

**National Low Income Housing Coalition  
National Housing Trust Fund  
Model Allocation Plan for Ohio  
April 2016**

The National Housing Trust Fund (NHTF) will be implemented in 2016, making new funds available for the production, preservation, rehabilitation, and operation of rental housing that is affordable to extremely low income (ELI) households, those with incomes at or below 30% of the area median. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) is engaged in a multi-pronged strategy to assure that implementation is successful and the funds are used for maximum effectiveness.

The purpose of this paper is to inform Ohio housing and homeless advocates about what the NHTF statute and regulations require regarding the NHTF Allocation Plan. It is important that you participate in the public participation process to influence the content of the Ohio NHTF Allocation Plan.

The NHTF is a block grant to the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and U.S. territories that is administered by HUD's Office of Community Planning and Development (CPD).

There are two conditions that each state must meet in order to receive its NHTF allocation:

- The state must designate an entity to administer the NHTF and notify the HUD Secretary of the administering entity; and
- The state must prepare and submit a NHTF Allocation Plan to HUD.

The Governor of Ohio submitted a formal letter to the HUD Secretary stating that the Ohio Development Services Agency (ODSA) is Ohio's designated entity responsible for administering the NHTF. That letter also states that the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA) will participate as a subgrantee to allocate NHTF dollars and monitor funded projects.

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However, the person actually involved on a day-to-day basis will be Kelan Craig at OFHA.

This paper is based on NLIHC's interpretation of the statute that created the NHTF and the NHTF Interim Rule issued by HUD. Material that is specific to Ohio is gleaned from the State of Ohio's 2015-2019 Consolidated Plan <https://development.ohio.gov/files/cs/PY%202015%20-%202019%20Con%20Plan%20Final.pdf>.

The paper also contains NLIHC's suggestions for what ideal NHTF Allocation Plans should include. For the sake of clarity, some sections are marked **ST** for statute, **REG** for regulation, and **SUG** for suggestions.

## Tentative Timeline for 2016

- April 4: HUD announces that nearly \$174 million will be allocated for the NHTF in 2016.
- Late April: HUD publishes NHTF Allocation Plan guidance.
- Late April: HUD publishes NHTF allocations to states in the *Federal Register*. NLIHC estimates that Ohio will receive **\$3,790,000**.
- April-May: Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OFHA) develops NHTF Allocation Plan following its Consolidated Plan (ConPlan) public participation procedures, including at least a 30-day comment period. (see ConPlan Citizen Participation Requirements starting on page 14 of this paper.)
- June: OFHA submits NHTF Allocation Plan to HUD, which has 45 days to review it. The Allocation Plan is automatically approved after 45 days if HUD does not comment.
- Summer: When HUD Secretary Castro wants to distribute NHTF funds.

## Key facts about the NHTF Allocation Plan

- The NHTF Allocation Plan is part of the Annual Action Plan (REG) that Ohio must submit as an update to your 2015-2019 ConPlan. The ConPlan and the Annual Action Plan must be submitted to HUD for Ohio to receive your annual allocations of CDBG, HOME, HOPWA, ESG, and now NHTF funds.
- Ohio's last Annual Action Plan was submitted on September 15, 2015. A draft 2016 Annual Action Plan is dated February 2016.
- The Office of Community Development (OCD) within the Ohio Development Services Agency (ODSA) is responsible for submitting the ConPlan and Annual Action Plans. The Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OFHA), which awards a portion of Ohio's HOME funds, works closely with OCD in preparing the ConPlan
- Most people are more familiar with their local jurisdictions' ConPlans. NHTF advocates have to become knowledgeable about your state ConPlan and the state's process for seeking public input on its ConPlan.
- HUD has announced that in 2016 the NHTF Allocation Plan will be submitted as a "substantial amendment" to the Annual Action Plan. A "substantial amendment" requires a 30-day comment period. The NHTF Allocation Plan likely will be submitted at a different time than the Annual Action Plan because the annual funding for the NHTF will become known at a time that differs from that of the other CPD block grants: CDBG, HOME, ESG, and HOPWA.
- Typically, ConPlans and Annual Action Plans are submitted via HUD's IDIS electronic system. However, until the IDIS system is adapted to receive the NHTF Allocation Plan, it is expected that it will be submitted as a PDF document.
- The NHTF rule does not directly address the approval process for NHTF Allocation Plans. However, as part of the ConPlan, we infer that the same standards that apply to HUD's approval of ConPlans apply to HUD's approval of NHTF Allocation Plans. After the ConPlan or Annual Action Plan is submitted, HUD has 45 days to review and reject it. HUD can reject a ConPlan for several reasons, including being incomplete or failing to meet public participation requirements. If HUD does not act, the plan is accepted.

## Important Definitions for the NHTF Allocation Plan

- **Grantee (ST).** The state entity that prepares the Allocation Plan, receives the NHTF dollars from HUD, and administers the NHTF in the state. The Grantee for Ohio is OFHA.
- **Subgrantee (REG).** Ohio has elected to have the Ohio Housing Finance Agency participate as a subgrantee. If Ohio chooses, it may also designate local jurisdictions to administer the NHTF in a city or county.
- **Eligible Recipient (ST).** The organization or agency that submits an application to OFHA (or subgrantee) for funds to carry out a NHTF project in the state (or locality).

## NLIHC's Suggestions and Assumptions

NLIHC is making the following suggestions and assumptions. All are SUG:

- Advocates should seek the deepest possible affordability for rents and the longest possible periods of affordability for NHTF-assisted units.
- All funds in the first year should be used for rental housing, and none should be used for homeownership activities.
- All funds in the first year should be distributed by OFHA to eligible recipients, with no funds going to subgrantees. The allocation in 2016 will be too small to justify subgrantees.
- All funds in first year should be used to expand extremely low income (ELI) rental housing and have maximum impact. NHTF must not be used to supplant other federal or state funds. Please minimize using NHTF for preservation of existing federally assisted housing, including in the context of Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) or Choice Neighborhood Initiative (CNI) projects.
- In order to maximize affordability, projects no debt service or as little debt service as possible should be preferred. Therefore, the preferred forms of assistance are grants or no interest loans.
- Given the small amount of money available in the first year, NLIHC recommends focusing on projects with the most impact, as opposed to distributing small amounts of money to many projects.

## NHTF Allocation Plan Elements

The interim rule for the NHTF lists the elements that must be included in the NHTF Allocation Plan. They are:

1. Description of distribution of funds (ST)
2. Application requirements (REG)
3. Criteria for selecting applications submitted by recipients.  
Criteria must meet priority housing needs the Ohio ConPlan (ST)
4. Ohio's maximum per-unit development subsidy limit for NHTF-assisted housing for all areas of the state (REG)
5. If funds are to be used for first-time homebuyers, identify resale or recapture provisions (REG)
6. Whether Ohio intends to directly select applications from recipients and/or to use local cities or counties as subgrantees to select applications (REG)
7. Priority for funding must be based on:
  - a. Geographic diversity (ST)
  - b. Applicant's ability to obligate funds and undertake eligible activities in a timely manner (ST)
  - c. For rental housing, extent to which project has rents that are affordable, especially to extremely low income households (ST); has federal, state, or local project-based rental assistance so that rents are affordable to extremely low income households (REG)
  - d. For rental housing, length of the units' affordability period (ST)
  - e. Merits of the application in meeting state's priority housing needs (ST)
  - f. Extent to which applicant makes use of non-federal funding sources (ST)
8. Description of eligible activities and eligibility requirements for recipients (ST)
9. Certification by each recipient that NHTF-assisted housing units will comply with NHTF requirements (ST)
10. Performance goals and benchmarks consistent with state's proposed accomplishments (ST)
11. Rehabilitation standards that NHTF-assisted projects must meet (REG)
12. NHTF affordable homeownership limits (REG)
13. Preferences or limitations to a particular segment of ELI or VLI (very low income) population (REG)
14. Requirements and conditions under which existing project debt may be refinanced (REG)

## Model Allocation Plan for Ohio

To the best of our ability, NLIHC has attempted to discern from the NHTF Interim rule, other HUD documents, and the Ohio ConPlan and Annual Action Plan, what should be included in Ohio's NHTF Allocation Plan. HUD has stated that it will issue NHTF Allocation Plan guidance, but this guidance has been delayed several times.

### 1. *Description of Distribution of Funds*

ALL SUG

OFHA will prepare a Request for Proposals (RFP) that will describe in detail eligible applicants, eligible activities, what an application is to include, when and where applications are to be submitted, the criteria by which applications will be evaluated, who will review the applications, and when grant awards are to be made.

The RFP will indicate what Ohio has determined to be the priority housing need(s) it intends to address based on the outcome of its public participation process and the priority needs indicated in its current ConPlan. The RFP may also reference other needs assessments that show statewide housing needs.

OFHA will convene an application review panel composed of state officials and at least two private representatives of the housing and homeless advocacy community who are not affiliated with any applicant.

OFHA will determine which applications are responsive to the application requirements and present those to the members of the application review panel. The panel members will independently review each application and rate it according to the published criteria. The panel will then meet to reconcile their scores and settle on agreed upon recipients.

OFHA will be responsible for executing contracts.

### 2. *Application Requirements*

ALL SUG

OFHA will detail the application requirements in the Request for Proposals (RFPs), including:

- Project information similar to that required for LIHTC applications.
- How the project responds to priority housing need that Ohio intends to address.
- How the project responds to the six priority factors listed in the statute.
- Description of how NHTF-assisted units will be integrated with units that have higher income targeting.
- Description of how the project affirmatively furthers fair housing.
- Description of the plan and methods for achieving affordability (rent no greater than 30% of household income) for households at 30% AMI, 20% AMI, and 10% AMI.
- Description of tenant recruitment and selection process.
- Definition of a successful resident. Description of services and subsidies that will be provided to maximize resident success.
- Applicant's credentials to carry out project, including evidence of successful completion and operation of similar projects.

**3. *Criteria for Selecting Applications Submitted by Eligible Recipients  
(Criteria Must Meet State’s Priority Housing Needs)***

ALL SUG

a. Threshold criteria

- Responsiveness to application requirements
- Project reflects priority housing need(s) found in ConPlan that the state intends to address.

b. Final criteria, rating based on:

- Six priority factors listed in the statute
- Creativity and innovation
- Feasibility
- Potential for resident success
- Applicant’s credentials

*Criteria for Selecting Applications Submitted by Eligible Recipients  
(Criteria Must Meet State’s Priority Housing Needs)*

Continues next page

### 3. Criteria for Selecting Applications Submitted by Eligible Recipients (Criteria Must Meet State's Priority Housing Needs)

Regarding priority housing need(s) in the Ohio 2015-2019 ConPlan:

"The most common statewide housing problems include cost burden greater than 30% of income for owner households and a housing cost burden greater than 50% of income for renter households. Renters with 0-30% AMI have the highest percentage of having one or more of the severe housing problems, while owners between 0-30% AMI have the highest percentage of having one or more of the severe housing problems." {Note: "severe housing problems" include: severely over-crowded (more than 1.51 persons per room), lacking complete plumbing or kitchen facilities, paying more than 50% of income for rent and utilities.}

"In renter households, "other" households, followed by "small related" households represent the largest proportion with a cost burden greater than 30%.

[page 13]

The Housing Market section of the ConPlan also spells out housing needs:

"As noted in the housing needs assessment, small related households include many single-headed households, both male and female. Construction of new rental units is a priority for these households that experience high housing costs and also are among the largest category of renter households. Rental assistance is proposed for the lowest income households."

"As indicated in the previous section, with regards to the size of the units there is a need to construct new units and also for rehabilitation of some existing units to assist this population which has among the highest cost burden, especially for households below 50% of median income for large related families of 5 persons or more."

"There is also a housing need for elderly households. Specific housing types that can benefit this group can include new construction for those with incomes below 50% of median income, along with rental housing assistance, as elderly households in this income range experience a significant cost burden. Housing rehabilitation and repair goals are also proposed to address deficiencies in existing rental housing, which could include accessibility improvements..."

"It is somewhat difficult to establish goals for 'other' households, as this group is somewhat undefined. Certainly this group includes many single households, which market data have increased substantially during the last 10 years. These households are highly rent burdened and consequently one goal is to provide rental assistance, especially to those in the 0-30% of median income range. There are also goals for construction of new rental units for this population, particularly those below 50% of median income."

[pages 55-56]

The priority needs section of the ConPlan simply lists as high priority, "housing" for:

extremely low, low, moderate, large families, families with children, elderly, rural, chronic homelessness, individuals, mentally ill, chronic substance abuse, veterans, persons with HIV/AIDS and their families, victims of domestic violence, unaccompanied youth, frail elderly, persons with mental disabilities, persons with physical disabilities, persons with developmental disabilities, persons with alcohol or other addictions, non-housing community development [sic], public housing residents.

[pages 87-88]

4. *State's Maximum Per-Unit Development Subsidy Limit for Housing Assisted with Funds for All Areas of State*

The state must establish maximum limits on total amount of NHTF funds that can be invested per-unit to develop “non-luxury” housing, with adjustments for number of bedrooms and location. Limits must be reasonable and based on actual costs (REG).

HUD has indicated that it will be issuing guidance on the per-unit development subsidy limit for the NHTF. The limit is likely to be higher than it is for units produced with HOME funds, recognizing that the deeper targeting for NHTF units will require higher levels of subsidy.

5. *If Funds Are to be Used for First-Time Homebuyers, Identify Resale or Recapture Provisions*

SUG: NLIHC suggests using all funds for rental housing in the first year, so possible Allocation Plan language is: “Ohio does not intend to use any funds for homebuyer activities in the 2016 funding cycle.”

6. *Whether State Intends to Directly Select Applications from Eligible Recipients and/or To Use Subgrantees to Select Applications*

SUG: NLIHC suggests that all funds be awarded directly by Ohio to eligible recipients in the first year, so possible Allocation Plan language is: “Ohio does not intend to make grants to subgrantees in the 2016 funding cycle.”

7. *The Priority That Will Be Placed on the Six Priority Factors for Awarding Funding to Eligible Applicants*

**Awarding of NHTF to applicants should be based on total maximum points = 100 (SUG)**

a. *Geographic diversity (ST). (Maximum points = 0)*

Given the relatively small amount of money available in the NHTF for the first year, NLIHC suggests focusing on projects with the most impact, as opposed to distributing small amounts of money to many projects (SUG).

b. *Applicant's ability to obligate funds and undertake eligible activities in a timely manner (ST). (Maximum points = 10)*

While the statute and regulations refer to an applicant's ability to “obligate” funds (ST and REG), obligate is not defined. The regulation refers to the “commitment” of funds (REG).

- OFHA must “commit” its NHTF funds within 2 years (ST and REG), and expend funds within 5 years (REG).
- Factor b concerns the ability of the applicant/potential recipient. The regulation defines “commitment” for eligible recipients as:
  - For new construction or rehabilitation, to start construction within 12 months of date of contract between the recipient and OFHA (REG).
  - For acquisition of existing housing, receipt of title to the property within 6 months of the date of contract between the recipient and OFHA (REG).

c. *For rental housing, the extent to which rents...are affordable, especially for ELI families (ST); the extent to which the project has federal, state, or local project-based rental assistance so that rents are affordable to extremely low income families (REG). (Maximum points = 40)*

- “Affordable to extremely low income families” is defined as families not paying more than 30% of their household income for housing costs, including utilities (SUG).
- Project-based rental assistance includes, but is not limited to, unit-based rental assistance, operating subsidies, or cross-subsidization of rents within the project (SUG).
- Up to 33% of OFHA's allocation may be used for operating cost assistance and/or operating cost assistance reserves for NHTF-assisted units (REG). HUD intends to issue guidance on operating costs for the NHTF later in the year.



d. *For rental housing, the duration of the units' affordability period (ST) (Maximum points = 15)*

- Minimum affordability period of 30 years is a threshold requirement (REG).
- The extent to which a project exceeds the 30-year minimum determines its duration points, to a maximum of 15 points for projects that commit to affordability in perpetuity (SUG).

e. *Merits (ST) of the application in meeting priority housing needs of the state (REG) (Maximum points = 25)*

- Meeting Ohio's priority housing needs, as identified in the 2015-2019 ConPlan, is a threshold requirement.
- The extent to which a project meets the needs of the lowest income households within the state's priority housing needs (SUG), to a maximum of 25 points.
- Examples (SUG):
  - Projects that serve people with special needs, who are homeless, or ex-offenders.
  - Projects affordable to households with incomes less than 15% AMI or whose sole income is SSI.
  - Projects proposed by nonprofits.
  - Phased rehabilitation projects that do not cause displacement.

Regarding priority housing need(s) in the Ohio 2015-2019 ConPlan:

"The most common statewide housing problems include cost burden greater than 30% of income for owner households and a housing cost burden greater than 50% of income for renter households. Renters with 0-30% AMI have the highest percentage of having one or more of the severe housing problems, while owners between 0-30% AMI have the highest percentage of having one or more of the severe housing problems." {Note: "severe housing problems" include: severely over-crowded (more than 1.51 persons per room), lacking complete plumbing or kitchen facilities, paying more than 50% of income for rent and utilities.}

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"As indicated in the previous section, with regards to the size of the units there is a need to construct new units and also for rehabilitation of some existing units to assist this population which has among the highest cost burden, especially for households below 50% of median income for large related families of 5 persons or more."

"There is also a housing need for elderly households. Specific housing types that can benefit this group can include new construction for those with incomes below 50% of median income, along with rental housing assistance, as elderly households in this income range experience a significant cost burden. Housing rehabilitation and repair goals are also proposed to address deficiencies in existing rental housing, which could include accessibility improvements..."

"It is somewhat difficult to establish goals for 'other' households, as this group is somewhat undefined. Certainly this group includes many single households, which market data have increased substantially during the last 10 years. These households are highly rent burdened and consequently one goal is to provide rental assistance, especially to those in the 0-30% of median income range. There are also goals for construction of new rental units for this population, particularly those below 50% of median income."

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[pages 87-88]

f. *Extent to which application makes use of non-federal funding sources (ST). (Maximum points = 10)*

- Extent to which application makes use of state and local publicly-controlled funds and/or land donated by state or local government to achieve deep affordability for ELI households (SUG).
- Extent to which application makes use of private funds or in-kind commitments, including land donated by state or local government to achieve deep affordability for ELI households (SUG).

8. *Eligible Activities and Eligibility Requirements for Recipients*

Eligible Activities

The primary purpose of the NHTF is to support the creation or preservation of rental housing that is affordable to extremely low income households. NHTF funds will be focused on activities that acquire, produce, or rehab rental housing for the benefit of ELI households.

NLIHC recommends that eligible activities be limited to:

- The production and rehabilitation of rental housing affordable to extremely low income households (SUG).
- Up to 33% of Ohio’s NHTF allocation for operating cost assistance and/or operating cost assistance reserves (REG).
  - May only be provided to rental housing acquired, rehabilitated, reconstructed, or newly constructed with NHTF funds (REG).
  - Includes costs for insurance, utilities, real property taxes, and maintenance, and scheduled payments to a reserve for replacing major systems (REG).

SUG: “Ohio does not intend to permit NHTF funds to be used for homeownership activities or for the new construction, rehabilitation, or preservation of federally assisted housing in the 2016 funding cycle.”

Eligible Recipients, see next page

## Eligible Recipients

An eligible recipient is an organization, agency, or other entity, including a for-profit or nonprofit entity (ST) or public housing agency (REG).

Consider limiting eligible recipients to nonprofits in the first year, or to for-profits that limit profits or rate of return to investors (SUG).

An eligible recipient must:

- Have demonstrated experience and capacity to conduct an eligible NHTF activity as evidenced by its ability to:
  - Own, construct, or rehabilitate, and manage and operate an affordable multifamily rental housing development (ST); and
  - Serve low income households and special needs populations, such as homeless families and people with disabilities (SUG).
- Demonstrate the ability and financial capacity to undertake, comply, and manage the eligible activity (ST).
- Demonstrate familiarity with the requirements of other federal, state, or local housing programs that may be used in conjunction with NHTF funds to ensure compliance with all applicable requirements and regulations of such programs (ST).
- Must make acceptable assurances to the OFHA that it will comply with NHTF program requirements during the entire period that begins when the recipient being selected to receive NHTF funds and ends at the conclusion of all NHTF-funded activities (ST).

## *9. Certification by Each Recipient that NHTF-Assisted Housing Units Will Comply with NHTF Requirements*

OFHA requires each eligible recipient to certify that housing units assisted with NHTF funds will comply with all NHTF requirements (ST). The certification must include (SUG):

- The number of units in a NHTF-assisted project by income group: extremely low income, very low income, moderate, and above moderate (SUG);
- A statement declaring that all tenants of a NHTF-assisted development meet the income limits as required by program guidelines (SUG); and
- A statement declaring that recipient will comply with rent limits, determined to be no more than 30% of 30% of the area median income (SUG).

## 10. Performance Goals and Benchmarks Consistent with State's Proposed Accomplishments

This section refers to the proposed accomplishments in the affordable housing section of the Strategic Plan part of the ConPlan. The state must specify the number of extremely low income families and homeless persons for whom the state will provide affordable rental housing. Affordable rents are defined as not exceeding the greater of 30% of the federal poverty line or 30% of 30% AMI (REG).

To achieve maximum affordability, an Allocation Plan can set performance goals about (SUG):

- How many extremely low income families and homeless people will be assisted with have affordable housing, with affordability defined as 30% of household income (SUG)? or

How many families or persons will have rents set at 30% of 20% AMI or 30% of 10% AMI (SUG)?

The Ohio 2015-2019 ConPlan calls for 2,250 rental units to be constructed and 5,500 rental units to be rehabbed over the five-year period, using CDBG, HOME, and Ohio Housing Trust Fund resources [page 102] for low and moderate income households [page 105].

ConPlan regulations require Ohio to estimate the number of extremely low income, low income, and moderate income families for whom the state will provide affordable (as defined by HOME).

The affordable housing goals section of the Ohio ConPlan says:

“The state expects to provide affordable housing to approximately 6,500 households over the course of the five year period (1,300 households annually) that are extremely low-income, low-income or moderate-income. Of the total 6,500 households provided affordable housing the state expects that approximately 1,625 households (25%) will be of extremely low-income, 2,275 households (35%) will be of low-income and 2,600 households (40%) will be moderate income. Note: the goals identified take into account the number of units, households and persons served with state OHTF funds.”

[page 106]

## 11. Rehabilitation Standards that NHTF-Assisted Projects Must Meet

OFHA must establish rehabilitation standards for all NHTF-assisted housing rehabilitation activities. The standards must set forth the requirements that the housing must meet upon project completion. The description of standards must be in sufficient detail to determine the required rehabilitation work, including methods and materials. The standards may refer to applicable codes or they may establish requirements that exceed the minimum requirements of the codes (REG).

Standards must address, at a minimum: health and safety; major systems; lead-based paint; accessibility; disaster mitigation; state and local codes, ordinances, and zoning; uniform physical condition standards; and, capital needs assessment (REG).

OFHA should ensure that it has taken all reasonable steps to minimize the displacement of residents as the result of rehabilitation activities (REG).

Recipients that propose phased rehabilitation activities that do not cause displacement should be given preference, such as receiving more points when OFHA examines the merits of an application – see 7(d) of the Allocation Plan (SUG).

#### 12. Resale and Recapture Guidelines if Funds Used for First-Time Homebuyers

SUG: NLIHC suggests using all funds for rental housing in the first year, so possible Allocation Plan language could be: “Ohio does not intend to use any funds for homebuyer activities in the 2016 funding cycle.”

#### 13. NHTF Affordable Homeownership Limits

SUG: NLIHC suggests using all funds for rental housing in the first year, so possible Allocation Plan language could be: “Ohio does not intend to use any funds for homebuyer activities in the 2016 funding cycle.”

#### 14. Preferences or Limitations to a Particular Segment of ELI Population

OFHA will limit or give preference to a particular segment of the extremely low income population based on the state’s priority housing needs as described in the Ohio Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plan.

Any such preference or limitation will be memorialized in the written agreement between the State and eligible recipient (REG).

The Ohio 2015-2019 ConPlan lists as high priority, an array of population characteristics too broad to be a genuine indication of priority housing needs.

The priority needs section of the ConPlan simply lists as high priority, “housing” for:

extremely low, low, moderate, large families, families with children, elderly, rural, chronic homelessness, individuals, mentally ill, chronic substance abuse, veterans, persons with HIV/AIDS and their families, victims of domestic violence, unaccompanied youth, frail elderly, persons with mental disabilities, persons with physical disabilities, persons with developmental disabilities, persons with alcohol or other addictions, non-housing community development [sic] , public housing residents. [pages 87-88]

Any limitation or preference must not violate nondiscrimination requirements. Federal fair housing requirements, including the duty to affirmatively further fair housing, are applicable to the NHTF program. A limitation does not violate nondiscrimination requirements if the housing project also receives funding from a federal program that limits eligibility to a particular segment of the population, such as the Housing Opportunity for Persons Living with AIDS program, and the Section 202 and Section 811 programs (REG).

#### 15. Requirements and Conditions Under Which Existing Project Debt May Be Refinanced

OFHA may permit the use of NHTF funds toward the cost of fully or partially refinancing existing debt on a multifamily rental property provided the following conditions are met (REG):

- Refinancing is necessary to reduce overall costs and to make the housing more affordable (REG).
- Refinancing is proportionate to the number of NHTF-assisted units in the property. The proportional rehab cost must be greater than the proportional amount of the debt that is being refinanced (REG).
- OFHA must establish refinancing guidelines and include them in the ConPlan. The guidelines must (REG):
  - Demonstrate that rehab is the primary eligible activity.
  - Establish a minimum level of rehab per unit or a required ratio between rehab and refinancing.
- The new investment is being made to create additional affordable units (SUG);
- A review of the management practices of the applicant must demonstrate that the proposed rehabilitation is not the result of disinvestment in the property by any entity involved in the application for NHTF funds (SUG).

## CONPLAN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

### The Public Participation Plan.

There must be a written public participation plan that describes a state's or local subgrantee's policies and procedures for involving lower income people in the ConPlan process.

The public participation plan must "provide for" and "encourage" public involvement in drafting the ConPlan or Annual Action Plan, any "Substantial Amendment" to it, and the Annual Performance Report.

- The public participation plan must encourage involvement by low income people, especially those living in low income neighborhoods and areas where funds might be spent.
- States and local subgrantees are "expected to take whatever actions are appropriate" to encourage involvement by people of color, people with limited English proficiency, disabled people, and residents of public and assisted housing.

### Public Hearings

The law requires public hearings at all stages of the process. At a minimum, hearings must give the public a chance to identify housing needs, review proposed uses of funds, and comment on the past use of funds.

The ConPlan regulations require a public hearing specifically to get public views on housing and community development needs. This housing needs hearing must take place before a Proposed ConPlan or Proposed Annual Action Plan is published for public comment.

The ConPlan regulations only require states to have one public hearing and localities to have two public hearings. For local subgrantees, but not states, that second public hearing must be during the development of the ConPlan.

- There must be "adequate" public notice of upcoming hearings.
  - The ConPlan regulations declare, "Publishing small print notices in the newspaper a few days before the hearing is not adequate notice".
  - The ConPlan regulations add, "two weeks' notice is adequate".
- Hearings must be held at times convenient to people who are likely to be affected.
- Hearings must be held in places easy for lower income people to get to.
- Where there are a significant number of people with limited English proficiency, the public participation plan must say how they can be involved.

### The Proposed ConPlan or Proposed Annual Action Plan

- Complete copies of the Proposed ConPlan or Proposed Annual Action Plan must be in public places, such as libraries.
- A "reasonable number" of copies of a Proposed ConPlan or Proposed Annual Action Plan must be provided for free.
- The public must have at least 30 days to review and comment on the Proposed ConPlan or Proposed Annual Action Plan.
  - The state or local subgrantee must "consider" these comments.
  - A summary of public comments must be attached to the Final ConPlan or Final Annual Action Plan, along with an explanation why public suggestions were not used.

## **General Public Participation Provisions**

- A copy of the Final ConPlan or Annual Action Plan must be available to the public.
- States and local subgrantees must respond in writing within 15 days to written complaints.
- Access to information must be reasonable and timely.
  - There must be reasonable notice that standard ConPlan or Annual Action Plan documents are available for people to review and make comments about.
  - The public must be able to review records from the last five years.
  - For local subgrantees (not states) the public must have "reasonable and timely" access to local meetings (such as Community Advisory Committee meetings, City Council subcommittee meetings, etc.).