



**Homes and  
Community Renewal**

**Housing  
Trust Fund  
Corporation**

**KATHY HOCHUL**  
Governor

**RUTHANNE VISNAUSKAS**  
Commissioner/CEO

January 11, 2022

The Honorable Kathy Hochul  
Governor of the State of New York  
The Capitol, Executive Chamber  
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Hochul:

Pursuant to Section 170 of the Executive Law, I am submitting this response to the recommendations for corrective action in the Office of the State Comptroller's Report 2020-S-4, Oversight of the Residential Emergency Services to Offer Home Repairs to the Elderly (RESTORE) Program.

Sincerely,

RuthAnne Visnauskas  
Commissioner/CEO

cc: Honorable Thomas P. DiNapoli, Comptroller, State of New York  
Honorable Brian Benjamin, NYS Senate President  
Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins, NYS Senate President Pro Tempore and Majority Leader  
Honorable Robert G. Ort, NYS Senate Minority Leader  
Honorable Liz Krueger, NYS Senate Chair, Finance Committee  
Honorable Thomas O'Mara, NYS Ranking Minority Member, Senate Finance Committee  
Honorable Carl E. Heastie, NYS Assembly Speaker  
Honorable Crystal D. Peoples-Stokes, NYS Assembly Majority Leader  
Honorable William A. Barclay, NYS Assembly Minority Leader  
Honorable Helene F. Weinstein, NYS Assembly Chair, Ways and Means Committee  
Honorable Edward P. Ra, NYS Ranking Minority Member, Assembly Ways and Means Committee

**Recommendation 1: “Develop objective scoring guidelines to promote consistency and transparency in scoring and selecting LPA applications.”**

This recommendation was fully implemented. New "Application Scoring Guidance" was developed to ensure consistent rating and ranking among reviewers. The Guidance specifies allowable scoring in response to review criteria that aligns with the program application and review criteria published in the Request for Applications (RFA). The new Guidance was reviewed with RESTORE program staff and used to score the applications received in response to the 2021 RFA. Additionally, HCR performed quality assurance reviews on a random sample of all applications reviewed.

**Recommendation 2: “Maintain clear, contemporaneous documentation (e.g., supporting scores, including deductions) during the LPA application scoring process.”**

This recommendation was fully implemented. The new Application Scoring Guidance provides more specific review criteria and an objective system for attributing and deducting points. This eliminates the need for extensive notes to support scoring determinations. Notes need only state the deficiency upon which low points are attributed and will continue to be used to provide application review debriefs/exit conferences to applicants for future improvement. All application review scores and notes are maintained in an Access database.

**Recommendation 3: “Identify LPAs that have shown they are unable to use awarded RESTORE funds within the contracted period and provide timely assistance.”**

This recommendation was fully implemented through improvements in three areas:

1. Start-Up Support -- To ensure more effective and efficient utilization of RESTORE funds, HCR conducted a grant implementation training webinar for the 2020 funding round awardees. In addition, HCR held one-on-one onboarding meetings for each RESTORE awardee that had not administered a RESTORE grant within the last three years. In these sessions, HCR discussed all program launch requirements with an assigned program manager. Group implementation webinars and one-on-one training opportunities will continue to be provided to future awardees.

2. Monitoring Support -- A Monitoring Plan was developed and implemented to perform status checks on all 2020 open RESTORE grants and will be adopted for future awards and contracts. This provides for continual monitoring throughout the contract term against relevant milestones. Program staff will continue to conduct outreach and communicate with LPAs during routine administrative activities, e.g. committing funds and processing payments and provide direct support and training for LPAs that have not met milestones such as environmental review paperwork, project commitments or expenditures.

3. Evaluation of Extension Requests -- A process for consistently reviewing and evaluating requests to extend Grant Agreements was implemented. Program staff evaluate if an extension is justified to ensure the continuity of essential RESTORE program services. LPA deficiencies are also considered, and whether the de-obligation of funds is more appropriate. HCR is also conducting more frequent routine status checks on extended 2020 RESTORE and all future contracts.

**Recommendation 4: “Increase monitoring of LPAs for RESTORE program compliance and establish a process for LPAs to consistently track compliance with program requirements, including timeline, bidding, and PMD provisions.”**

This recommendation was fully implemented. HCR staff have begun to conduct a "first file review" for all 2020 funding round and future RESTORE awards. This review is designed to ensure that projects are complying with



program requirements and to allow program managers to work with awardees to cure deficiencies at the beginning of the program. This practice will help LPAs develop a better understanding of program requirements early in the program implementation process. In addition, HCR will conduct periodic internal status meetings to identify and target outreach to awardees that are not in compliance with contract timelines and other program requirements. Closeout monitoring will now incorporate a more detailed evaluation of program compliance. HCR developed a detailed Monitoring Questionnaire, utilized to ensure the consistent review of key program requirements, such as timelines, bidding, and PMD provisions, and to document compliance.

**Recommendation 5: “Increase outreach and support to LPAs in counties that have not applied for or did not receive RESTORE program awards.”**

HCR disagrees with this recommendation since the agency is already engaged in significant outreach to LPAs in counties that did not receive or apply for RESTORE awards. However, HCR is committed to exploring opportunities to further enhance its already considerable program outreach efforts, and has already begun additional outreach. In addition to continuing to publish a Notice of Funding Availability in the State Register, publishing on HCR's website, and emailing notifications to HCR's grant contact list, HCR also promoted RESTORE directly with the New York Conference of Mayors (NYCOM), the Association of Towns, Association of Counties, and the New York State Office for the Aging. Further, HCR conducted targeted outreach in counties that were awarded one or no awards in the last three years. This expanded outreach included calls and emails to 153 nonprofit Rural and Neighborhood Preservation Companies, and 45 County Offices for the Aging in the targeted areas.

Non-awarded applicants for the 2020 funding round were offered an "Application Review, Common Deficiencies" webinar conducted April 6, 2021. The invitation for the webinar was included in the non-award notification letter. Non-awarded applicants were also offered one-on-one consultations to discuss deficiencies and opportunities for improvement. These opportunities will continue to be made available for future applicants.

**Recommendation 6: “Improve timeliness of awarding RESTORE program funds to LPAs.”**

This recommendation was fully implemented. HCR published the 2020 RESTORE RFA on November 18, 2020 and made awards on March 3, 2021. HCR published the 2021 RFA September 8, 2021 and made awards on December 9, 2021. HCR remains committed to the timely awarding of RESTORE funds and will continue efforts to ensure future RESTORE awards are made as expeditiously as possible and within the same fiscal year in which the funds are appropriated.