

The U.S. Department of the Treasury seeks a research partner. Details below.

A virtual group meeting was held on Tuesday February 13, 2024 to discuss the project opportunity. The meeting notes and presentation materials are included below.

How equitable is the distribution of Homeowner Assistance Fund (HAF) funds to homeowners most in need of assistance?



Department: U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Capital Access (formerly known as the Office of Recovery Programs)

Topics: Home Ownership; Housing Stability; Economic Recovery Programs; Equity

Summary:

The [Homeowner Assistance Fund](#) (HAF) is designed to prevent mortgage delinquencies and defaults, foreclosures, loss of utilities or home energy services, and displacement of homeowners experiencing financial hardship. HAF provides \$9.961 billion for states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories, Tribes or Tribal entities, and the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands to provide relief for the country's most vulnerable homeowners. In the immediate term, a key research priority for the Homeowner Assistance Fund is understanding how its funds are flowing to homeowners most in need of assistance.

In comparison to previous programs to assist homeowners, such as those launched during the Great Recession, HAF is uniquely [focused on equity](#) and meeting the needs of low-income homeowners. Specifically, HAF recipients must use at least 60 percent of their HAF award funds for qualified expenses to assist homeowners with incomes at or below 100 percent of Area Median Income (AMI) or less than 100% of the median income for the U.S. Additionally, any amount not made available to homeowners that meet the income-targeting requirement must be prioritized for assistance to “socially disadvantaged individuals.” Taken together with [program features](#) that permit payments for a wide range of expenses (including utilities and homeowners association fees), allow for a variety of support for homeowners (legal services and housing counseling), and [encourage](#) culturally competent outreach strategies, this focus on assisting the most in need homeowners makes addressing barriers to equitable access a key consideration in the program's implementation.

In order to answer the question of “How equitable is the distribution of Homeowner Assistance Fund (HAF) funds to homeowners most in need of assistance?” from Treasury's [Economic Recovery Learning Agenda](#), the following more detailed evaluation questions could allow researchers to explore the various equity elements of HAF:

- What are the demographics of homeowners that received HAF assistance and how do they compare to previous federal homeowner assistance programs?
- What program characteristics used by jurisdictions had the biggest impact on improving equity?
- Which outreach strategies were most effective in terms of reaching underserved communities (including both urban and rural places)?

Evidence Project Portal

- What was the overall impact of HAF on racial disparities in housing wealth?
- How did allowing more housing types (such as manufactured housing) to receive HAF assistance affect the equity of the program?
- What were the impacts of Tribal HAF programs and how do they compare to state HAF programs?
- Within four key elements of HAF programs—outreach, the application process, HAF program features, and communication with loan servicers—how has equity been a factor into each of these stages?

In addition to the information above, more details are available in Treasury’s [Economic Recovery Learning Agenda](#) where this question is HAF research question #2, which is on page 20 of the learning agenda.

Anticipated deliverables:

- **Meetings:** Regular meetings with Treasury program and evaluation staff to discuss the research approach, the evaluation plan, initial findings, and reports.
- **Evaluation Plan:** An evaluation plan that Treasury will review before researchers begin any analysis. This evaluation plan should outline the researchers approach to evaluating the relevant research question, including methodology.
- **Evaluation Report(s):** An interim report for review by Treasury and a final public report that include the results of the evaluation assessing how the HAF program is serving low-income and socially disadvantaged homeowners. Reports should include short 3-4 page plain language summaries of results as well as documentation on methodology. For example, see this sample of a [summary of findings](#) and [methodology](#) from a previous research project.

Planned use of results:

This research will help inform how the Homeowner Assistance Fund works with state governments that are receiving HAF award funds and whether additional guidance or support is needed to ensure that HAF participants are meeting their goal for helping homeowners most in need to stay in their homes. Depending on the results, Treasury could use this research as the basis to create additional [promising practice documents](#) or other tools that seek to increase the effectiveness of the HAF program. This research will also inform Treasury’s lessons learned from the American Rescue Plan programs as well as the federal government’s long-term policy development for future programs to assist homeowners in future economic crises.

Funding:

Treasury does not have funds available for this research.

Data:

While Treasury is open to a variety of research designs, the following are some illustrative ideas of ways to conduct research in this area. In particular, potential evaluation designs focused on the equitable distribution of HAF funds to homeowners most in need of assistance could utilize of number of [complementary data sources](#). Using [HAF reporting data](#) on the demographic distribution of [HAF funds](#) can provide a high-level sense of the program’s equity impact. To identify potential evaluation designs, researchers could also use information on the differing features of each state’s HAF program by examining the state plans [posted on Treasury’s website](#).

To dive more deeply into how the program is [serving](#) low-income and socially disadvantaged homeowners, researchers could partner with a [state](#) to use data on the [distribution](#) of HAF assistance across census tracts to perform a descriptive analysis of the characteristics of areas that had larger numbers of HAF beneficiaries, with a

particular focus on examining Qualified Census Tracts. In addition, Treasury could help researchers work with states to confidentially access individual level beneficiary data via a secure data sharing agreement.

Additional potential data sources could include [foreclosure data](#) and [credit reporting information](#) which can be used to do more in depth examination of the equity impact of the program with the possibility to examine which aspects of the program were most successful for increasing assistance to underserved homeowners.

Other Benefits to Researchers:

Treasury could provide briefings to researchers about the HAF program, including information on program structure, the state plan approval process, available data, and program chronology. Treasury could also assist with matchmaking between researchers and particular states to facilitate the secure exchange of detailed data on homeowners that applied for and received HAF assistance. Treasury could also participate in regular meetings with researchers that are conducting an evaluation to discuss research progress and answer questions.

Agency Learning Agenda Question:

Treasury Learning Agenda Question 1.3: To what extent are American Rescue Plan (ARP) programs being implemented equitably? What is the impact of ARP programs on households, businesses, and governments? More details are available in Treasury's [Economic Recovery Learning Agenda](#).

Expertise needed:

- An interest in producing actionable and policy-relevant research
- General knowledge (or a willingness to learn) about federal financial assistance programs and state/local housing programs
- An ability to work cooperatively and collaboratively with the federal government
- Skill in producing concise, plain language summaries of research findings
- A willingness to partner with local or state governments (if doing local or state level research)
- A background in rigorous evaluation research and designs as well as qualitative research methods

Key dates:

Ideally, initial research products would be completed before the end of 2024 to allow the findings to be used to inform the future implementation of the program.

Project point of contact:

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Homeowner Assistance Fund (HAF) Researcher Interest Meeting

Evidence Project Portal

February 13, 2024

Hosted by Paul Strande (Office of Management and Budget (OMB)) and Vanessa Megaw (U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury))

Background on the Evidence Project Portal:

- This HAF project is part of an effort that the OMB Evidence Team is leading using the Evidence Project Portal. The portal is intended to help make connections and build partnerships between the federal government and external researchers. The Evidence Team works with agencies across the federal government to identify opportunities for evidence-building projects to share with the research community via the portal.
- The HAF project with the Treasury is the second of many projects that will be shared through the Evidence Project Portal.

Slideshow presentation & Next Steps:

- See slideshow deck for an overview of the information provided.

Q&A:

- Q: Is the Office of Capital Access at Treasury planning to engage in international research projects to support the Learning Agenda?
 - o A: No, not at this time.
- Q: Are government entities eligible to apply?
 - o A: Yes. Government entities may submit an expression of interest.
- Q: Who is the audience for the deliverables? What are we evaluating?
 - o A: Research results will be of interest to policymakers, Treasury, and other stakeholders who implement or administer HAF programs or are looking to implement programs like HAF in the future. Broadly speaking, researchers will evaluate the effectiveness of the HAF program and how equitable is the distribution of HAF funds to homeowners most in need of assistance.
- Q: Is Treasury open to recommendations for additional research questions?
 - o A: Yes. Treasury is interested in thoughtful research questions that fall within the scope of the Learning Agenda. However, at this time, Treasury does not anticipate revising its Learning Agenda.
- Q: Could you share more about the possible partnerships between researchers and HAF participants to share data to support quantitative or qualitative evaluations, particularly for providing additional administrative data?
 - o A: Treasury posts the HAF data that we collect on our website. Treasury encourages HAF participants to engage in research projects when requested. While Treasury cannot require a HAF participant to engage in a research partnership, there are many potential

benefits to doing so, including providing valuable insights that can inform future emergency housing efforts.

- Q: May a research partner conduct interviews or surveys with a HAF participant?
 - o A: Yes, if the HAF participant and/or HAF stakeholders are willing to take part in these efforts. Treasury encourages participation in research efforts that support the Learning Agenda.

- Q: How does the HAF program reach vulnerable homeowners?
 - o A: It depends on the program the HAF participant designs. Through our HAF plan review process, promising practices, and regular interactions with HAF participants, Treasury consistently recommends data-driven and culturally/linguistically competent strategies to reach homeowners most at risk of housing insecurity. In this way, Treasury has encouraged a “human-centered” design approach to reach traditionally underserved communities.

- Q: Should I plan for my research to be vetted through a university’s Institutional Review Board?
 - o A: It might depend on the researcher and affiliated university-specific requirements.

- Q: Is the definition of equity the same across the HAF program?
 - o A: Yes. See Section 2(a) of [Executive Order 13985](#) for the definition

- Q: What sources are used to identify socially-disadvantaged individuals?
 - o A: There are some flexibilities in defining socially-disadvantaged individuals (see slide deck and/or HAF Guidance for the definition).

- Q: May a researcher undertake a project related to a tribal HAF program?
 - o A: Treasury encourages research designs that recognize the different circumstances that might affect HAF programs administered by Tribes. For example, research designs might take into account the different housing support needs of Tribes (e.g. a greater emphasis on utility assistance and home repair). There might be different strategies for researchers to engage with Tribes, and research designs may consider how. Tribal communities can also vary significantly from community to community.

- Q: How does HAF improve economic inequality and wealth gaps?
 - o A: This is the type of question Treasury would be interested in a researcher pursuing.

- Q: Does Treasury have any recommendations on partners or sources of funding to support research?
 - o A: No, Treasury is not able to provide any recommendations at this time.

- Q: If I have additional questions, who do I reach out to?
 - o A: Please email OSPPI@treasury.gov for additional assistance.

- Q: Is Treasury conducting a similar opportunity for the Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) programs?
 - o A: HAF and SLFRF are currently the only two active Treasury projects on the portal. Note that ERA is also included in the Learning Agenda, and Treasury has started engaging with

researchers to answer research questions about the program.

Additional Resources:

- **Evidence Project Portal:** <https://www.evaluation.gov/assets/resources/Portal - Treasury - HAF.pdf>
- **OCA Learning Agenda:** <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/ORP-Learning-Agenda-Draft-2023.pdf>
- **HAF website:** www.treasury.gov/HAF
 - *HAF Guidance:* <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/homeowner-assistance-fund/guidance>
 - *HAF Promising Practices:* <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/homeowner-assistance-fund/promising-practices>
 - *HAF Program and Service Design Resources:* <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/homeowner-assistance-fund/program-service-design>
 - *HAF State Plans:* <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/homeowner-assistance-fund/plans>
 - *Published HAF Data:* <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/homeowner-assistance-fund/reporting>

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Evidence Project Portal Homeowner Assistance Fund

February 2024

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The inclusion of examples through these materials does not constitute an explicit approval of these projects by Treasury.



Meeting Overview

Purpose: Overview of Treasury Goals

- 1) Introduce overview of Treasury's learning goals
- 2) Overview of the HAF program
- 3) Answer researcher questions as shared in the Evidence Project Portal

Agenda:

1. Meeting Overview
2. Overview of Research and Learning Priorities
3. Program Background
4. Program Learnings to Date
5. Evidence Project Portal: Open Opportunity
6. Next Steps
7. Q&A



Overview of Research and Learning Priorities

Office of Capital Access: Learning Agenda

- The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 ("Evidence Act") emphasizes collaboration and coordination to advance data and evidence-building functions in the Federal Government by statutorily mandating Federal evidence-building activities, open government data, and confidential information protection and statistical efficiency (see: [OMB M-19-23](#))
- Overarching [Economic Recovery Learning Agenda](#) questions include:
 1. How did recovery funds stimulate an equitable economic recovery?
 2. How equitable was the impact of recovery funds on Americans most in need of assistance?
 3. What have we learned that can be applied to the development of future economic recovery programs?



Equity and Positive Outcomes



“equity and outcomes are not mutually exclusive but rather inextricably linked— programs will not reach their true goals unless they are advancing more equitable outcomes.”

– Economic Recovery Learning Agenda



Equity Definition

Equity: The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as:

- Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color;
- members of religious minorities;
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons;
- persons with disabilities;
- persons who live in rural areas; and
- persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

(Executive Order 13985)



Office of Recovery Programs: Research Designs

The Office of Recovery Programs is interested in learning from a variety of different research designs:



Descriptive evaluations: Describing the characteristics of those that received services or funds but not necessarily cause and effect



Process evaluations: Examining the process by which a program was implemented and the potential effects of program design choices



Impact evaluations: Measuring the causal impact of the program on beneficiaries



Other Tools: Data analysis, performance metrics, qualitative methods, and additional tools for examining the implementation and outcomes from programs

* See page 6 of the Learning Agenda for more details



Office of Capital Access: Research and Learning Priorities



Homeownership Assistance Fund Overview

Homeowner Assistance Fund

Overview

The American Rescue Plan Act (2021) established the Homeowner Assistance Funds (HAF) and makes \$9.96B available for **states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories, Tribes or Tribal entities, and the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands** to provide assistance to eligible homeowners struggling to pay mortgages and utilities.

Part of a broad response to coronavirus-related housing risks across all of government.

Key objectives of HAF:

- Prevent mortgage delinquencies and defaults, foreclosures, loss of utilities or home energy services, and displacement of homeowners experiencing financial hardship after January 21, 2020 and cover qualified expenses related to mortgages and housing.
- Provide funds for mortgage payments, homeowner's insurance, utility payments, and other specified purposes.
- Requires at least 60% of funds go to homeowners with income at or below 100% AMI or US MI to cover qualified expenses; prioritization of remaining funds for socially disadvantaged individuals.



HAF Summary Data

- As of the end of Q3 2023, HAF participants assisted over 412,000 homeowners across the country
- Across the program, participants have obligated 62.7% of HAF funds, a 20% increase from the amount reported for the Q2 2023 period
- Excluding omitted data or data not reported through Q3 2023:
 - 50% of HAF assistance has been delivered to very low-income homeowners (those earning 50% of area median income and below);
 - 35% of HAF homeowners self-identified as Black and 18% self-identified as Latino; and
 - 59% of HAF beneficiaries were female.



Homeowner Assistance Fund Opportunities for Feedback and Collaboration

Learning Area: How equitable is the distribution of HAF funds to homeowners most in need of assistance?

Background

Learning to Date

Example Research Project(s)

- Treasury has helped HAF participants reach historically underserved populations, including through conducting culturally and linguistically relevant outreach, reducing unduly burdensome application requirements, and streamlining communication with servicers to get assistance to borrowers with minimal delays.
- Treasury is regularly [releasing HAF data](#), including demographic information. HAF programs are reaching a higher proportion of economically vulnerable and traditionally underserved homeowners than previous federal mortgage assistance efforts.
- Working with a HAF participant(s) to understand the effectiveness of targeted outreach to equitably engage homeowners that are most in need of HAF assistance
- Combining HAF data with other data sources such as foreclosure data and credit reporting information to do more in depth examination of the equity impact of the program with the possibility to examine which aspects of the program were most successful for increasing assistance to underserved homeowners.



Other Related Learning Areas

How did HAF's structure, flexibilities, and state plan review process encourage states to adopt impactful approaches to assist homeowners?

How are HAF funds changing the housing and fiscal stability of homeowners?



Research Opportunities

Evidence Project Portal: Open Opportunity

How equitable is the distribution of Homeowner Assistance Fund (HAF) funds to homeowners most in need of assistance?

More detailed evaluation questions could allow researchers to explore the various equity elements of HAF:

- What are the demographics of homeowners that received HAF assistance and how do they compare to previous federal homeowner assistance programs?
- What program characteristics used by jurisdictions had the biggest impact on improving equity?
- Which outreach strategies were most effective in terms of reaching underserved communities (including both urban and rural places)?
- What was the overall impact of HAF on racial disparities in housing wealth?
- How did allowing more housing types (such as manufactured housing) to receive HAF assistance affect the equity of the program?
- What were the impacts of Tribal HAF programs and how do they compare to state HAF programs?
- Within four key elements of HAF programs—outreach, the application process, HAF program features, and communication with loan servicers—how has equity been a factor into each of these stages?

Evidence Project Portal: Open Opportunity

Funding:

- Treasury does not have funds available for this research.

Potential Data:

- HAF reporting data: demographic distribution of HAF funds
- State plans posted on Treasury's website
- State partnerships (on a voluntary basis)
- Qualified Census Tracts
- Foreclosure data and credit reporting information
- Treasury may:
 - provide briefings to researchers about the HAF program, including information on program structure, the state plan approval process, available data, and program chronology.
 - assist with matchmaking between researchers and particular states
 - participate in regular meetings with researchers that are conducting an evaluation to discuss research progress and answer questions.



Evidence Project Portal: Open Opportunity

Anticipated deliverables:

- **Meetings:** Regular meetings with Treasury program and evaluation staff to discuss the research approach, the evaluation plan, initial findings, and reports.
- **Evaluation Plan:** An evaluation plan that Treasury will review before researchers begin any analysis. This evaluation plan should outline the researchers approach to evaluating the relevant research question, including methodology.
- **Evaluation Report(s):** An interim report for review by Treasury and a final public report that include the results of the evaluation assessing how the HAF program is serving low-income and socially disadvantaged homeowners. Reports should include short 3-4 page plain language summaries of results as well as documentation on methodology.

Evidence Project Portal: Open Opportunity

Planned use of results:

- This research will help inform how the Homeowner Assistance Fund works with state governments that are receiving HAF award funds, and influence how housing programs implement future initiatives.
- Depending on the results, Treasury could use this research as the basis to create additional promising practice documents or other tools that seek to increase the effectiveness of the HAF program.
- This research will also inform Treasury's lessons learned from the American Rescue Plan programs as well as the federal government's long-term policy development for future programs to assist homeowners in future economic crises.



Next Steps

Next Steps: Expression of Interest

If you are interested in partnering with the U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Capital Access on a Homeowner Assistance Fund (HAF) project opportunity, please submit a short (2-3 page maximum) expression of interest that includes:

1. Brief scope of work. How would you approach this question?
2. If any, identify potential challenges/hurdles and what you would anticipate needing from Treasury to overcome them.
3. What would you need from Treasury to get started?
4. If there is any other information you would like Treasury to consider, please share.

Please email your expression of interest and a copy of a recent CV to OSPPI@treasury.gov by **Friday March 1, 2024**. Make sure your email subject clearly states this is an Expression of Interest for the HAF project. If you have questions or if that timeframe isn't possible for you, please contact OSPPI@treasury.gov.



Q & A

Appendix

Other Related Learning Areas

How did HAF's structure, flexibilities, and state plan review process encourage states to adopt impactful approaches to assist homeowners?

Potential evaluation design:

Descriptive evaluation that could potentially examine the degree to which different program features affected the number and characteristics of homeowners that received assistance.

How are HAF funds changing the housing and fiscal stability of homeowners?

Potential evaluation design:

A quasi-experimental evaluation examining the distribution of HAF funds to eligible households could assess the impact of HAF assistance on post-award outcomes by comparing HAF recipients to non-recipients.

Socially Disadvantaged Individuals

Those whose ability to purchase or own a home has been impaired due to diminished access to credit on reasonable terms as compared to others in comparable economic circumstances, based on disparities in homeownership rates in the HAF participant's jurisdiction as documented by the U.S. Census. The impairment must stem from circumstances beyond their control.

Indicators of impairment under this definition may include being a:

- (1) member of a group that has been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice or cultural bias within American society;
- (2) resident of a majority-minority Census tract;
- (3) individual with limited English proficiency;
- (4) resident of a U.S. territory, Indian reservation, or Hawaiian Home Land, or
- (5) individual who lives in a persistent-poverty county, meaning any county that has had 20% or more of its population living in poverty over the past 30 years as measured by the three most recent decennial censuses.

In addition, an individual may be determined to be a socially disadvantaged individual in accordance with a process developed by a HAF participant for determining whether a homeowner is a socially disadvantaged individual in accordance with applicable law, which may reasonably rely on self-attestations.

See: [HAF Guidance 6-12-2023 \(treasury.gov\)](#), p.2

