November options for solutions

At the October workgroup meeting, members brainstormed options for solutions. The two program subgroups then refined the options, and MAD condensed their work in this document.

The way each subgroup described/grouped a solution did not always align. In some cases, MAD condensed the two subgroups' work into one row, but left both subgroups' "option for solution" language in place, separating the two with a slash. In other cases, the subgroups' options were too different to merge; for those, MAD left the subgroup ideas in separate rows but placed them near each other. Members may wish to condense these options themselves at the November meeting.

MAD grouped the options into broad categories to facilitate discussion. The category labels and options' placements are not important; they are just a tool for current conversations.

Processes and procedures

#	Subgroup origin	Option for solution	Details from underlying stickies	How would this help address slow timeframes for application determinations and payment?	What concerns do you have about this option?
1.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Simplify verification process/ Allow for self-attestation	• Reduce mandatory verifications either through automation or self-attestation. • Self-attestation as an option. • Different ways to self-attest. • Automatic verifications (similar to MNsure). • Landlord can provide verification directly. • Program simplification such as fewer mandatory verifications speeds processing significantly (but also increases spending).	• Would reduce administrative burden for applicants and county staff determining eligibility. – CT • Speed up applications, remove barriers for applicants. - MK. • Self-attestation will eliminate the need for extra paperwork to be submitted with application. - AP	• Simplifying too much would likely increase spending and allow potential program integrity issues. – CT • Potential political concerns around fraud/lack of oversight. - LP
2.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Utilize inclusive electronic signature process/ Require universal adoption of electronic signatures	• Availability of electronic signatures. • Electronic signatures for landlord/client ROIs.	• An inclusive signature process could reduce a barrier for residents to submit an application that will be approved. - MH • Clients would not have to travel or waste time to go into an office to sign papers if they can do so electronically. -RR	• Could we add verbal a well? -KMS

#	Subgroup origin	Option for solution	Details from underlying stickies	How would this help address slow timeframes for application determinations and payment?	What concerns do you have about this option?
3.	EA/EGA	Revise existing application or create an emergency-specific application	• Design applications to request this kind of help to significantly speed processing. • An application that is leads client to programs (not client applying for programs).	• One application could be used for FHPAP, EA or EGA. – CF • Could potentially use for CDBG as well. - KMS • Could significantly shorten the application while also obtaining much more relevant information such as what the emergency is, who the landlord/property owner is, etc. - KMS • Would be easier to route quickly and correctly. -KMS • Making it clear to an applicant what they are applying for could reduce the number of "accidental" apps that are currently clogging the system. -KMS • A more thorough application could reduce or remove the interview requirement. -KMS	• Could cause barriers or additional steps for residents seeking SNAP and/or Cash benefits. – CF • Could add yet another system for counties to use when they are already working in multiple systems. -KMS • Any application would work depending on staffing - simpler apps are better for clients but require more work by processors. -KMS

#	Subgroup origin	Option for solution	Details from underlying stickies	How would this help address slow timeframes for application determinations and payment?	What concerns do you have about this option?
4.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Create unified application with same eligibility criteria and database/ Create a single application with multiple options to apply	• Updated application designed for EA/EGA/FHPAP. • One statewide application/access point. • One application for multiple funding sources (i.e., EA/EGA, FHPAP, CDBG, etc.). • One database holds applicant info making any new applications easy to update info. • No duplicate applications. • Universal standards for service. • Multiple application options. • Flexible access points - phone, online, in person. • An application that is leads client to programs (not client applying for programs). • Taking applications by phone is fast and convenient for clients, will speed processing, but counties are not equipped to staff an initiative like this. • Applications designed to request this kind of help can significantly speed processing.	• This would simplify and reduce barriers for applicants, increasing the success of applicants submitting the required information to get approved for assistance. MH • Could be easier to move applications to appropriate funding sources vs. asking the applicant to start over every time they are denied. -KMS • Would be easier to share information needed to determine eligibility across systems. -KMS • Allow clients to apply in one application without having to figure out what program they are eligible for. – LP • Easy for clients to apply in the way that fits them best (online, phone, paper). - LP	• Any kind of larger scale program/systems alignment would require significant time, resources, partnerships, etc. - MH • Many counties prefer a level of control over their programs to customize to specific needs within the community. -KMS • Would cause some counties to vastly overspend and some to vastly underspend. -KMS • Utilize a new application system that is not MN Benefits. - DE
5.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Develop a pre-screen for eligibility and prioritization/ Triage emergency timeline	• Identify emergency up front to assist with prioritization. • Early identification of who qualifies / doesn't qualify. • Pre-screen for baseline eligibility. • Route people toward the best possible outcome.	• Allow clients to understand if they are eligible for assistance. – LP • Allow program administrators to quickly be able to prioritize critical applications. - LP	• Potentially screens out someone who could get assistance by them not understanding a question. – LP • Creates additional step in process. -RR

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6.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Intra-program process alignment/ Develop and align intra-program standards	• Each county has their own rules for EA-are there guardrails that can be put in place to ensure access/equity. • More uniformed process across FHPAP partners. • Align programs within counties. • Program transparency if not alignment. • Streamlined processes across agencies/departments.	• Easier for clients and community partners to know what to turn in with the application. -KMS • May reduce the number of clearly ineligible people applying, reducing volume. -KMS • Creates consistency across programs that could be less confusing for providers and clients - RR	• Reduces flexibility to meet specific community needs. -KMS • Would need to increase funding to prevent overspending. -KMS • Time-consuming and crosses different agencies. - LP
7.	EA/EGA	Centralize tasks for specialization/efficiency	• None.	• Reduces competing priorities from other programs. -KMS • Increases confidence and expertise of processors allowing them to move more quickly. -KMS	• Smaller counties would not have the workload to justify specialization. - KMS
8.	FHPAP	Provide application support	• 24-hour application assistance. • Provide support for applicant-Incomplete application ~40% of denials for incomplete applications. Prioritize solutions for helping renters complete their portion or close application if their situation has changed.	• Clients will be able to complete applications and get their questions answered in a timely manner. – AP • Resolves issue of household not having access to online technology. - DE	• Personnel heavy work, might require more staff/money. – LP

#	Subgroup origin	Option for solution	Details from underlying stickies	How would this help address slow timeframes for application determinations and payment?	What concerns do you have about this option?
9.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Align rent assistance and eviction process to support housing stability	• Acknowledge broader context of eviction laws and timelines. • Tie rental assistance to eviction laws. • Match pace of emergency/eviction process. • Give programs breathing room by relaxing eviction timelines. • Pause eviction while rent assistance application is pending. • Include landlord's refusal to participate as an affirmative defense to a nonpayment eviction. • FHPAP data: timelines, processes. (We were unclear on this point but seemed to be about aligning processes overall.)	• This creates efficiency so that processors, applicants, and rental property owners are following the same timeline, creating predictability for all parties. ES • Connecting the 14-day deadline for guarantee letter with letter with time for tenant to redeem would help meet the ultimate goal of preserving housing, which is the purpose of this workgroup. -MK • By making a category/segmenting applications with an eviction filed, those applications can be handled by a processor who specializes in this work (expertise with the needs of this demographic) allowing the applications to be expedited in the timeline needed to avoid a writ of recovery. Maybe there needs to be an instant determination for this population (automatic eligibility based on eviction filing for past due rent and self-attestation of income and circumstances) and the two weeks is the time needed to pay landlord. JF	• What process slows or speeds up? • Even with this timeline, the eviction process moves faster than most highly prioritized applications can currently be processed. In addition, is there enough funding to handle this volume of need? JF

Communications

#	Subgroup origin	Option for solution	Details from underlying stickies	How would this help address slow timeframes for application determinations and payment?	What concerns do you have about this option?
10.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Invest in infrastructure for flexible communication options/ Offer a variety of accessible communication options	• Provide flexible communication options, including ability to text. • Electronic communication options can speed processing time for many applicants. • Improve communication options between counties and state.	• Increased accessibility for residents to connect with staff. Can improve the interview process and verification gathering. CF • A system that allows for electronic communication and automatic routing can result in: faster responses from clients, deeper understanding of status/what is needed, less time commitment from processors, no time commitment from administrative staff. -KMS • It's very difficult to reach someone on the phone - the county/provider can't reach the applicant, and when the applicant is available they have a hard time reaching the county/provider. This missed communication adds significant time to completing the application, especially if there's a need for multiple outreaches throughout the application process, and in some cases the connection may never happen. Offering online, text, multi-lingual, extended phone hours, and/or asynchronous options could help decrease the time spent playing phone tag and provide options for people with different needs/preferences in how they prefer to communicate. -JO	• Need to ensure data privacy is protected with any new communication system. – CF • Multiple channels could be harder to manage, so good systems would need to be in place to ensure all the communications are tracked in one place, regardless of how someone chooses to interact. Additionally, some channels may be easier to process faster than others i.e., online applications vs. paper applications. There would need to be protocols in place to ensure there isn't a "slow lane" for some types of applications. - JO

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11.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Provide access in multiple languages	• Better support for LEP. • More language access.	• Interpreters would not be needed to work on forms, which would eliminate current barriers in place. – RG • MAXIS does not send notices in other languages, so we could build in more language options. -KMS	• None.
12.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Build landlord trust/ Proactively engage rental property owners as critical partners in housing stability	• Building trust with landlords. • Allowing the program to ensure payments in a timely manner to encourage positive relationships with partners. • Rental property owner can initiate an emergency assistance request and partner in document submission.	• With trust and better relationships, property managers and landlords would allow faster application processing. - TD • Property owners may be able to identify renters behind on their rent and provide information about emergency rental assistance earlier in the process. -JO	• If someone needs an eviction notice to be prioritized for a program, then earlier in the process might not make a meaningful difference. -JO
13.	FHPAP	Increase effective outreach for people who do not know about the programs	• None.	• None.	• None.

Program rules

#	Subgroup origin	Option for solution	Details from underlying stickies	How would this help address slow timeframes for application determinations and payment?	What concerns do you have about this option?
14.	FHPAP	Expand and unify all programs' eligibility criteria to allow more households to be eligible and for early intervention	- Support early applications for help – not waiting on an eviction filing. - Reward/incentivize asking for help early in the process. - Do not wait until potential recipients are in crisis, near eviction. - Expand program rules to stay ahead of the crisis. - Remove scarcity mindset - don't wait until eviction filing to give assistance. - Consider other pathways for application that don't only rely on the renter in crisis. - Early intervention. - Remove 200% income limitation. - Uniform income qualifications for all EMERs. - Unified definition of "crisis" and "emergency." - Consider where program alignment can facilitate better outcomes (applications, funding, eligibility, etc.).	• None.	• None.

#	Subgroup origin	Option for solution	Details from underlying stickies	How would this help address slow timeframes for application determinations and payment?	What concerns do you have about this option?
15.	EA/EGA	Allow for proactive identification of emergency to provide assistance before renters are in deep crisis	• Support early applications for help – not waiting on an eviction filing. • Remove scarcity mindset - don't wait until eviction filing to give assistance. • Do not wait until potential recipients are in crisis, near eviction. • Expand program rules to stay ahead of the crisis. • Consider other pathways for application that don't only rely on the renter in crisis. • Prevention/education about program timelines, eligibility guidelines.	• The earlier renters can seek help and be helped in the process will reduce barriers for the renter to complete an application process. - MH	• Application is still reliant on timing of client/landlord communication regarding the emergency. -KMS • Would need to increase funding to meet increase in eligible applicants.
16.	EA/EGA	Expand program rule flexibility and clarify requirements	• Remove EA two-month per year restriction in some counties. • Uniform income qualifications for all EMERs. • Unified definition of "crisis" and "emergency." • Different funding for EA to remove connection to TANF cap. • Consider where program alignment can facilitate better outcomes (applications, funding, eligibility, etc.). • Rental property owner/landlord can initiate. • Reward/incentivize asking for help early in the process. • Remember county can't add more verification after landlord gives prefiling notice. • Program simplification such as fewer mandatory verifications speeds processing significantly (but also increases spending).	• None.	• Outcome could be faster or slower processing, more or less clarification around requirements, depending on the direction of the county. -KMS • May require an increase in funding or budgets will run out sooner. -KMS

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17.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Reduce amount of requirements/ Identify restrictive requirements that could be removed	• Moving program rules/policy toward fewer requirements. • Make less restrictive. • Provide clear communication on what is needed for a complete application including clear expectations on what the landlord needs to provide.	• Allow for faster processing if there are less requirements. – TD • At individual provider level, could simplify rules that providers have added. - LP	• State requirements are a small number currently, so this would more directly affect counties. Do counties have requirements to better serve the residents in their unique locations. - TD • Funding would run out faster and many counties are already overspending. CF • Personnel heavy with difficult oversight since it is likely more provider specific. – LP
18.	EA/EGA	Increase maximum issuance to $6,000 total combined or $4,000 per check	• None.	• Supervisors need to fill out an online form to request check issuances over $4,000 combined total. Increase maximum issuance for Program Trainers and Supervisors, and allow Program Trainers to request higher amounts from state. Increasing maximum issuance amounts would speed processing. -KMS	• Some counties/DHS may want more control over higher amounts being issued. -KMS
19.	EA/EGA	Stay eviction while pending application - could still include a cap	• None.	• This would help meet the ultimate goal of preserving housing, which is the purpose of this workgroup. This could also serve as a safety net to give programs flexibility if there's a good reason a certain application is taking longer. - MK	• None.

Funding

#	Subgroup origin	Option for solution	Details from underlying stickies	How would this help address slow timeframes for application determinations and payment?	What concerns do you have about this option?
20.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Increase or start state funding for staff	• (EGA has no funding, EA has some. FHPAP may be fully funded?) • State to fill staffing gaps. • Increase allowable admin funding (EGA- FHPAP-EA) for the RIGHT personnel (example: Case Aides). • Build statewide capacity to fill staffing gaps. • Overlaying local options with statewide options to fill gaps. • Reimagine scale of what adequate compensation looks like.	• More staff would allow for more focus on application timeliness as well as support for residents to obtain verifications. Currently EGA is not given admin funding leaving it up to the county to come up with staffing funds. CF • Provides for faster assignment and initial review if caseloads are lower, and increases responsiveness to inquiries about how/when to apply, what to turn in, what is needed, etc. -KMS	• Would need a process to determine how much funding is needed. CF • How do you prevent counties from utilizing these staff to complete other equally or potentially even more important tasks. -KMS
21.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Increase funding to match real time assessment of need/ Size funding to match need and provide for nimble process to consistently evaluate changing needs	• Expand available money so restrictions can be relaxed. • Partner with state supplemental funding. • Develop systematic way of tracking need that considers denials, remove duplicate payments between programs when calculating need. • Funding scarcity. • Decreased program complexity made possible by increased funding.	• Scarcity of available funding is a root driver of program rules that are more complex for the renter in order to maximize the dollars and provide resources to those "most in crisis." Funding that matches the need would permit simpler rules and reduced barriers for renters. - MH	• There will always be political and practical challenges with attaining consistent state funding that is commensurate with need. In the totality of our recommendations we need to be mindful of these challenges. - MH
22.	EA/EGA	Risk-sharing when counties overspend	• None.	• Counties are carrying the full risk of overspending which discourages risk-taking. Reduced risk would allow for increased innovation. -KMS	• None.

Technology

#	Subgroup origin	Option for solution	Details from underlying stickies	How would this help address slow timeframes for application determinations and payment?	What concerns do you have about this option?
23.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Invest in a user interface to improve customer experience/ Develop system with accessible and user-friendly interface	• Easy navigation. • User interface, accessibility, and plain language. • Good experience regardless of device. • Improve notices. • Modernize the processing system to improve the application, communication, training timelines, etc. • Centralize task management system for applicants and/or administrators for specialization/efficiency.	• Applicants can more easily get information to processors to speed up processing time. • A system that's easy to access by applicants and user-friendly would allow those with access to apply online in a mostly self-service manner. If applicants could see the completeness of their application they would better be able to see what's missing. If they could see the status of their application it could ease anxiety during the waiting process or help them know when to reach out if they see an issue. -JO	• Will need to ensure data privacy. -KMS • Not everyone will be able to access an online system. System would need to be in plain language and provide sufficient tech assistance. Still would need easy access to a real person to talk to, not rely solely on a technology fix. -JO
24.	EA/EGA	Modernizing the processing system to improve the application, communication, training timelines, etc.	• None.	• Would reduce time gathering materials across slow or multiple platforms and allow for easier coordination of application materials. – CT • Would be able to make changes that MAXIS currently does not allow, such as streamlining case assignment or improving notices/communication. -KMS	• Modernizing systems is a huge, multi-year effort that often loses steam and doesn't materialize. – CT • Execution. -KMS

#	Subgroup origin	Option for solution	Details from underlying stickies	How would this help address slow timeframes for application determinations and payment?	What concerns do you have about this option?
25.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Create easy to navigate public website to explain eligibility process and criteria for each program	• Application checklist. • Create easy to navigate public website to explain eligibility process and criteria for each program. • Transparency around program rules.	• Clear understanding of the eligibility criteria and what is needed for application can speed up processing. - CF	• Eligibility criteria would need to be easily explained - example, net 200% FPG earned income disregards. – CF • Rules change often so keeping the information up-to-date could be a challenge. -KMS • Could be difficult to prevent misinterpretation depending on language and accessibility. -KMS
26.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Create clear and easy to understand guide to process and rules that is easily accessible online for households and landlords	• Transparency around rules. • Transparency around program rules. • Application checklist. • Identify the minimum amount of information. • Prevention/education about program timelines, eligibility guidelines. • Provide clear communication on what is needed for a complete application including clear expectations on what the landlord needs to provide.	• Limit personnel time needed to answer questions. – LP • Create understanding between landlords and clients around who needs to complete each part. - LP	• None.

#	Subgroup origin	Option for solution	Details from underlying stickies	How would this help address slow timeframes for application determinations and payment?	What concerns do you have about this option?
27.	EA/EGA	Invest in and implement a statewide EDMS (electronic document management system)	• Statewide EDMS system / system modernization. • Systems modernization. Shared/statewide EDMS (electronic document management system).	• Another county may already have a document that is needed to finish processing. -KMS • The application transfer process between counties is complicated and inefficient, and often causes delays in processing. -KMS	• Might reduce flexibility in how counties use their EDMS. -KMS • Would require increased shared understanding in how documents should be titled/routed/filed. -KMS • Would need to be inclusive of all public assistance programs/departmental needs or it would just duplicate efforts and slow processing of documents. -KMS • Not all counties would want to participate. - CF
28.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Establish an online system for uploading, storing, and sharing documents/ Implement a tool for immediate worker visibility when documents are uploaded	• Easiest if renters can directly upload their own documents as able (i.e., RentHelpMN/Allita). • Allow for easier document uploads via cell phone/text photo. • Use examples in other spaces – e.g., can deposit a check with a photo.	• Makes document verification easier for clients and providers – RR • The faster workers can access documents, the more quickly they can approve eligibility. Many delays are caused by waiting for documents to be routed to the processor. -KMS	• Data privacy and security concerns. - RR • Counties are already using various EDMS systems, it could complicate things to introduce yet another one. - KMS • A document maybe be needed for more programs than just EA/EGA processing - how do we ensure it ends up routed correctly in complex and varying systems? -KMS

#	Subgroup origin	Option for solution	Details from underlying stickies	How would this help address slow timeframes for application determinations and payment?	What concerns do you have about this option?
29.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Integrate systems/ Develop communication system that integrates all programs seamlessly to benefit all stakeholders	• System that communicates with FHPAP/EGA/EA (would not separate from current systems). • Sharing data across programs / systems. • Have assistance programs speak to one another. • One statewide administrator/portal (can then refer to counties). • Some ways for providers to be able to see what individuals have been served. • Verification carries over between systems. • Track and share quality data for decision making. • Centralized website with centralized contact information. • Retain partnerships in systems for SNAP and cash (MNbenefits app). • Leverage existing systems.	• A client may apply for one program and get denied then move on to apply for another program. This could possibly take months. If all programs are screened through a statewide central intake application system before moving to the program that will help, then a large portion of the work is already done for the person processing the application -- speeding up the timeline. JF • Faster sharing of information between agencies. -KMS • Reduce duplicate issuances while also making it easier to braid funding to resolve emergencies. -KMS	• Develop communication system that integrates all programs seamlessly to benefit all stakeholders. • Would increase data sharing potentially lessening data privacy protection. -KMS
30.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Ensure accessibility and technology matches the user's skills and technology access/ Create a balance with accessibility and technology	• Balancing technology with accessibility / support for applicants. • System that balances technology and accessibility. • Ensure system has technology process that supports those with tech skills and those without.	• Having a user focused system would allow applicants to use the tools that match their skills / technology available. Processors would know the best way to interface with applicant and valuable time could be saved. ES • For those with the ability to use and access technology, it would speed up the process for them, but we need to also have the ability to serve folks that don't have the ability to access technology. If we can serve both tech savvy and not, then we won't put up any barriers for either population. - RG	• May have some built in preferences for electronic submissions so deliberate effort is required to dedicate staff time to the more complicated "paper" applications.

Personnel

#	Subgroup origin	Option for solution	Details from underlying stickies	How would this help address slow timeframes for application determinations and payment?	What concerns do you have about this option?
31.	EA/EGA	Create an EA/EGA specialized training track	• Onboarding, training plans/timelines, employee engagement levels and drivers. • Reduce training time. • Supportive training (engagement, morale, humanizing processing). • Valuing a variety of experiences in the hiring process.	• Removing requirements for low-relevance trainings such as SNAP would remove 2 weeks from current training schedule of Emergency workers. Training could even happen at the County level, potentially speeding training time considerably. -KMS	• Would need to otherwise train when to refer people to apply for SNAP and/or what information might need to be shared with other program areas. -KMS • Workers might be better at navigating MAXIS if they go through SNAP training. -KMS
32.	FHPAP	Streamline staff training and engagement	• Onboarding, training plans/timelines, employee engagement levels and drivers. • Supportive training (engagement, morale, humanizing processing). • Reaffirm and support universal standards for service.	• Gets new staff up and running faster and creates consistency across the administrator or state. -RR	• Training in itself does not necessarily lead to a dignified experience for clients and sometimes it is helpful to be able to tailor training for a specific community. -RR

#	Subgroup origin	Option for solution	Details from underlying stickies	How would this help address slow timeframes for application determinations and payment?	What concerns do you have about this option?
33.	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Define roles and make sure gaps are filled/ Create specialized and responsive staff roles	• Reimagining scale of what adequate compensation looks like. • Compensate and recognize navigators and assist organizations. • Establish staff that works specifically with clients with an active eviction case. • Navigators with a variety of expertise. • Explore use of navigators or case aides to help applicants assemble verification before transmitting to Eligibility Workers (Example: MNsure Navigators). • Train navigators to have a variety of expertise. • A successful model has been assigning direct Customer Service to Case Aides and processing paperwork and determining eligibility to Eligibility Workers.	• Centralizing tasks such as program navigation/responding to client inquiries into certain roles allow processors to focus on processing. Currently processors are tasked with a variety of competing priorities to balance. -KMS • This would prioritize those cases with the most active threat of displacement. ES	• Higher potential for clients receiving misinformation. -KMS • Processors might end up needing to respond to multiple inquiries (client and navigator, for instance) instead of one client inquiry - additional roles must be well-trained. -KMS • Maybe an unintentional incentive for rental property owners / manager to file in order to get expedited attention / action. • Could lead to handoffs if one processor starts the process, and then the case moves to eviction while the case is pending. -KMS • Potential burnout of staff in this role. -KMS • Could be hard to identify in smaller teams / coverage could be an issue too. -KMS

Miscellaneous

#	Subgroup origin	Option for solution	Details from underlying stickies	How would this help address slow timeframes for application determinations and payment?	What concerns do you have about this option?
34.	EA/EGA	Ask questions	• How do we attract staff to work? • How do we retain staff? • What is the priority/balance/best practices when weighing staff approaches and processing speeds? • Questions about how EA/EGA are represented in the MNbenefits process. • Can we consider collapsing funding for more effective service delivery? (Instead of aligning services with separate funding?) • Why do we have two programs at all? why have DHS and MHFA both administer money for the same ultimate purpose? • How will we complete ongoing program evaluation and performance measurement?	• None.	• None.