



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY

Your Partner For A Stronger Arizona

Douglas A. Ducey
Governor

Michael Wisehart
Director

January 26, 2021

Dear County and City Partners,

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted nearly every aspect of our lives. The Consolidated Appropriations Act specifically identifies funding to support Arizona renters and landlords through the Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) Program. Nearly \$500M has been awarded to Arizona to assist individuals who are behind or in danger of falling behind on rent or utility payments. This funding has been distributed to 13 local jurisdictions with populations over 200,000 and to the state for administration of all other areas.

Each jurisdiction has the opportunity to create and run its own program, but the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES/Department) is interested in a partnership that minimizes administrative costs to quickly implement an effective rental assistance program. Setting up 14 individual processes across the state is likely to cause confusion for Arizonans as terms and conditions may vary and some programs may not be able to be launched for weeks or months -- while risking that certain renters and landlords receive funding from multiple programs while others receive no funding. To best ensure a straight-forward client experience, consistent eligibility determination processes, and prompt payment, the Department invites you to participate in a single program administered by DES. Eligibility for assistance would be consistent irrespective of the tenant's property address:

- Tenant household income is less than or equal to 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI)
- Tenant is eligible for unemployment insurance (UI) benefits or has experienced a financial hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Tenant has a demonstrated risk of homelessness or housing instability or is in unsafe living conditions

Application intake and eligibility determination will occur in a web-based portal that has been engaged by DES. This portal was designed specifically for the ERA Program and will provide tenants and landlords a comprehensive, user-friendly interface to submit applications:

Client experience

- Mobile friendly website is available 24/7, allowing tenants and landlords to apply and check the status of their applications
- Smart interface guides users through the entire application
- Separate tenant and landlord portals complete with notification workflows protect financial and personal identifiable information (PII)
- Documents and photos of documents are easily uploaded as attachments to facilitate the eligibility determination process
- The maximum monthly benefit amount will be up to \$1,500 for combined rent and utility assistance
- Additional assistance of up to \$500 one time will be available to landlords for court related costs and fees

Eligibility determination

- Automated configuration of federal eligibility requirements
- ID.me integration verifies tenant's identity and mitigates fraud. If a client has already completed identity verification through ID.me for UI benefits, they would be able to use those credentials and would not have to duplicate that effort.

Payment issuance

- Automated Clearing House (ACH) file will be transmitted daily to remit timely payments to landlords and utility service providers

Data analytics and reporting

- Real-time data analytics dashboard to inform workload management
- Demographic information to comply with federal requirements and inform policy
- Report generation to facilitate federal reporting of financial and performance data

DES has devoted 140 frontline adjudicators to determine rental assistance eligibility and has the ability to scale. These staff will handle calls, assist with the completion of applications, and determine eligibility.

The Department is committed to utilizing available funding to ensure that all eligible claimants in a local jurisdiction opting into the state program are served. If demand for services exceeds the local area jurisdiction allocation, the state would use financial resources from the statewide allocation to continue to provide services.

If your local jurisdiction declines the opportunity to join the statewide program, the Department requests that your jurisdiction create a landing webpage by Friday, February 12, 2021, where eligible claimants can be directed until the local program is operational. Should a resident of that jurisdiction log onto the Department's website to apply, they will be redirected back to the jurisdiction running its own program to apply there. DES would not accept applications from residents of those jurisdictions.

Additionally, should demand exceed budget in a local jurisdiction operating its own program, the state will evaluate available funding for any requests from a local jurisdiction and, if available, will allocate funding based on a calculation using the eligibility and maximum benefit criteria being utilized in the statewide program.

DES will launch its ERA program in mid-February. Please let us know if your local jurisdiction would like to partner with us to ensure an equitable experience and timely assistance for Arizona residents. We are requesting a response by **Friday, February 5, 2021**, so we can make the necessary system modifications. We will provide a demonstration of the portal by Friday, January 29, 2021 as well as a Frequently Asked Questions document.

Please email any questions, and whether you would like to participate in the statewide Emergency Rental Assistance Portal to Wes Fletcher, Chief Operations Officer, at wfletcher@azdes.gov.

Sincerely,



Michael Wisehart
Director