

Housing Authority Of Gloucester County

NJ204

MTW Program Application – Asset Building Cohort

MTW Plan and Application Package

July 28, 2022

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Part I – MTW Plan and Asset Building Initiatives Information

a) MTW Plan

1) Vision for PHA's Local MTW Program

Since its inception in 1972, the mission of the Housing Authority of Gloucester County (HAGC) has been one of service to those individuals in our community that face difficulties securing a safe, healthy, and affordable place to call home. HAGC is committed to assist families and HCV participants that have been struggling financially and are facing multiple setbacks towards achieving economic independence and self-sufficiency. Participation in the MTW program would allow HAGC the flexibility to implement and evaluate strategies to effectively assist more working families to access HAGC's self-sufficiency programs and incentives. The MTW's statutory objectives of cost effectiveness, self-sufficiency, and housing choice are ones we share. Specifically, HAGC plans to utilize the MTW program's flexibilities to:

- Maximize Cost Effectiveness: HAGC plans to increase the income targeting percentage from 25% VLI to 50% VLI, while remaining in compliance with all other statutory requirements, allowing HAGC to better assist working families earning minimum wage and bring down the average PUC of our HAP. VLI families often miss the ELI qualification by just hundreds of dollars, effectively delaying any assistance they may be entitled to, at a rate of (4) four times longer than their ELI counterparts. For example, a household composed of a parent and child, where the parent works 40 hours

a week and earns \$29,120 or about \$14 per hour (minimum wage) would surpass the ELI Income Limit of \$25,300 and would be considered a VLI household. On 6/28/22 the average rent in Gloucester County for a 2-bedroom unit was approximately \$2,049, this means this family would be paying approximately 85% of their monthly adjusted income towards rent or be forced to secure a cheaper, most likely substandard, unit. It has been HAGC's experience that faced with these extreme circumstances an increasing number of our families choose to quit their jobs to qualify under the ELI bracket to receive assistance sooner and maintain this mindset to ensure they continue to participate in the program indefinitely, effectively cancelling any chances of achieving self-sufficiency and financial independence in the long run.

On the same note, HAGC plans to perform biennial certifications for those participants who receive a fixed income. This move would allow our personnel to focus on those experiencing a harder time leasing, as well as significantly reduce the administrative burden on the authority.

- Improve Self-sufficiency: HAGC plans to expand and implement programs in addition to its FSS program that would promote financial wellness and encourage credit building, allowing participating families to access necessary knowledge and tools that foster building credit and financial awareness, providing an opportunity for more participants to move to financial independence and homeownership.
- Increase Housing Choice: HAGC plans to increase the SAFMR Payment Standards to help more families find affordable housing. HAGC's voucher

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holders are struggling to lease up, the rental housing market in our community has skyrocketed, even by today's standards. Gloucester County's reduced affordable housing stock and slow turnover rate have driven the price even higher, on average 50% of voucher holders looking to lease spend more than 120 days searching for an affordable unit before they are able to lease. An increase in the SAFMR Payment Standard would allow our families to increase their housing choices, giving our participants the ability to move to areas with greater opportunities for success, like access to higher paying jobs, better education, and reliable transportation, amongst other benefits, while also lowering their rental burden. HAGC's observations are that participants who move to areas of greater opportunity have an increased chance of achieving self-sufficiency.

HAGC's staff members are experienced, knowledgeable, and well trained on the Department of Housing & Urban Development program operations and requirements. All key staff members routinely attend conferences and/or training seminars sponsored by HUD, PHADA, NAHRO, Nan McKay Associates, and others.

HAGC's current Executive Director, Ms. Kimberly Gober has over 28 years managing and administering housing assistance programs, she holds a B.S. in Business Administration and Accounting from the Glassboro State College and is a Certified Public Accountant. In addition to her responsibilities at HAGC, Ms. Gober serves as the Executive Director for the Housing Authority of the Borough of Glassboro, while also serving in the following Boards and

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Committees: Finance and Professional Development Committees of PHADA, Vice-President of Housing for the NJ National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NJNAHRO), Chairperson for the Gloucester County Human Services Advisory Council (HSAC), Chairperson for the Gloucester County Comprehensive Emergency Assistance Subcommittee of HSAC; Executive Board Member of the Southern New Jersey Continuum of Care; Member of the Gloucester County Workforce Development Board and the Gloucester County Economic Recovery Committee. These well-established relationships link HAGC to community resources that will assist and support our MTW participants.

HAGC administers an FSS program that assist families in gaining economic independence through coordination of essential activities, supporting self-improvement and community partnerships. Our FSS Coordinator, Ms. Heather Faulkner has over 24 years of experience in the affordable housing field and has served more than 15 years as the FSS Coordinator for HAGC, where she has helped more than 50 participants become new homeowners. Ms. Faulkner holds an A.A.S. in Public Administration from Hudson County Community College, serves as the Outreach Director at First Baptist Church of Jericho and Advisory Board Member.

HAGC is committed to comply fully with all federal, state, and local nondiscrimination laws, and with rules and regulations governing fair housing and equal opportunity in housing and employment, including, but not limited to:

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- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;
- Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (as amended by the 1974 HCDA, the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988);
- Executive Order 11063;
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973;
- The Age Discrimination Act of 1975;
- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA);
- The Equal Access to Housing in HUD Programs Regardless of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity Final Rule, published in the Federal Register February 3, 2012 and further clarified in Notice PIH 2014-20;
- The Violence against Women Act of 2013 (VAWA);
- Executive Order 13988 on the Enforcement of the Fair Housing Act;
- 24 CFR 5.151, 903.7(o), and 903.15; and
- Any applicable State laws or local ordinances, and any legislation protecting the individual rights of tenants, applicants, or staff that may subsequently be enacted.

2) Plan for Future Community/Resident Engagement

HAGC will continue to work with the Resident Advisory Board (RAB) to ensure and facilitate meaningful engagement for residents and participants. As previously mentioned, HAGC's Executive Director is the chairperson for both the Gloucester County Human Services Advisory Council and the Gloucester

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County CEAS committee, both committees can serve as vehicles for future community involvement and resident engagement. It is the Authority's intent to ensure that programs and services will be offered and accessible to all interested and eligible individuals, marketing the programs and services to those individuals who have been historically underserved. The Authority periodically reviews, updates, and creates program-wide marketing materials as needed to make them relevant, understandable, and effective to all potential program applicants, based on applicable Federal Regulation and New Jersey state law, to identify, target, and outreach segments of eligible populations which are least likely to apply to the housing program.

3) PHA Operating and Inventory Information

HAGC owns and/or manages a combined 614 affordable housing units throughout the County, operated under a variety of multi-family housing programs. 552 of these units are apartment buildings that house low-income elderly and near-elderly disabled individuals in an independent setting, the buildings are:

- Deptford Park (PH), in Deptford, NJ (99 units),
- Carino Park (PH), in Williamstown, NJ (99 units),
- Nancy Elkins (LIHTC), in Deptford, NJ (80 units),
- Colonial Park (S8 New Construction), in Woodbury, NJ (199 units)
- Shepherd's Farm (Section 202), in West Deptford, NJ (75 units).

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The remaining 62 units are Public Housing (PH) Scattered Sites homes for low-income families. HAGC intends to dissolve the 62 units of PH due to high cost of maintenance and extremely low turnover, current applicants on our homes waitlists are expected to wait an average of 15 years. HAGC feels this part of the community would be better served by refocusing our attention and funds to expanding the HCV program. HAGC would apply for Tenant Protection Vouchers if available or offer current residents an HCV from its current ACC authority. The current residents would be given the ability to relocate to areas that may offer greater opportunities, such as more employment and transportation options, or the ability to select the school district better suited for the assisted family, or the ability to live near the assisted families support network. Lastly, HAGC would offer households currently residing in our PH homes an HCV with a homeownership option, which may allow them to purchase the home they reside in, further promoting housing choice and self-sufficiency.

HAGC also administers the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program, which is currently serving approximately 1,800 families participating in a variety of regular and targeted HCV programs, including Mainstream, VASH, MOD Rehab, and Near Elderly Disabled.

HAGC administers the HOME Funds program which is a tenant based rental assistance program funded by the Department of Public Works, Planning Division/HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME), Department of Economic Development.

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HAGC operates a Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) Program to assist Public Housing Residents and HCV Participants increase their earned income and reduce dependency on the rental subsidy. Participants of the Public Housing Program and the Housing Choice Voucher Program may be eligible to participate in the Authority's homeownership program. These participants undergo extensive mentoring and monitoring to ensure they are prepared for homeownership through credit counseling and budget management courses. HAGC's participants in the FSS Program have benefited significantly from establishing credit and credit repair, which is a determining factor in HAGC's MTW plan.

HAGC operates a Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS) program which provides supportive services to Public Housing participants to remain living independent and age in place rather than require institutionalized placement.

Finally, HAGC also operates a Congregate Services program for the elderly, funded through the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, the Authority, and the tenant receiving services. Congregate provides daily meals, housekeeping, laundry, and shopping services for eligible residents

4) Plan for Local MTW Program

HAGC plans to design its own program aimed to improve credit worthiness as a vehicle to obtain financial independence, specifically:

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- HAGC will provide incentives to property owners that contractually agree to report HCV MTW participants' rents to credit bureaus;
- HAGC's PH management office will report for MTW participants in our owned and/or managed properties;
- HAGC will educate MTW participants on the benefits of reporting their own utility payments;
- HAGC will provide Financial Education to enforce the importance of household budgeting, savings and clearing derogatory debts to promote the following:
 1. Increase and maintain acceptable credit scores
 2. Increase household incomes
 3. Better spending Habits
 4. Increase savings potential
 5. Financially stable households
 6. Financial independence
 7. Removing financial difficulties to increase better quality housing opportunities

5) Proposed Use of MTW Funds

HAGC plans to use MTW funds flexibilities to create a more efficient use of funds by our participants and the authority.

- Increase of Payment Standard rate from 110% to 150% of SAFMR.
- Contracting Financial Educators services.

- Providing incentives to property owners that contractually agree to report HCV MTW participants' rents to credit bureaus.
- Contract credit reporting program(s).

6) Evidence of Significant Partnerships

HAGC has standing MOU's (Memorandum of Understanding), active partnerships, services agreements, or memberships with the following partners:

- **Gloucester County Workforce Development Board (GC WDB)**

The WDB is a local partnership of top executives from businesses and county and state government agencies in Gloucester County. The WDB is designed to create a workforce tailored to meet the needs of the community and produce an environment that will empower existing businesses, as well as bring new industry to the area.

- **Gloucester County Department of Economic Development**

Fosters public/private partnerships to create an environment of sustainable growth through retaining, expanding, and attracting quality businesses (Business Development) and by developing an educated/trained workforce (Workforce Development WDB /WIOA).

- **Gloucester County Department of Human and Special Services**

Fosters a comprehensive human services delivery system by implementing, coordinating, and improving network of community-based organizations using Federal, State, and County funds.
- **Gloucester County Chamber of Commerce member (GCCC)**

The GCCC exists to build relationships and help grow business throughout the Southern New Jersey and Philadelphia region by connecting businesses to each other.
- **Financial Wellness Institute**

Provides financial education and coaching for Gloucester County low-income residents.

b) Asset Building Initiatives Information

1) Assessment of Existing Asset Building Programs

HAGC operates a Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) Program to assist Public Housing Residents and HCV Participants increase their earned income and reduce dependency on the rental subsidy. Families work closely with the FSS coordinator in developing the family's individual training and service plan with specific short term and long-term goals. The FSS Coordinator meets individually with each family to review progress under the goals and connect the families with resources to move towards successful goal completion. Families are offered credit and budget counseling, career and educational

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counseling and community-based services specially tailored to their unique goals. Our FSS Grant FY22-23 is in the amount of \$110,726; we have 44 active participants, 29 of those have escrow accounts that total almost \$170,000.

HAGC operates a Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS) program which provides supportive services to Public Housing participants to remain living independent and age in place rather than require institutionalized placement. The ROSS program also has the objective promoting job training and mentoring programs for disabled and elderly persons through employment and career counseling and economic self-sufficiency training. Our current grant FY22-25 is in the amount of \$245,850; we currently have 471 active participants.

HAGC has partnered with the Gloucester County Workforce Development Board (GC WDB) and thru resolution #20-14, executed a MOU with GC WDB. The WDB is a local partnership of top executives from businesses, County and State government agencies in Gloucester County that gathers and delivers information and opportunities available in our community aimed to assist our low-income residents gain access to a variety of programs, resources, and services that can benefit their households, such as job fairs, educational opportunities, and other assistance programs.

2) Choice of Asset Building Initiatives Option

HAGC intends to utilize MTW's Initiative 3(c) PHA Designed Asset Building Option. HAGC has identified credit worthiness as one of the primary barriers preventing our participant households from obtaining financial

independence, potentially resulting in an increased participation in our homeownership program. In addition, lack of credit or negative credit is a major barrier to HCV holders searching for housing to secure a rental unit, even with an HCV about 20% of our participants have difficulties securing a unit based on lack of credit worthiness. However, a close second is an insufficient Payment Standard rate, which prevents our participants from securing units and accessing higher opportunities neighborhoods, limits an already diminished affordable housing stock and reduces property owner's participation. HAGC feels option 3(c) would offers an increased flexibility that would better suit the needs of HAGC's participants.

3) Information Specific to Asset Building Initiatives Option Chosen by PHA

HAGC aims to provide our participants with the necessary tools to achieve financial stability, with the anticipated benefit of accessing a path to financial independence, potentially allowing these households to move on from the program and become self-sufficient. HAGC primary goal is to build credit for our assisted households and expand housing opportunities, reducing the rental burden of our participants, and allowing for a more efficient use of funds by our participants and the authority.

Elements that would require MTW Statutory or regulatory relief:

- Increase of Payment Standard rate from 110% to 150% of SAFMR.
- Increase the income targeting percentage from 25% VLI to 50% VLI.

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- Biennial Certifications for those participants receiving fixed incomes.

Elements that would require MTW funding flexibility and/or that are tied to building credit

- Contracting Financial Educators services.
- Providing incentives to property owners that contractually agree to report HCV MTW participants' rents to credit bureaus.
- Contract credit reporting program(s).

HAGC plans working on the MTW for a period of 30 years, starting with a pool of 25 participants as an initial control group, which is equal to about 1% of the PHA's assisted households, with the goal of increasing the number of participants as we identify the effectiveness of the different initiatives proposed.

HAGC anticipates serving the same number of households as it currently assists making use of the MTW flexibilities to better utilize the funds it currently receives. HAGC feels confident that the planned MTW proposed programs will promote credit building and financial wellness will be improved.