



Communications & Planning Department Memorandum

To: MaineHousing Board of Commissioners
From: Cara Courchesne, Communications Coordinator
Date: May 17, 2021
Subject: Emergency Rental Assistance Program Outreach & Marketing Efforts

This memo is meant to provide context related to Communications & Planning's presentation regarding MaineHousing's Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) Program outreach & marketing efforts. Below you will find an updated, detailed explanation of our work to date.

As a general note, we want to be sure that the program information we provide is accessible to people we aim to serve. All of our ERA materials (outreach documents, website information, and the application) are at an approximate 7th grade reading level to best reach people with lower literacy levels.

Traditional marketing efforts:

- Before we launched the program, we created an email signup for program updates. We first announced our March 1 launch on Friday, February 26 through that email list (over 5700 recipients) and with a post to our social media channels. We boosted the post on Facebook and Instagram.
- With the launch of the program, we distributed a press release which resulted in 8 interviews. We also posted and boosted Facebook/Instagram post noting that the program was open and accepting applications.
- We created a PSA which ran on WGME, WCSH, WMTW, WABI, WLBZ, and WAGM during news hours: early morning, noon, evening, and late night. The PSA ran twice in two week spans March 22 – April 3 and April 12-April 23. The PSA is also running as a social media ad campaign on both Facebook and Instagram. The social ad campaign will run for 2 months and is targeted to Maine people.
- Media interest in the program continues, which helps drive additional outreach.

State agency support:

- Information about the program and how to apply went out in the MaineCare email list which goes out to 80k MaineCare participants in March. We will ask them to send another email as a reminder about the program.
- We are actively working with DHHS's Office for Family Independence to get the word out to TANF and SNAP recipients. This includes information on OFI's website, phone recordings for incoming calls/calls in queue, and information provided to ASPIRE participants via the online portal they use to connect with their case managers. We are exploring the possibility of a direct mailing to all TANF and SNAP recipients sometime this summer.
- We shared information and program details with General Assistance (GA) administrators. We will provide information sessions for GA administrators soon.
- We've worked with the Maine Department of Labor and all 68k unemployment claimants received an email about the program. The program is highlighted on the ME Joblinks



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homepage and is a login message for job seekers on DOL's online platform. We've also provided them with flyers and tenant one-pagers to hang in CareerCenters around the state.

- Ana Hicks from the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future has supported our outreach efforts in a number of ways, including regularly convening stakeholders to discuss outreach possibilities and program implementation.

Landlords & property managers:

- We provided information to our HCV landlords about the program and encouraged them to support their tenants' applications.
- We hosted three landlord forums where we had approximately 150 total landlords and property managers in attendance. The forum included a program overview and time to ask questions about the program or discuss related issues or concerns. We also presented at the Biddeford Area Landlord Association in early May.

New Mainer Communities

- Our application and website materials are translated into 8 languages – Arabic, French, Spanish, Lingala, Somali, Portuguese, Khmer, and Vietnamese.
- We've created a flyer and one-page doc for tenants (attached). Both documents were translated into 8 languages (Arabic, French, Spanish, Lingala, Somali, Portuguese, Khmer, and Vietnamese) and we will soon have them in Swahili, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi and Dari/Farsi.
- We recently contracted with the United Somali Women of Maine and Prosperity Maine to provide outreach for the ERA and housing stability services to Maine's immigrant and refugee communities. We will support their outreach work in the communities they will serve. We will provide translated outreach materials to other Ethnic Community Based Organizations and create any additional materials they need.
- We wrote responses to a Q&A about the program for the Maine immigrant newspaper, Amjambo Africa, which ran in April. We will ask them to run an update this summer.

Legislators

- We provided information about the program to Maine legislators provided them with images and sample language to include in their constituent mailings and on social media. Although members of Maine's Congressional delegation have already provided information about the program, we plan to ask each of them to include program info periodically to remind constituents the program is available.

Outreach material distribution

- Our outreach materials (including flyers, social media images and caption language, and information for newsletters and websites) have been provided to:
 - o Family Child Care Association of Maine
 - o Maine Association for the Education of Young Children
 - o The Maine Afterschool Network
 - o Maine People's Alliance
 - o Good Shepherd Food Bank



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- Maine DOE communications and McKinney Vento Coordinator
- Maine Principals Association
- Maine Affordable Housing Coalition
- CMP
- Versant
- Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault
- Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence
- Maine Council on Aging
- AARP Maine
- Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition
- Maine Women's Lobby
- Maine Justice Action Group
- EqualityMaine
- Maine's Area Agencies on Aging
- Legal Services for the Elderly
- Maine Council for Elder Abuse Prevention
- Maine's United Ways
- Maine Primary Care Association
- NAMI Maine
- Maine Suicide Prevention Program
- Disability Rights Maine
- Maine's Public Housing Authorities
- MaineTransNet
- Maine Council of Churches
- Maine Health Equity Alliance
- Maine's United Ways
- Maine Municipal Association
- Maine Bureau of Veterans' Service

- We worked with both Versant and CMP on outreach efforts in addition to those described above. Both companies are providing information about the program to their customers, including (but not limited to) in utility statements/bills, via email, as a phone recording when a customer is on hold, and through their social media platforms.

Community Action Agencies

- The CAAs are doing their own local marketing and outreach and we provided support when necessary. This includes presentations to local groups, radio and TV interviews, localized press releases, and other grassroots marketing and outreach work.

As we move forward, we plan to repeat many of the aforementioned items and continue to engage more people, organizations, and agencies as we can. We will work with our contracted marketing agency, Rinck Advertising, to develop and implement a communications and marketing plan for the second round of ERA funding. We know with that funding there will be a number of changes that will increase the number of eligible Maine renters. We recognize the need to have a thoughtful and specific process to manage communicating program updates and changes.

We firmly believe we can always do better to make sure Maine people know that help is here. As always, we are happy to answer questions and hear ideas and feedback on our outreach and marketing work. Thank you for your interest and support.



NEED HELP PAYING RENT OR UTILITIES?

The Emergency Rental Assistance Program could help!

This program helps pay rent and utility costs for eligible renters affected by COVID-19. Maine's Community Action Agencies are running this program across Maine.

Do I qualify? If you:

- Pay rent
- Meet the program's income guidelines
- Have COVID related problems with money (unemployed, reduced income, increased bills, etc.)
- Have trouble paying your rent or utilities

You may qualify! Learn more about all the program specifics at mainehousing.org/covidrent or by calling MaineHousing at 1-800-452-4668.

How can this program help me?

We can help pay back or unpaid rent you owe back to March 13, 2020. We can also pay your three months of rent in advance. The program covers unpaid and current costs for certain utilities: water, trash, electricity, heat, sewer, and internet.

How do I apply?

Apply by going to mainehousing.org/covidrent OR by calling MaineHousing at 1-800-452-4668 for a paper application. You will need to provide some income documents, something that proves your address, and your lease or rental agreement (if you have it). We also need your landlord or property manager contact information.



NEED HELP PAYING RENT?

The Emergency Rental Assistance Program helps pay rent and utilities for Maine renters* affected by COVID-19.

One application can pay:



UNPAID & FUTURE RENT

This program can pay rent you owe your landlord back to March 13, 2020. We can also pay the next three months from when you apply.



UNPAID & CURRENT UTILITY BILLS

Eligible utilities: electricity, water, sewer, trash, heat, and internet.

* Eligibility rules apply. Learn more: mainehousing.org/covidrent or call MaineHousing at 1-800-452-4668.



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