

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.

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## 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)?

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- 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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