological and practical challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The RAP Center is an additional component meant to relieve the burden on RAAs and complement the RAAs' expertise administering RAFT. Nan McKay offers a deep team of managers and case processing experts who are ready to immediately begin processing applications, as well as technological tools to speed workflow. DHCD sees Nan McKay's value particularly in their deep experience operating similar programs during the pandemic and their ability to focus singularly on RAFT while the RAAs continue to administer all of their other programs in addition to RAFT.

10. How will RAAs know the status of an application once it is with the central processing center?

RAAs will receive regular reporting with case status for any applications sent to the RAP Center. In addition, contact information for the RAP Center will be provided to RAAs for critical inquiries that require additional information.

11. Will the applicant be informed that their application has been transferred to the RAP Center?

To minimize confusion and maintain applicant relationships with the RAAs, applicants will not be notified the RAP Center is processing their applications. Rather, they should still inquire about their application through existing RAA channels. The RAAs will then communicate the status to the applicant.

12. How long will the RAP Center operate?

The RAP Center is scoped initially for 10,000 applications. In terms of timing, it will continue to operate as long as the partnership is effective and there is need for additional processing support.

13. Will RAAs still get paid for the applications the processing center completes?

Yes, in FY21, DHCD will pay NMA directly for their services, and RAAs will continue to be paid the already contracted 18.95% admin fee on RAFT applications that are transferred to NMA for processing. This fee will be paid even if NMA processes the RAFT application.

14. How much staff will be involved at the RAP Center?

NMA will be bringing on at least 65 additional staff. Additional staff at DHCD and Accenture have been brought on to assist with the coordination with RAAs and management of the initiative.

15. What data entry will the RAP Center be completing on applications they review?

The RAP Center will enter all data into HAPPY, lock in the transaction, and retain required documentation in the applicant's file. These files, including email communications with applicants and landlords, will be returned back to RAAs and DHCD.

16. How long will it take the RAP Center to process RAFT applications given these changes?

The goal is for the RAP Center to be able to process 10,000 backlogged applications in approximately 60 days.

17. Will RAP Center staff follow the same program rules for eligibility and processing as RAA staff?

Yes, the rules and requirements will be the same for both the RAP Center and RAA staff. DHCD will be rolling out a new admin plan on January 11 that RAA and RAP Center staff will follow.

18. Who will be training RAP Center staff?

DHCD and Accenture has trained Nan McKay supervisors ("train the trainer" model). Nan McKay will train its own frontline RAP Center staff. DHCD and Accenture will work closely with Nan McKay leadership to ensure they understand and implement the RAFT program as designed.

19. If RAP Center staff enter payment requests directly into HAPPY, will those entries be able to be identified by who entered them and distinguished from those entered by RAA staff?

Yes, we are currently working with NMA and the initial RAAs working with the RAP Center to develop an effective way to distinguish applications reviewed/approved by the RAP Center.

20. Will quality control/audit/file checks be performed by DHCD or Accenture on applications handled and entered by RAP Center staff?

Yes.

21. How will RAP Center staff connect with owners and applicants?

RAP Center staff will contact and respond to owners and applicants, identifying themselves as Nan McKay staff calling on behalf of the RAA. We will be sharing and requesting feedback on the communications standards from each RAA who will have applications processed by the RAP center.

22. What is the language access plan for serving people whose primary language is not English? How will compliance be tracked?

Nan McKay will employ staff speaking English and Spanish initially, and will have on-call translation for other languages. Additional on-staff languages may be added based on need.

23. Who will handle IRS tax and other financial forms?

RAP Center staff will secure the W-9 and direct deposit forms prior to payment being entered into HAPPY. Because RAAs will be issuing payment, RAAs will continue to be responsible for issuing 1099 forms.

All records processed by the RAP Center will be subject to address validation using a system called "Melissa Data". Failed addresses will be subject to additional review by RAP Center staff. Once verified, addresses are checked for duplication of benefits by comparing to other applications that received funding at the same address. The property owner is verified against local tax records and also compared against the lease. Discrepancies will be resolved in accordance with program policies and procedures. Owner W-9 is also verified either through IRS TIN matching or through GIACT.

24. What system will be used to track the progress of applications being handled by the RAP Center, and if inquiries are received as to the status, how will they be received and who will follow up on them?

The RAP Center will be using Podio, a case management software, and report out to DHCD daily progress via a PowerBI dashboard. RAAs will be provided with sufficient information about cases to answer inbound questions.

25. Who will set production standards for the Nan McKay staff, and will those standards be the same for Nan McKay staff and RAA staff?

DHCD will set production standards for Nan McKay for inquiry response time that meet or exceed expectations of RAAs.

26. How will the hiring of Nan McKay be "messed" to the general population of stakeholders (legislature, advocacy groups, the general public) - will it be promoted as an additional resource rather than seen as a "penalty" because RAAs "could not do the job?"

DHCD will be communicating externally and internally using the same message: DHCD is standing up the RAP Center to provide additional processing support to RAAs that are facing unprecedented demand for a valuable resource. At the same time, DHCD is modifying rules of the RAFT program to reduce processing times.

27. What impact will the RAP Center processing have on funds advanced to RAAs?

We anticipate RAAs working with the RAP Center to have increased monthly expenditures. DHCD will review expected expenditures and make appropriate adjustments to the advances.

28. How will liability for RAP Center-approved applications be handled?

DHCD is contracting directly with Nan McKay and Associates for the RAP Center operations. Nan McKay will be responsible for abiding by all Commonwealth Terms and Conditions, including those related to data security and fraud. In the event Nan McKay recommends a payment that is incorrect or fraudulent, or otherwise breaches its contract with DHCD, DHCD would use the tools available *within the contract with Nan McKay* to address the issue.