

# FREQUENTLY ASKED SHIP QUESTIONS

## State Housing Initiatives Partnership Program

The SHIP program offers communities an opportunity to quickly respond to COVID-related housing assistance needs\*. The Florida Housing Coalition and the Florida Housing Finance Corporation have created an extensive list of SHIP-related frequently asked questions, updated regularly and available at <https://www.flhousing.org/covid-19-housing-related-resources>. We have helped many communities establish their SHIP COVID programs to provide rent and mortgage assistance. Here are the latest questions on a variety of topics.

### RENTAL ASSISTANCE TOPICS

**QUESTION: An applicant for rental assistance has a roommate, but only one of them is applying. Can I process just one member of the household?**

**ANSWER:** It depends on the applicant's and his/her roommate's lease arrangement. When SHIP provides COVID-19 emergency rent assistance, all household members must apply and provide income information. In most cases, roommates share household expenses, have a shared lease, and are counted as household members. You can only process an application once you have received income information and signatures from all adult household members, so collect roommate information in such a case. In other cases, each roommate has a separate lease; in these cases, you may only count the applicant as a household member, and not the roommates.

Another scenario involves applicants who rent a room in the house of a homeowner. Tenants who have lost a job and have a lease may be eligible for rental assistance. In such a case, only the tenant is counted as the applicant household, not the homeowner's household members.

**QUESTION: How can residents learn if SHIP COVID assistance is available in their community?**

**ANSWER:** Contact your local SHIP office to determine. More than half of SHIP cities and counties are using SHIP funds for rental assistance and/or mortgage assistance. To contact the SHIP offices in your area, use the city and county pull-down menus located here: <https://www.floridahousing.org/programs/special-programs/ship---state-housing-initiatives-partnership-program/local-government-information>

**QUESTION: Can SHIP funds be used to pay a 'service delivery fee' to an agency to offer SHIP rental assistance?**

**ANSWER:** Yes, the SHIP program allows for payment of a reasonable service delivery fee to subrecipients that administer all or a portion of a SHIP strategy on behalf of the local government. The amount of the fee paid as an administrative expense or project delivery cost must be included in the Local Housing Assistance Plan (LHAP) and approved by FHFC. Contracting with a Continuum of Care organization is a best practice that helps ensure SHIP funds are coordinated with other sources of rent assistance.

### MORTGAGE ASSISTANCE TOPICS

**QUESTION: Should we collect documentation of an applicant's mortgage forbearance?**

**ANSWER:** Yes. Many homeowners are working with servicers on forbearances. While they may need help paying past due payments following the forbearance

period, you may decide to prioritize or limit mortgage assistance to those who cannot obtain a forbearance. In such a case, collect written documentation of the forbearance, typically in the form of a letter or email from the loan servicer.

**QUESTION: Can we assist homeowners or tenants who live in SHIP-assisted projects?**

**ANSWER:** Yes. You can provide mortgage assistance to households who have previously received SHIP assistance for home purchase, repair, or other housing needs. Similarly, you may provide rent assistance to tenants in rental units constructed or repaired with SHIP funds.



**QUESTION: Can you pay the mortgage if property taxes are included as part of the monthly mortgage payment?**

**ANSWER:** Yes. You can pay principal, interest, taxes, and insurance (PITI) as well as homeowner association fees

**INCOME QUALIFICATION & FILE DOCUMENTATION TOPICS**

**QUESTION: We are using the recommended selection process of prioritizing assistance to applicants who were SHIP income eligible pre-COVID. For our income calculations of the pre-COVID period, do we use the income chart effective prior to April, 2020 and then use the income limits chart posted in April for calculating income under current circumstances?**

**ANSWER:** No. Use the current income limits chart for both.

**QUESTION: Even when self-certifying income, SHIP staff must obtain additional income verification eventually, so I will try to obtain it now whenever possible. What guidance can you offer related to third-party verification?**

**ANSWER:** For several years now, applicant-provided documents have been defined in Section 5-13 of HUD Handbook 4350.3, Chapter 5, and are considered third-party verification. This policy applies not just during disaster recovery periods, but all the time. Applicant-provided documents are items dated within the last 120 days like pay stubs, retirement benefit letters, bank account monthly statements, and unemployment benefit notices.

Income eligibility for COVID-19 SHIP rent and mortgage assistance may be based on pay stubs and other

applicant-provided verifications. The HUD Handbook indicates that housing staff may collect the most recent 4 to 6 consecutive pay stubs. The paystubs of some applicants show weekly income while others have monthly paystubs, so use a specific time frame—like one month of paystubs—as a best practice. Also remember that the HUD Handbook 4350.3 allows for verbal verifications of income and assets.

**PROVIDING ONGOING ASSISTANCE**

**QUESTION: Once an applicant is determined eligible and receives a month of rent or mortgage assistance, what documentation do I collect the following month to determine if the recipient is eligible for additional assistance?**

**ANSWER:** It depends on the type of assistance provided. The income certification form shows that an applicant is eligible and is considered valid for one year. For programs providing month-to-month assistance, you should email or call recipients each month to determine if they are still in need of assistance and to check if their income has increased. If income has changed, you must re-verify existing income sources, collect verification of new income sources, and complete an updated income certification form. If income has not changed, do not collect any additional documentation from the applicant. The Florida Housing Coalition created a 'Monthly Income Verification Update for Disaster Assistance' form to document SHIP staff's monthly communication with each applicant. The form tracks the assistance a household has received to help ensure that assistance does not exceed the maximum award amount. To request a copy of the form, email [chaney@flhousing.org](mailto:chaney@flhousing.org).

**\*Once your community receives CARES Act funding that can be used for rent and mortgage assistance, use those funds instead of SHIP.**

**QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SHIP PROGRAM?**

Free telephone technical assistance is available to help you successfully implement your SHIP funded work. Call the Florida Housing Coalition's SHIP hotline at (800) 677-4548, Mon.-Fri. 8:30-5:00.



MICHAEL CHANEY

**Michael Chaney** is a Technical Advisor for the Florida Housing Coalition, specializing in SHIP, homebuyer counseling, and foreclosure prevention programs. He has 21 years of experience providing technical assistance to local government, nonprofit housing professionals, and consumers throughout Florida. Michael holds a Bachelor's degree from Loyola University in New Orleans and a Master's of Social Work Administration from Florida State University, where he has served as an adjunct faculty member of the housing department.